Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical perfomer

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CHAPTER 4 - CONCEPTUALISING REDUCTION

In this chapter, the discussion enters the core of my research: the reductive approach. In my own artistic work I apply reduction to the musician's profession, while other artists discussed in this chapter do so with actors or dancers in the fields of performance and installation art. Both the theoretical and the practical work focus on the framework of external and internal elements of the musician's profession, and present examples of how these are taken away. Theory is thus elaborated and concretised through artistic work: the conceptual framework of internal, external and contextual elements not only addresses a specific understanding of existing artistic work (by myself and others), but also strongly influences the creation processes of my performances.[148]

To contextualise the overall research findings, artistic practices in recent music theatrical performances in general and my own artistic work in particular, I will first observe and analyse musicians who are deprived of their instrument as most important external element. This will be followed by a discussion as how to remove internal elements, and then musical sound altogether, and its consequences for performance. Next, the discussion will lead to the idea of staging musicians as "less present", finally getting to works without any performers at all.

Several differences between reduction and expansion can be traced in the creation strategy, the impact on the performer and the reception. In the expansive approach I localised a tension between what the musician is used to, versus several less usual or extra-musical performative elements being responsible for the theatrical effect. In the reductive approach, a specific tension is responsible for the theatrical effect as well, situated for the musician in the distance between well-known and rather unfamiliar elements of performance. This results in an intensified effort in order to be able to perform, and therewith a heightened awareness and presence on stage. The crucial difference is that when the profession of the musician is extended, the core of the profession is kept intact. The musician is performing music, and several elements of performance might be added.[149] In the case of reduction, the profession itself becomes deconstructed; elements of performance are torn apart and the musician is denied certain habits and making use of bodily knowledge that she is used to for many years. The ritual of making music is unsettled, challenged or taken apart into several medial entities that are usually inseparable. In opposite to learning single elements anew (such as in the form of performative assignments in the expansive approach), a musician in this situation has to let go crucial elements of performance. This certainly produces a different kind of tension than described in the previous chapter. For many musicians this deconstruction feels much more radical, occasionally almost violent, as several elements of performance that usually are and have been taken for granted in the concert hall and even on the theatre stage are renegotiated. The musician is challenged intellectually because she has to reflect on her professional habits and to rethink them.[150] Many of the musicians I have worked with in my artistic practice became more conscious of what they were actually doing when they were

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[148] In its most concrete form this happens with *still life 2.0*. See p. 113.

[149] The only exception may be the category of the musician as *other performer*, where the original profession incidentally might disappear.

[150] This rethinking strongly happens in practice, during the performance or in the rehearsal process, or in the talks during or in between the rehearsals.

performing music, playing their instruments or conducting, at the very moment when they were forced into *not* doing something. In the case of the expansive approach the specific process of reflection is situated differently. The profession is in this case influenced by the extra-musical assignments, so that for example flute-playing is situated differently for the musician who is asked to throw tennis balls in between the musical phrases. However, I argue that whereas more and more musicians nowadays are used to techniques that extend their profession (the expansive approach) and thus do not experience the extra-musical assignments as real problems or difficulties anymore, reduction has the potential to intervene into the musician's profession in a significantly more radical way. In the reductive approach, it is the endeavour to handle the missing elements, the denial of certain habits that usually form an integral part of the musician's professional identity, what makes it theatrical. The absence of crucial elements of performance create an emptied space, which on top might be filled in with imagination, interpretation and meaning by the audience.

The differences in the working strategies of the two approaches require different strategies for their analysis. In case of the reductive approach, it does not sufficiently work to address several stages of reduction, comparable to how I described the different stages of extension. Because the different elements of the musician's profession are strongly interdependent to each other, they do not necessarily work in a hierarchic way or in a continuum - one element is not necessarily easier to take away, or more or less complex than another element. I will therefore analyse the different phenomena of reduction by addressing the concept of the internal, external and contextual elements of the musician's profession as outlined in Chapter One. I will discuss these various elements and how it works in practice when they are taken away; how the actual struggle of the musician may take shape, and what the effect of a given strategy of reduction might be, both for the musician herself and for the perception of her in the moment of performance. I will elaborate on how the missing elements might or might not effectively be communicated to the audience as taken away, and with what kind of theatrical effect.

Crucial to the perception are the elements that are left, the remainders of the musician's profession. In fact, two complementary questions are central to the process of creating performances with reductive approaches: what is taken away, and what is staged as left over; which performative elements remain; and with what kind of effect, both for performer and receiver? Reductive approaches play with the audience's knowledge, the conventions and cultural codes of what musicians do, how they are in general perceived by an audience. Depending on which elements are taken away on the one hand, and on the other which are left over, the missing elements are fairly obvious. As performances without performers challenge the general assumption that theatre is performed by human bodies, the performance with reductive elements plays with the expectation of what a musician is and what she usually is supposed to do on stage. This presents an element of friction on the audience's side as well, which is partly responsible for the theatrical effect. A missing element is only perceived as such if one recognises it as missing.

Taking away External Elements - Musicians without Instruments

Taking the instrument away from a musician is perhaps the most obvious and radical way of working with reductive approaches. No matter if a musician is making classical music, jazz, rock- or pop music, at least traditional instruments are such a crucial part of the musician's identity, that taking them away in performance has far reaching consequences. Computer and electronic instruments, with their ever-new design in hard-and software, might be crucial exceptions here. However, also other less traditional instruments such as turntables are usually an indispensable part of this musician's performance.

When the instrument is missing, its function as extension of the musician's body is taken away. Given the understanding of many musicians who indeed perceive their instrument as a natural extension and means for expressing themselves in music, one could even state that a musician who is denied her instrument considers herself as partially amputated. I mean this not only as literally detached from the instrument as a physical object that the musician knows extremely well, but also from an often life-long practice on that instrument. Taking away the external element "instrument" results in the simultaneous detachment from several internal elements of the musical profession.

Speaking from an artistic, collaborative point of view, why expose the musician to such an uncomfortable situation? It is the taking away of the instrument that creates a tension, a state of increased awareness of the musicians, and that makes the approach interesting and fascinating for the theatrical stage. As the attachment to the instrument is absent, the musician has to bridge this missing familiarity by an additional effort to fulfil the performative assignments, with the intention of making something else visible: taking away the instrument from a musician has the potential of really seeing the musician as performer and focus on the bodily performative quality much more than in most music making with an instrument.

Musicians without instruments on film: *Sigh*

Composers or (music) theatre makers are not the only ones who work intensively with musicians and collaborate closely with them. From her background in the visual arts originally, British artist Sam Taylor-Wood (b.1967) created several works with musicians without instruments, manifested in the form of video installations. Reductive ideas are a recognisable thread through Taylor-Wood's work, from various angles, perspectives and viewpoints. In *Breach (Girl and Eunuch)* (2001), the sounds of a girl's tears and her sobbing are removed, taking away the inherent sound of the scene, while at the same time the "qualitative experiencer" (Robin Nelson)[151] is invited to imagine her own sounds to go with the silent movie. Taylor-Wood's film *The Last Century* (2006) seems to be not

[151] "Experiencer" is a term to serve in situations where either 'spectator' of 'audience' may fall too short, suggesting "a more immersive engagement in which the principles of composition of a piece create an environment designed to elicit a broadly visceral, sensual encounter […]." (Nelson in Bay-Cheng et. al 2010: 45).

much more than a static image of a group of actors, with no 'acting' happening. The actors' utterances are reduced to "involuntary blinking, twitching and barely-visible breathing".[152]

Taylor-Wood employed such reductive approaches also in visual works that are closely related to music, works that deal with music or musicians from which or whom specific elements are taken away. In *Mute* (2001) a singer's performance is filmed but the sound has been taken away, giving the work the impression someone pushed the mute button.[153] In *Prelude in Air* (2006) Taylor-Wood filmed a musician playing a cello suite of Johann Sebastian Bach, but without the instrument. The cello is absent.

Departing from the idea of making the musical instrument absent while the playing musician is filmed, Taylor-Wood created the large-scale multi-screen installation *Sigh* in 2008[154], in collaboration with the BBC Concert Orchestra and with British composer Anne Dudley. In the work the members of the orchestra are sitting in their everyday clothes in an old factory building. When the conductor, projected on one of the video screens starts conducting, the musicians start miming the piece of music. The different sections of the orchestra - percussion, woodwinds, brass and strings were filmed individually in different takes and projected on seven screens, in a circle around the conductor's screen. This spatial arrangement plays with the experiencer's perception of how an orchestra is arranged, One has the feeling of being able to walk across the imagined stage, between the musicians, experiencing an orchestra from within its inner workings during a performance.

Image 4.1: Sam Taylor-Wood, *Sigh* (2008)

[152] http://whitecube.com/artists/sam_taylor-wood/, last retrieved September 17, 2012.

[153] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Ai14sZvEGw&feature=relmfu, last retrieved June 27, 2013.

[154] I have seen the installation on 14.5.2011 in Kunsthal Rotterdam, as part of the exhibition *I Promise to Love You* (Caldic Collection).

Looking at *Sigh* and other works, Taylor-Wood's play with expectation is remarkable. She makes something absent which is commonly expected by the audience or the museum-goer to be there. One expects to hear the falling tears in *Breach*; to hear the girl sobbing. One expects the singer in *Mute* to sing, even if the work's title does suggest the contrary. These pieces, together with *Prelude in Air*, are often associated with melancholy, loss, immateriality or "the removal of a voice" (program book for the exhibition *I Promise to Love You*). Reduction works as a creation strategy, as a metaphor for aesthetic content, and as a spring board for interpretation.

Playing the saxophone without playing the saxophone: *Thespian Play*[155]

In my own artistic work, simultaneously being used as exemplifications of this research and as radicalisations of the concept of reduction, *Thespian Play* (2009) exemplifies taking away the instrument from the musician. A saxophone player performs a *musical choreography* without his instrument, quasi-miming what happens on the soundtrack.[156] He does not make a single sound during the whole piece. The performance is a kind of mime or playback performance, on the borders of music, choreography and installation. The main conceptual idea at the outset of the creation was the fragmentation of the performer - the separation of the different means of expression. Especially movement (the live body) and sound (loudspeakers/electronics) are extracted and used as separate entities and elements in the performance. Movement is performed solely by the body's physical action, sound solely through the loudspeakers and the soundtrack. Important aspects in which the musician has traditionally trained for many years - playing his instrument and controlling both the sound and timing he produces - are taken away from him. Every sound is pre-recorded and partly processed by electronics. The performer has to follow the mechanical soundtrack and must adjust his movements exclusively to the external sound source. On the other hand, every sound, pure or heavily processed by electronics, has its origin in the musician and his instrument. During the rehearsal process all basic sounds were recorded by the musician with his instrument, so the performer knows very well everything which surrounds him acoustically. He also knows the origin of the processed sounds, which enables him to produce the movements in his body to mime these sounds - though without his instrument. It is a conceptual and conscious choice to make separate, pre-recorded audio and video tracks instead using of live electronics, motion-sensors or live video.[157] The sound and movement produced by a musician are usually inseparable, as part of what I earlier called the "cause-and-effect-chain" of making music, but in *Thespian Play* they are separated, with the result that a fragmentation of the different elements is made visible, remaining fragmented and separate, and at the same time complementing each other to create a new, tessellated whole.

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[155] Parts of this section have earlier been published under the title "*Thespian Play*: Synchronous differences." In Bay-Cheng, Sarah, Chiel Kattenbelt, Andy Lavender and Robin Nelson (eds.) (2010), *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (pp. 143-148). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 143-148.

[156] It is possible to watch a video trailer of the performance on www.falkhubner.com/ThespianPlay.html.

[157] For a detailed discussion of the technique of using live-video to create effects of doubling to express difference see: Merx, Siegrid (2006). "Verdubbeling en transformatie. De rol van video in de Proustcyclus van Guy Cassiers." In Henk Havens, Chiel Kattenbelt, Eric de Ruijter and Kees Vuyk (eds.), *Theater en technologie* (pp. 48-61). Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland.
For a discussion of interactive live electronics in combination with dance see the papers by Todd Winkler on http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Music/sites/winkler//papers/index.html.

The performance developed into a musical choreography of the performer's body. This causes tension with the soundtrack which emphasises a lack of control by the performer, and a tension between seeing and hearing, although happening at the same time. The performance expresses the separation of space and time: something which is recorded in the past, and put together at the very moment of the performance with the live performer. Besides the possibility of gaining access to a specific kind of theatricality, it is crucial to note that the resulting choreographic movements can only be performed by a musician. Even without the instrument, the saxophone player in *Thespian Play* is performing the piece on the basis of his life-long training on the instrument, using the finger movements, his breathing technique and the techniques of his lips, so that the resulting theatricality is exclusively bound to the performer as musician.

Image 4.2: *Thespian Play* (2009)

Idea and concept

In the performance the various medial layers of the performer's body are extracted and used as separate elements, exclusively using pre-recorded material from the performer. An interest I had in the beginning was creating a heterophony of different means of expression and intermodality of rhythms[158]: I questioned whether the rhythms of sound and moving body are the same, or if there is a polyphony of two (or more) independent rhythms, or whether they add up to one compound rhythm.

I was interested in what becomes the identity of the performer's actions on stage. I was interested in dislocating the central parameters of the profession of a musician, his instrument and, even more striking, his ability to control and to decide what to play, and when, his ability for timing. But I wanted to create a piece that can only be performed by a musician, as it calls on the crucial abilities of the musician, in this case a saxophone player, namely his breathing, finger and lip techniques, and his ability to perform and to remember complex musical rhythms. Detached from their usual purpose of creating sound, the musical movements become performative utterances. The bodily movements can hardly be performed by a dancer or actor, they have to be performed by a musician, even specifically by a saxophone, or possibly a clarinet player; partly because of the demanding in-depth physical knowledge of saxophone playing, partly because of the musical complexity of the piece as such.

Regarding her abilities as a performer, a musician generally has control over his appearance and surroundings on stage, over both space and time (see also Kattenbelt in Havens et al. 2006: 22). In this context the performer of *Thespian Play* in fact does not do that much; he seems to be only a kind of human "at rest" in the acoustic surrounding of the performance. He is surrounded by an audio and video environment that he has co-created, but cannot control. His instrument has been taken away from him, as well as one of his most crucial abilities as a musician, the control and interpretation of time. All audio signals have been pre-recorded, processed and produced in advance, so the performer has no control over any musical parameters. Being a live performer, he is the centre of the performance as perceived by the audience, but bound to the control of the electronic system. He has to know very well how to accept and to use the sound coming from the soundtrack.

From process to product

In the opening passage of the piece I composed the player's finger movements and then doubled them by pre-recorded and amplified key sounds of the saxophone, thus fragmenting two elements that usually belong together and are produced at the same time: finger movement and corresponding key sounds. Having recorded the key sounds with the performer, I started composing the choreography, worked on the sounds and organised them in the software program. I loaded the sounds into a sampler in order to be able to react most flexibly to the movements, and to readjust and reorder the sounds if necessary. For rehearsal purposes I composed several

[158] By intermodality of rhythms I understand that rhythms as temporal events can be experienced by all senses. Visual rhythms can be set against musical or textual rhythms. For a more detailed description on intermodality see Brüstle et al. 2005: 16-18.

etudes to test and learn about the relationship between sound and movement in this specific setting. We rehearsed these examples over and over again and I changed sounds until we got a movement-sound-relation that I liked most. In general, on both hands I chose to use lighter sounds for the little finger, the ring finger and the middle finger, and heavier, bass-like sounds for the thumb and the index finger. Thus, in the actual performance of the passage there is no longer any real-life connection between the technique and the original sound the technique usually produces.[159] It is this aspect that forms the most important difference to Taylor-Wood's *Prelude in Air*, despite the obvious similarities: the *Prelude* works in a mime setting comparable to *Thespian Play*, broaching the issue of the loss of the instrument and the resulting melancholy. The possibilities of the instrument as such are not subject of the piece, whereas *Thespian Play* is not even playable on a real instrument; the absence of the saxophone and the setting of the performance makes the piece and the resulting choreography possible.

Other than one would possibly expect in the case of an exact doubling of sound and movement, the experience of this passage is still one of separation and difference, although every movement is precisely doubled in time by sound. The sounds are taken out of their original context (some of the sounds can even hardly be perceived as key sounds if the listener does not know their origin), displaced[160] and confronted with movement, raising the awareness of the viewer and giving the possibility to new experiences of relationships between movement and sound. Without digital technology this process would not have been possible, since only contemporary audio software offers advanced interfaces, direct and fast access to recording, enhanced manipulation, live performance and post-production capabilities. All four play a major role in audio and composition work in theatre and performance in general, and were crucial specifically for the creation of *Thespian Play*.

When I was planning the piece, I wanted to use the auditive and visual elements separately and independently, in a polyphonic and intermodal way. However, during the process this approach did not prove to work best: movement and sound seemed weak and as a rather uncoordinated whole, seeming somewhat arbitrary and without a strong coherence. In general that would not be a problem, as countless contemporary theatre performances have proved, but in this case the artistic and aesthetic result was weak mainly for two conceptual and practical reasons. If movement and sound were presented as autonomous elements, the sound would be perceived more as soundtrack to a minimalist choreography (neither in fact convincing at all). The difference between the two would paradoxically almost disappear, because they would have been presented as autonomous elements which in fact they are not. Although fragmented, both are different performative aspects of the act of music making. When placed at the exact moment in time, the difference becomes most experienceable, because one perceives elements as separate that usually belong together. In fact the concept of intermediality as "phenomena across medial

[159] In my experience of the piece, this disconnectedness does not produce arbitrariness, but on the contrary gives more orientation to the spectator, as the sound is not related to the instrument (which is absent), but on the finger movement. As every finger has a specific sound assigned to it, it is in fact much easier to follow what is happening. Actually the relationship between movement and sound would become much more arbitrary *if* the "real" sounds resulting in the use of the different finger settings would have been used.

[160] I use the concept of displacement here as "[removing] objects, images, and words […] from their original contexts, thus drawing new attention to the object." (Groot-Nibbelink in Bay-Cheng et. al 2010: 97) Usually the sounds belong closely to the musician and her instrument, but through the process of displacing them they become self referential and present as sounds as such, different from their self-evident identity when played by a musician.

boundaries that involve at least two conventionally distinct media" (Rajewsky 2002: 13, my translation) is reversed. In *Thespian Play* aspects not usually perceived as distinct media are separated and thus perceived as distinct *after* the process of separation, with the effect that one becomes aware of the art form's mediality, of the varied elements of musical performance.

The second, more practical reason is that the musician needs some sounding relationship to his movements in order to be able to perform that movement convincingly. Since sound, as *the* effect of his movements and physical bodily processes*,* is already taken away from him, displaced and taken over by the electronic soundtrack, he has to be able to connect his movements to something he knows. As a musician he does not think and act in reference to purely bodily movement as dancers or mime actors can, but he does need some minimal acoustic reference to be able to perform in a convincing way and to fill his movements with meaning and intensity.[161]

Surprisingly, the most striking and interesting relationships between movement and sound occur when the rhythms of both are exactly the same. By placing movement and sound exactly together in unison, the differences between them (and their mediators, the live performer and the soundtrack) are most accentuated. This phenomenon of unison as such is not new in contemporary theatre. In many performances movements are repeated (Christoph Marthaler), or performed in slow motion in unison (Robert Wilson). Precisely because movements are performed at the same time and in the same way by different performers, even the smallest differences become particularly noticeable. The difference in *Thespian Play* is that I use *different* media that are not necessarily directly connected with each other, yet they still match each other in the experience of the here and now of the performance.

In many theatre and performance works since the 1960s rhythm has been used to de-synchronise the audience, as a means against traditional dramatic or character-driven interpretations of theatre. The individuality of the different media has been accentuated by giving them their own autonomous rhythms, rather than supporting each other's rhythms and multiplying one and the same idea. In giving the audience an experience of dislocation, this approach has become a powerful tool for the liberation from logocentrism in the context of postdramatic theatre, as well as for shifting the attention from working on character and narrative towards timing and polyphony of the various media (Roesner 2008). Other approaches work with repetitions, in which a particular element changes every time it occurs, which gives the audience the experience of difference (Fischer-Lichte in Brüstle et al. 2005: 238-239). In *Thespian Play*, it is neither the individuality of the different media nor repetition which expresses and accentuates the distinctiveness of sound and movement, and makes the small differences experienceable. I use exactly the same rhythm for both and hold a strong coherence between both visual and auditive rhythms through the whole performance.[162] It is the exact appearance of visual and auditive elements, placed together in time, which communicates their difference.

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[161] These aspect apply especially for this specific performance with this specific setting. In my later performance *almost equal / meistens gleich* for conductor and trombone player (2010), I use solely the movement of the two performers as choreographic material, completely independent from sound, even in stillness. Here *visual* rhythms become much more important for the performers than in *Thespian Play*.

[162] There are passages in the piece that are so polyphonic and complex in sound that they cannot be completely doubled by one player. Still, in these passages the performer doubles at least one of the audible voices, and also switches between different voices.

The core of this experience of difference is even stronger for two reasons. According to normative conventions, we expect sound and movement to match, even if we already know that they are separately produced (as in playback shows). In *Thespian Play* the perception is twisted because movement rhythmically matches with sound, but the instrument is missing with which these sounds have been produced. What makes this experience more radical is that I manipulate and combine pre-recorded saxophone sounds in ways that do not just re-inform the possibilities of the instrument, but which are not possible in reality.[163] By means of technology the saxophone player seems to be able to perform something impossible, which makes the difference between his movements and the sounds even more striking. Although the technical processes are obvious and made visible, in some passages of the piece one could almost believe that the performer really produces the sounds, although one knows that this is not possible due to the absence of the instrument. The experience constantly shifts and oscillates between knowing and believing.

Nearly all artistic decisions during the process made the piece "simpler" and clearer, but at the same time more radical, and the experience of difference greater; the difference of origins of the displaced material more experienceable, the fragmentation more obvious and clear. In my experience of the creation of this performance, it is not necessarily the best approach to plan or to design difference, fragmentation, displacement or separation. In the example of *Thespian Play*, the most striking experiences emerge from the simplification and rhythmical parallelisation of the different elements.

As a result of the staging of the performance, the audience experiences much more the bodily endeavours of the musician-as-performer than a musician performing a piece on his instrument. As the instrument is missing, the focus of attention shifts to the body; to the musician's hands, his face or his throat. The musician becomes a performer, and becomes theatrical without acting. As I could experience in talks with various audience members, it's not clear what this person on stage actually is: especially in the beginning of the piece it could be an actor or a mime, or perhaps even a dancer. During the piece this changes bit by bit, and in the last third of the piece, at the latest, it is obvious that it is a musician performing. This openness of reception or interpretation is a result of the missing elements of the musician's profession, and the electronic media that fill in these elements. The absent instrument makes it possible for the audience to fill in the emerging "empty space" with their own interpretation concerning the identity of the performer. Still, as all actions have at least some reference to the performer's professional practice as a musician, it becomes possible for him to perform carefully choreographed movements without his instrument. By means of this fragmentation of movement and sound the movements themselves become theatrical, and may be further developed to an independent, yet musical movement language.

However, for the performer the setting of the performance is quite demanding. He has no instrument anymore, and thus a large part of his life-long musical practice is gone; he does something which he has never done before. The performance of the piece demands an enormous amount of concentration, and the performer struggles anew with the piece at every performance.

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[163] This is the case for example when the saxophone player would have to remove the mouth piece for a specific sound, and to put it on for the next sound. In reality, the time to change the physical condition of the instrument would be far too short to play these two sounds directly after one another.

Precisely because the instrument is missing, even standard musical movements become new and challenging; no matter how often the performer plays *Thespian Play*, performing without his instrument will never belong to his professional daily practice. For me as a director watching his performance in the theatre, it remains a challenging experience, sitting on the edge of my seat, as very small mistakes are easy to make and immediately recognisable. Though he is physically there, he is displaced from his habitus; his customary mode of producing sound through his instrument has been digitally displaced through time and space. The player's attempt to reconcile these separations in performance is both futile and at the same time seemingly possible, and this is what makes the performance of *Thespian Play* challenging for the saxophonist and audience alike.

In both *Sigh* and *Thespian Play*, the musicians are performing without their instruments, performing as mimes, while *Sigh* is created from the perspective of a visual artist, given shape in the form of a video installation. *Sigh* tends to work entirely differently than *Thespian Play*, not the least because it is not a live performance but a video installation. The piece does not happen in the here and now with live performers, but the musicians are projected onto screens. A further important difference is that despite the same or a similar technique of performing from the musicians' point of view, the members of the orchestra in *Sigh* remain essentially musicians. They are not transformed into theatrical performers in a way, and I state this for the following reasons.

First, the setting of *Sigh* provokes a kind of an "as-if" situation. The musicians are performing *as if* there were playing, they are almost acting the playing of their instruments, though without instruments. At the beginning of the piece, the musicians concentrate, then look to the imaginary conductor, *as if* there was a conductor, whose performance was recorded separately and during the work only present as video projection.[164] When they start performing, they are playing the air and relaxing their bodies as if it was a real situation, and they were really performing this piece of music. Their performance comes very close to acting in Kirby's sense of pretending, simulating and representing. The conductor finds himself in such an extreme "as-if" situation as well: conducting music in a playback environment, where the music is not played by the ones he is supposed to conduct. He is filmed, and he does not give cues to real musicians (not even the ones who are miming, as the musicians are filmed separately and are thus absent during the conductor's shot), but for a camera. The same goes for his expression, which neither affects nor finds an answer in the playing of the musicians.[165]

Second, the music is an autonomous composition in itself. It can potentially be played and listened to on a CD, but it is also perfectly possible to perform the music as musical composition in a symphonic program. The piece can be perceived as a musical work, without the impression that something is missing. The soundtrack in *Thespian Play* works quite differently. The music is not composed to have the potential of an autonomous piece of music (in fact I myself find it not very

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[164] The whole performance in fact *was* conducted by conductor Jurjen Hempel. During the video recording the music was performed as if it was a normal performance, only without the instruments, with the musical notation projected onto a screen above the camera, invisible on the final video. Each section of the orchestra was recorded separately, as was the performance of the conductor. (I have to thank Kate Perutz from White Cube London for this information.)

[165] I will come to the difficulty of this way of performing for a conductor later, in the discussion of my own performance *almost equal / meistens gleich*; see p. 128.

interesting to listen at), and does not work like that. The music needs the visual and the performative part, the live musician as the complementary part, to be perceived as a complete work of art. What makes *Thespian Play* interesting to experience is the relation between the sound and movements, the tension between these elements and the challenge for the musician to follow and double the soundtrack as exactly as possible. The actual game, subject or even narrative of *Thespian Play* is how the live body relates to the mechanical soundtrack.

Third, related to the previous aspect, is the relation between the sounding notes in the composition and the quality of choreographic movement to produce these notes. As stated in the first chapter, at least every traditional instrument requires a physical action to produce sound, such as breathing, moving fingers to close and open keys of a flute or arm movements of a string or percussion player. Creating a piece like *Sigh* or *Thespian Play* means focussing on exactly the *relation* between the sounds and their movements. During the development of *Thespian Play* we were very much looking for sounds that work well as choreographic elements of the mime: there is no single sound that is not tested for its specificity and effectivity in combination with its "double", the miming performer. This had a huge influence of the musical material we used, as, for example, most of the musical motives or sounds are short rather than long notes or *cantabile* melodies; I judged this as much easier and convincing to follow and experience with an eye on the relation between the visual and the audible. This relationship seems of far less importance in *Sigh*, as the internal logic of the composition is primarily musical. The musicians are doing exactly what they would have done at a regular performance, as if they were playing the music. The strength of the movements works particularly well with the corresponding sound, the result being the movement that is necessary to produce precisely this sound in a concert situation, however, the choreographic potential remains limited. There is no obvious section in the piece focussing on choreographic actions, such as in the beginning of *Thespian Play* that focuses explicitly on finger movements related to key sounds.

Fourth, a re-information of the instrument's possibilities as analysed in the discussion of *Thespian Play* is not happening in *Sigh*. All instrumental gestures that are performed and doubled on the soundtrack (or the other way round, the notes and music which is doubled by the soundless gestures of the musicians) are conventional playing techniques, no kind of extended technique is applied in Anne Dudley's music. All sounds and combinations of sounds are perfectly possible in reality and playable in a live concert without any problem. This is not the case with the performance of *Thespian Play*, on the contrary: it is precisely the impossibility of playing the piece on a physically present instrument which creates the specific gestural-musical language of *Thespian Play* and which adds significantly to its theatrical dimension.

Thinking music from choreography: Xavier Le Roy

An aspect that constantly reappears in the previously discussed examples is the one of choreography. By taking away the instrument from a musician in a performance situation, the body is exposed in a way that potentially enhances the performative presence of this musician, and invites the audience to read and interpret the body much more in a way that focusses on its movements than on the musical content of those movements. In one way, the body literally becomes more exposed as there is no instrument that covers it or blocks the view on the music

making body. Additionally, the absence of the instrument steers the audience's gaze towards the body; something is missing, which highlights the presence of another.[166]

When a choreographic perspective[167] appears from within the main medium of music, it might be fruitful to have a look at an artist who works the other way round, with dance and choreography as the main artistic discipline. Xavier Le Roy is a dancer and choreographer who has used musical ideas in his projects, thought from his own perspective: dance. Le Roy's work has several connections to reductive approaches and to absence in the domain of dance.[168] In recent years several works of Le Roy show quite a conspicuous focus on aspects derived from musical projects. Two works in which his working method with reductive ideas in connection to musicians become most clear are *Mouvements für Lachenmann - Salut für Caudwell* (2005), and *Sacre du Printemps* (2007) based on Le Roy's observations of Simon Rattle rehearsing Stravinsky's famous piece for orchestra.

As part of the staged concert *Mouvements für Lachenmann*, Xavier Le Roy created *Salut für Caudwell* (called *Caudwell* from here on). The music is a composition for two guitars by German composer Helmut Lachenmann (b.1935), composed in 1977.[169] The music is built on a considerable amount of *extended techniques*, such as hitting the neck of the guitars or scratching the strings. Lachenmann's sounds refer to their concrete origin, to the way of sound production itself, by means of physical action. His pieces are "compositions in which the audibility of the music making body is not experienced as merely instrumental, serving a sound ideal, but as expression of physical presence." (Craenen 2011: 50, my translation)[170] As most of Lachenmann's chamber music compositions, *Caudwell* can be experienced as physically demanding for the guitarists, and visually appealing for the audience, a composition not only to be heard but to be seen as well. However, Lachenmann himself does not specifically aim at a theatrical or choreographic experience of his music, despite its choreographic potential. It is nevertheless exactly the physical impact of his music that attracts choreographers such as Xavier Le Roy to these compositions. Especially the relationship between hearing and seeing is important for Le Roy:

> After listening and reading some of Helmut Lachenmann's pieces: I get the feeling that H.L.'s music, at least *Salut für Caudwell*, was written as much to be seen as it was to be heard. Listening to his music coming out of my stereo speakers […] I couldn't help myself from wondering what the musicians were actually doing with their instruments. (Le Roy 2006: n.p.)

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[166] Of course there are many more way of accentuating the choreographic ways of making music. I refer to the doctoral research and dissertation of Paul Craenen (2011), *Gecomponeerde Uitvoerders*. Leiden: Leiden University. Here, Craenen discusses the accentuation of the musician's body in contemporary instrumental compositions, and analyses a "body paradigm" in the work of a generation of young composers today.

[167] "To trace a choreographic intention would mean that specific movement patterns do not have the function of making sound in the first place, but are rather motivated by their visual impact." (Craenen 2011: 82, my translation)
"Een choreografische intentie terugvinden zou betekenen dat sommige bewegingspatronen niet in de eerste plaats een klankfunctie bezitten, maar gemotiveerd zijn door hun visuele bewegingskwaliteit."

[168] See Gerald Siegmund's chapter on Le Roy's work, "Die Artikulation des Dazwischen" in Siegmund 2006: 369-408.

[169] The other compositions of the staged concert are Lachenmann's *Schattentanz* for piano (No. 7 from *Ein Kinderspiel*, 1980) and *Mouvement (- vor der Erstarrung)* for ensemble (1982/84).

[170] "[…] composities waarin de hoorbaarheid van het musicerende lichaam niet ervaren wordt als louter instrumenteel, ten dienste van een klankideaal, maar als expressie van fysieke aanwezigheid."

Le Roy chose a very specific staging of *Caudwell*. He extended the ensemble from two to four guitarists, two of them sitting behind screens, invisible to the audience, for the performance of the work. Two other players are sitting in front of the screens, performing the piece *without* their instruments as mime players, synchronised with the other two, with their movements as close as possible to the actual movements necessary to perform the composition. Le Roy made several small interventions in the piece, such as stopping the movement while the invisible players continue to play, or looking upwards at the end of the performance. The already present choreographic potential of Lachenmann's music gets even more strengthened by Le Roy's interventions, and becomes more visible. In his theatrical-choreographic interpretation, Le Roy develops a "dramaturgy of relationships between the visible and the audible to reveal some already existing theatrical aspects of Lachenmann's compositions and to transform the concert event in a choreography." [171] To do so, Le Roy applies *reduction* as strategy, he works with taking away external elements from the musician's performance. Already in Le Roy's first ideas on the production, documented in his text for *Revue de L'Ircam No 2*, embryonic thoughts about reduction can be traced:

> In order to take the composer's ideas and bring them on stage for a theatrical production we may have to make things more visual for them to be heard (differently); or maybe have only a visual element and not hear anything. […] So what if we take the instrument away and imagine the sound? (Le Roy 2006: n.p.)

The staging of *Caudwell* accentuates the choreographic potential of Lachenmann's composition by taking away the instruments of the visible performers. The sound is not anymore the result of a musical action, but is now the starting point for developing a performative, choreographic utterance. This approach opens the view on the performers' bodies literally, but also metaphorically on the movements and their performative and theatrical potential, it makes a different perception of Lachenmann's music possible. Precisely by changing the relationship between sound and movement in several moments of the performance, Le Roy creates a counterpoint to predictability and achieves a tension that lasts throughout the performance.

[171] http://www.xavierleroy.com/page.php?sp=e347f884fa37480bd0bd5dff79104483a8e284b5&lg=en, last retrieved September 10, 2012.

Taking away Internal Elements

Compared to external elements, internal elements of the musician are far more difficult to identify in live performance. It is also more difficult to stage missing internal elements and to communicate this loss to an audience, because these internal elements can hardly be directly perceived. The ability for active listening for example is crucial to the profession of a musician, but cannot directly be experienced on a theatre stage, and can hardly be communicated convincingly if taken away. However, the "missing" internal elements might have an enormous impact on the performer. Not being able to execute certain habits of her profession may cause the musician an enormous struggle.

One possible example for taking away internal elements may also be the previously mentioned *Emergency Solos* by Christina Kubisch.[172] The performer is assigned to play her flute and several other objects attached to the instrument or to the performer's body. But it is actually the ability for a virtuoso performance that is taken away here. The flute player is denied any kind of virtuoso performance in these pieces; and this denial is also the concrete subject of the piece: As the title suggests, the works comment on the identity of the soloist, mostly associated with classical "virtuoso" music. In the pieces, the soloist is challenged by the task of playing the flute, and encounters the impossibility of doing so. When the soloist tries to play the flute only with thimbles on her fingertips, it is not the actual flute sound in the sense of the sound for which it is built, that is coming out. The only sounds created are the miniaturist metallic noises of the thimbles hitting the flute keys. What the audience perceives is the strife to make an actual flute sound, and the impossibility of getting to it.

The performer being reduced to "impulse and input": *still life 2.0*

Unlike *Thespian Play*, the study *still life 2.0* (2010) for viola player, dancer, live electronics and live video, is an experiment in taking away internal elements from the musician's profession. In doing so, this artistic work is a direct result from the theoretical framework of internal, external and contextual elements; without this framework *still life 2.0* would have hardly been possible to conceive. The objective is to remove the ability to develop structures over time. Electronic media and live performance exchange their functions, so that screen, video and loudspeakers are experienced as performance, and performers become part of an installation. Related to this is the idea that the non-living elements on stage are experienced as living entities, and that the performers of flesh and blood develop an almost machine-like presence on stage, twisting the perception of both human performers and electronic media.

A viola player and a dancer perform short and isolated movement and sound fragments which are recorded by a microphone and two cameras. For the largest part of the performance the two performers are "just standing", watching the other performer, watching the audience, or they are off stage. These short fragments are recorded and processed by microphones and video cameras. A computer program processes the input of the two performers as its only material into

[172] See p. 11 for a short introduction about the pieces.

an audiovisual score on loudspeakers and video screen; the piece emerges and develops completely out of these short fragments. The performers do not have any influence on the computer program, the processing and the emergence of the audiovisual score. One central idea of the work is the mutual dependency of the elements: as the performers provide the basic, fragmented material, the audiovisual electronics provide the overall structure of the performance. Without the performers the computer system is unable to process anything, as there would be no input to manipulate; it would remain silent. Without the computer processing their input, the performers' sounds and movements would remain fragmented and disconnected from each other. Control of the overall structure, the length of certain passages of the performance and a great deal of the auditive and visual identity of the work are taken away from the performers. They are reduced to the functions of giving impulses - such as triggering and starting computer processes - and giving input to the computer. They cannot control the computer system, they can only provide the material, to give the input. Neither are they able to control 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 an interactive, mutual one, it is about a *difference*. Performers and system have divergent functions that complement each other and need each other to survive. The relation between live performers and electronics oscillates between tension, conflict and collaboration.

Idea and concept

still life 2.0 focuses on aspects around the themes of communication, control and power, and man-machine/technology relationships, yet also about the aspect of the sensuality of the human body in our digital age. In creating this piece I was also interested in posing questions about a society that tends to abstract itself away from many processes or responsibilities by means of technology. Thinking about people's responsibility when using technology, surfing the World Wide Web, but also conceiving technology as extensions of human's body and mind, I was posing several questions, closely related to the research project:

> What remains of a performer, if she may only give the impulses for auditive and visual processes of a performance, but when the actual performance is done by audiovisual electronics?
>
> How much is a performer responsible for a performance that uses her sound, movements and actions as input, but processes these inputs to organise the course and structure of the performance without her?
>
> What is the responsibility of a performer, how much influence might she have on a performance, its structure and course? What remains if the performer's influence on the overall structure as central aspect of performance is taken away from her?

These questions were then translated to the setup and conceptual framework of an artistic work. In contrast to other works and artists I chose for a relatively sensitive approach: The performers are neither physically bound to machines as in the work of Kris Verdonck (*I/II/III/IIII*, *Duet*, *Heart*), nor are the machines controlled by the performer's body or the bodies extended by machines, as in the works of performance artist Stelarc. In technical respect *still life 2.0* exemplifies a less radical but

more sensitive, subliminal framework: by being part of the performance the performers agree in the interplay, the system and its various aspects of control and power. Even more than *Thespian Play*, *still life 2.0* is a paradigmatic example for digital media taking over specific elements of musical performance or the musical profession. However, technology does not work as autonomous element in this work, it is closely interlinked and related to the musician-performer, mostly in a complementary function. As the role of the musician and the possibilities and functions of technology are both restricted, this approach is an example of a challenging connection and relationship between musicians and digital media, with the intention to open up possibilities for a colourful, fragmented and tensional aesthetic experience in contemporary music theatre.

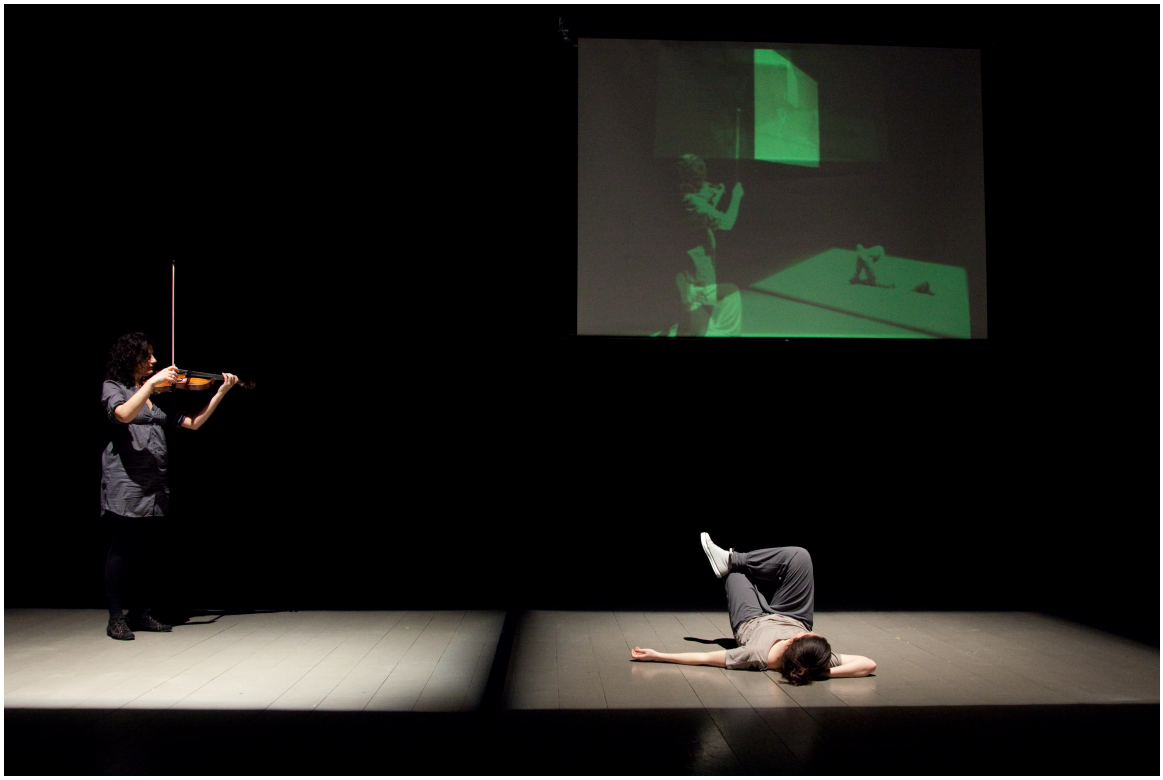

Image 4.3: scene from *still life 2.0*

Two aspects exemplify the concept of reduction: first, the movements of the performers - be it dance or musical movements - are cut or fragmented. Of course several composers of the twentieth and twenty-first century make use of very short and fragmented structures, such as Georges Aperghis who explicitly relies on working with fragments, on the basis of a musical but also ideological and cultural idea:

> I don't believe […] in a world where harmony and coherence of thought rule the day. I don't see any connections between things. That doesn't interest me. I believe more in small fragments, pieces of life,

> that randomly come into contact. They communicate more energy and feeling by this kind of contact. But that can only be fragmentary, I don't believe in a whole. (Aperghis in Maximoff 2006, my translation)[173]

As part of his composition process, Aperghis collects an often vast amount of small fragments and uses them as building blocks to develop a structure for a larger composition. In contrast to this strategy, the fragments in *still life 2.0* remain isolated from the performer's point of view. Only through the processing and manipulation by the computer these fragments can be brought into an overall structure, which is not in the hands of the performers anymore.

Second, as a conceptual idea which links *still life 2.0* to the research in a very particular way, the control of the overall structure is transferred to the computer system. The performers are denied this ability, which I assign as an internal element of the musician's, but also the dancer's profession. For the performers, this loss of control of the overall structure means a significant cut in their autonomy and identity.

From process to product

A central part of the rehearsals was trying out and looking for the relationship between what the performers did and what the computer could do with this as material to process. In the end, the contributions of the performers became staged exclusively according to the criteria of how that served as input for the cameras and the microphone. In the final performance, in a way, they do not perform as an audience would traditionally understand it, but are completely restricted to performing tasks in front of microphones and cameras. In order to depict this concept and to shed light on several important and/or related aspects, I will briefly discuss a selection of scenes of the performance in the following paragraphs.[174]

The opening scene of the piece takes the fragmentation of the musician very literally. After an initial phase of complete darkness, accompanied by processed sounds of a music stand operated by the dancer, the music stand is illuminated by light, in the middle of the stage. A viola in the left back corner becomes lit by a small spotlight, and after a few more seconds the viola player is also suddenly lit up, standing still on the right hand side of the stage in a statue-like playing position without her instrument, and then left in darkness again. The performer, her instrument and sound (in this case the recorded and processed sound of the music stand) become spatially separated. As result of the staging both instrument and musician become objects, positioned apart from each other as seemingly autonomous elements on stage. But while being staged apart from each other both seem to retain their functions: the instrument remains an instrument and the musician remains a musician. Her identity as musician is not questioned as such, but rather supported by the overall musical surrounding, containing her instrument and the music stand. As there is a distance between these elements, however, it is the audience who has to think the elements together - they have to invest some effort to experience the musician, her instrument and the music

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[173] "Ich glaube nicht an eine Welt […], in der gedankliche Kohärenz und Harmonie herrschen. Ich sehe keine Zusammenhänge zwischen den Dingen. Das interessiert mich nicht. Ich glaube eher an kleine Fragmente, Bruchstücke des Lebens, die zufällig aufeinandertreffen. Sie vermitteln mehr Energie und Gefühl durch diese Art des Kontakts. Aber das kann nur fragmentarisch sein, ich glaube nicht an ein Ganzes."

[174] A video trailer of the performance can be seen on www.falkhubner.com/stilllife.html. This trailer includes all of the scenes mentioned.

stand as parts of a fragmented whole. There exists a paradox between the elements which keep their function as parts of the musician in the music making, and yet are at the same time being separated from each other. The perception oscillates between separation and togetherness.

In another section the musician and the dancer are assigned to stand still in specific positions, such as the viola player standing still on one leg while holding her viola in playing position (image 4.4). They are filmed by the two cameras. The software recognises only *changes* in movement in this specific scene, if the performers manage to stand completely still, the video projects black. This way the video only displays the details of the performers *not* fulfilling the assignment correctly; if they move, abstract projections of their silhouettes are projected.[175] Also the violist keeps her bow on the strings, with the general assignment to make no sound. However, by shaking and other movements resulting from not being able to stand still she cannot help making several noises caused by minimal yet tense moves of the bow on the string. This way, also the acoustic result communicates the failure in perfection of fulfilling the performative assignment. The reduction of the musician is translated here to the violist not being allowed to produce a sound; the usual objective of her professional identity - making sound - is not allowed and communicated as failure.

Image 4.4: The viola player in *still life 2.0*

[175] Practically we chose for more difficult positions for the dancer in the "rest" position, while she is most likely much more in control of her bodily positions than a musician possibly can be. This way the "shortcomings" in fulfilling the assignment not only by the musician but by the dancer as well, were communicated to the audience.

In the final section of the performance the dislocated elements of the musician's performance are brought together again by means of digital technology. A section of viola music is repeated as a loop, and a shade of an earlier recorded section of playing is projected onto the screen, combined with the music stand filmed earlier during the performance. Together the screen and loudspeaker seem to project the recorded and processed image of a playing violist behind a music stand - the typical image of a classical musician performing or practicing. The previously fragmented musician is virtually assembled again on screen and through loudspeakers. The live performers are absent, the performance ends with only screen and loudspeakers. Along with the other examples, this scene is the most obvious example of digital media filling in elements of performance. When specific performative elements are taken away from the musician, digital media may take over these missing elements and their functions. This last scene of *still life 2.0* is happening even without performers, by means of digital technology the previously collected fragments of the musicians are combined to appear as the virtual image of a performing musician.

Consequences for the musician-performer

The identity of the viola player in *still life 2.0* becomes somewhat absurd or paradoxical both for herself and for the audience. In several moments of the work she performs *with* her instrument; she has the viola in her hands in the correct playing position, and plays according to the norms of viola playing. Still, the audience does not have the sense of seeing a musician performing music. Similarly, the musician herself does not feel like she is playing music. She only performs certain tasks, which among other things includes producing sound for several seconds. In fact, it is not her task to perform music; her main task is to stand in front of the camera or the microphone and to give input to the computer. The same goes if only her playing movements are recorded by the camera without recording the sound. It is precisely the ability to perform as a concert musician - projecting and communicating music and emotion to an audience - that is taken away from her, as a result of the performative assignment of focussing entirely on the microphone and the cameras.

As mentioned above, one research approach during the creation of *still life 2.0* was to twist and to play with the roles of the computer system on the one hand, and the performers on the other. Standing still for a large part of the work, the performers function as an installation, whereas the electronic audio and video system seems to be "performing". It records and uses the input of the performers - very short and fast viola and dance fragments - organises and processes it and creates the structure of the work, writing an audiovisual score over which the performers do not have any control. This control is actually the aspect of performance which is taken away from the performer in *still life 2.0*, which is more striking than it might seem at first thought: in most musical performances, be it classical, jazz, improvisation or pop music, musicians have a great deal (although in varying degrees) of control over many aspects of performance: structure, tempo, volume, length of a musical piece, coherence of a composition, the amount of physical and acoustic energy. These general parameters could also be transferred in various degrees to performing artists in other artistic forms as dance or acting. Taking away the ability to control even the starting points of the various fragments and the ability to control the overall structure and arc of suspense means a significant cut in the autonomy and identity of performing artists, so also here the question is what remains of the profession and the activity of these performers.

It is arguable if it is obvious or possible to perceive all of the above during a performance of *still life 2.0*, and also to whom in the audience this is applicable. The same goes for the question whether the absence of these elements transforms her into a theatrical performer. I argue that this is the case, for the following reasons. When an audience sees a musician on stage it is expected that she performs music, according to certain criteria. By not giving in to these expectations, the perception can cause irritation, heightening the awareness of the experiencers. An emptied space is created, although it might be difficult to recognise or to grasp what is exactly missing. The emptied space invites the audience to fill it in with interpretation and meaning in a personal, individual way.

Artwork vs. experiment

This section closes with a critical remark on *still life 2.0*, pointing at a central aspect and potential problem or trap in relation to research in and through artistic practice. While introducing the piece above I did so by labelling it a study or an experiment, and the reason for this is connected where the discussion has now arrived. After the piece had had its first performances[176], it proved to be artistically and aesthetically unsatisfactory to me. Though several sections were promising and interesting to experience, and had potential to be developed further, the piece as a whole seemed to be too static, visually not appealing enough, and the separate scenes felt too fragmented from each rather than to build an overall structure. I found it too formal and conceptual to get to the level of a convincing meaning-making potential, and to arrive at a theatrical level. I trace two reasons for this. First, the emerging audiovisual score was not yet developed well enough; to make an artistically inspiring performative installation, much more time would be necessary for both rehearsing and programming work. Second, and this is more crucial, I regard the piece as too close to the research objective, somewhat attempting to exemplify a research strategy, and therefore ending up as a formal experiment instead of a theatrical work.

On the other hand, seen from the perspective of a research experiment, *still life 2.0* actually can be regarded as successful. The performance's setup, the design of the relationship between performers and computer, and the creation process were capable of generating sufficient information to answer the project's research questions. Moreover, the answers were found specifically through the concrete artistic practice and could not have been answered without the collective and practical rehearsal process. In fact it *was* possible to abstract away internal elements of the musician’s profession. At the outset of the rehearsal process, I expected a certain effect on the performer, which proved to be supported by the result: the viola player did feel reduced in her professional identity as musician, and felt like being part of an installation. It was possible to take away internal elements such as the ability to build a structure in performance, though those missing internal elements prove to be hard to communicate to an audience as a surplus when judging the value of the remaining theatrical event.

The problem here seems to be a paradox, located in the centre of what artistic research could be about. In general, if I want to create a performance I really want to create a work for the stage, not a research presentation. Following theatre director Sanne van Rijn who does not "find it

[176] *still life 2.0* was performed twice, on 23rd and 24th february 2010, in Theater Zeebelt, The Hague.

interesting if someone calls his performance research" and wants "to see a performance, not research" (van Rijn in Bleeker et al. 2006: 20, my translation), it is my ambition as artist to create imaginative and meaningful experiences on the theatrical stage, not only successful research. *still life 2.0* was created as an artistic work being part of the research project, but it was only successful as part of this research, and was not able to stand as an artwork in itself. The reason for that seems to be the research itself, as the piece seeks to exemplify one conceptual category of the research, namely the reduction of the musician's profession by taking away internal elements of this profession. But, if the artistic work itself is no longer artistic in its essence but first and foremost research, the relationship between artistic practice and theory and reflection becomes exceedingly difficult. How can such a piece be an artistic example of a research project, if it doesn't qualify as autonomous artistic work? The work of Belgian visual artist and director Kris Verdonck tends to answer this rather provocative question. His production *I/II/III/IIII*, situated between installation art and performance is an example of a successful artistic work that makes the abstraction of internal elements very explicit. In this performative installation, four dancers are denied their most developed habit, the production and initiation of bodily movement, which is taken over by a machine.

Taking away the dancer's habits - Kris Verdonck's *I/II/III/IIII*

From the back of the stage, a sole dancer in a black dress, with the back to the audience, slowly floats in the direction of the audience. She hangs in a huge machine. Arms and feet are hanging downwards, relaxed. The machine lets her sink on the ground, in a position with her knees turned outside that resembles romantic ballets; then the machine pulls the dancer up to about four meters to perform a magisterial pirouette. This is the opening of the performance *I/II/III/IIII* by Belgian visual artist and theatre maker Kris Verdonck, created in 2007.[177]

The dancer performs a passage of choreography while hanging in the huge machine. After about fifteen minutes the dancer disappears into black the same way than she came. In the course of the piece, a second dancer joins the first and they perform the same choreography again, perfectly synchronised. The puppet-like dancer literally seems doubled, staged as an exact copy of the first. Then a third joins the two for a trio, and the doubling changes to the impression of a “copy getting stuck" (de Regt 2008: 36) The three dancers do not go entirely synchronous anymore due to the hanging ropes that cannot move exactly the same. Finally, a fourth dancer joins, performing again the very same choreography as *pas de quatre*. This last part accentuates the repetition as repetition; at this moment the installation presents no more than a "still life of dead beauty" (ibid.: 37). Knowing that this is the last part, the audience has passed the state of boredom. The *pas de quatre*, closes what Daniêlle de Regt calls a "journey through time": a reflection on dance in the periods from romanticism through modernism and futurism to the present (de Regt 2008), closing with the return to romantic ballet, implicitly referring to the four dancers of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* from 1876.

[177] For a visual impression of the piece, see p. 10.

The identity of the performers - A reductive perspective

When focussing on the experience of the performers[178], something else comes to the fore, which is more practical and concrete than the in the above experiential interpretation, but which also gives a clue how the result of the actual performance (and the experience of the performers' presence) is actually shaped and comes into being through the performers' own experience. The most striking is the strange presence of the dancers during the piece, which is not very human, but much more like puppets on the ropes. This reminds one above all of Kleist's vision of the actor as "super-marionette" in his *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810), as Daniêlle de Regt rightfully remarks:

> The puppet as metaphor for rethinking the performer could be seen as an emblem which has been worked out in theatre history by impulses from directors such as Gordon Craig and Oskar Schlemmer. From this Verdonck has primarily remembered that grace, and ultimately beauty, hides in the dematerialisation of the idealised body on stage. (de Regt 2008: 35, my translation)[179]

Within the framework of *I/II/III/IIII*, Verdonck zooms in specifically on this dematerialisation of the dancers' bodies, and on grace as movement quality. He does this by means of the machines, which allow him to give the impression that the dancers seem to be "sent […] into the air as weightless creatures" (de Regt 2008: 34) If one looks carefully at the pirouette one realises that the dancers are not even turning their heads abruptly, a technique of ballet not to become dizzy while turning. This is the perfect pirouette that even liberates the dancer from what is otherwise a purely technical necessity. But despite the freedom that is usually associated with weightlessness, or man's romantic wish for the ability to fly, the performers and their bodies are not free in *I/II/III/IIII*, on the contrary. They are dependant, subordinate to the machine in which they hang, and which suggests the movement to them.

What is most striking in the context of this research is that Kris Verdonck in fact takes away the most important, internalised, intuitive ability and habit of the dancer: the initiation or production of bodily movement. This habit, which is *the* central internal element of the dancer's profession, is denied. The dancers have to leave most of the impulses and initial starts of movement to the machine. It is the machine that provokes movement, and the dancers have to follow this initial provocation.[180] They do move by themselves, but the dancers' own movements result from following what the machine initiates. Verdonck's aim is that the movement is produced by machine and performers for equal parts. In contrast to other performative explorations of dancers hanging in a machine like Cirque du Soleil, Verdonck wanted to explore the possibilities of performers "together with the machine. […] We could have done something like Cirque du Soleil, actually that had been quite simple, but we didn't want that, we really wanted to listen to the language of the

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[178] I base these observation upon conversation with Kris Verdonck, in which he told me about the working process of *I/II/III/IIII*, the collaboration with the dancers and how the dancers communicated their experiences to him.

[179] "De pop als metafoor om de performer te herdenken zou je kunnen zien als een embleem dat doorheen de theatergeschiedenis onder impuls van regisseurs zoals Gordon Craig en Oskar Schlemmer een verdere uitwerking kreeg. Verdonck heeft hiervan vooral onthouden dat gratie, en uiteindelijk schoonheid, schuilt in de ontstoffelijking van het geïdealiseerde lichaam dat op het podium staat."

[180] This is what actually caused one dancer to say to another dancer who was a stand-in for another one who got sick, and who had considerable difficulty in adjusting to the movement provocations, "Just listen to the bloody machine." This is also the title of the book by Marianne van Kerckhoven, Verdonck's dramaturge, about the 2008 production *End*: Kerckhoven, Marianne van and Anoek Nuyens (2012). *Listen to the bloody machine. Creating Kris Verdonck's 'End'*. Utrecht: Utrecht School of the Arts and International Theatre & Film Books Publishers

machine."[181] It is in this respect that I disagree with theatre scholar Robrecht Vanderbeeken when he states that "technology does clearly not get an own identity on this stage" and that it is "an attachment behind the screens, a means for something different." (Vanderbeeken 2008: 65, my translation) In contrast to Vanderbeeken I think that, although the mechanics of the installation are hidden and thus not explicitly staged as being visible, they are indeed very present throughout the piece. Although the audience's eye does not see the machine's mechanics as such, the identity of the machine becomes present in the bodies of the four dancers[182], it manifests itself through the movements of the dancers-as-puppets.

A double logic

Besides the aspects above, *I/II/III/IIII* is also a paradigmatic example for technology taking over specific elements of the performer's profession. In doing this, *I/II/III/IIII* highlights an important aspect of the extension/reduction dichotomy, which I will call its *double logic* later on. The technology makes the perfect pirouette possible, it gives the dancers possibilities beyond the ones of their real bodies. It adds a performative dimension, it adds possibilities; therefore it *extends* the performers' potential. But not without a price. This "extra", this surplus of expression is only possible by taking away the most intimate ability of the dancers, the production of bodily movement. This is the double logic of the reductive approach that will be tackled later in the Conclusion.

[181] Verdonck in personal conversation.

[182] Verdonck himself told me that for him the piece is really about the performers, and that showing the machine's mechanics would only lead the audience's attention away from them.

Taking away sound

What is in the first place associated with music and music theatre is the sounding object. One expects something to sound, be it musical instruments, vocal chords, loudspeakers or other objects. In Chapter One I explained the musical action or playing as an essential part of the profession of the musician. When speaking with musicians about their profession it becomes clear that despite the generally multimodal nature of musical performance including e.g. eye contact and bodily movement, the production of sound remains the most important aspect for them, and their main medium of communication.

The following sections deal with sound being taken away from performance. I discuss several works and performances that tend to thematise the idea of silence in music, and to take away the production of sound from the musician and the musical performance. This starts with John Cage's famous *4'33"*, and continues with Dieter Schnebel's *nostalgie* as well as with my own *almost equal / meistens gleich*. In the discussion on these three pieces I want to leave the notion that "silence" or "the absence of sound" do not exist for what it is, as there are always sounds surrounding us: in a performance space or a theatre this might be coughing, performers walking (or audience members walking out of the performance location) and breathing. What I am concerned with is much more the fact that a musician - both in musical concert situations and in the theatre - is expected to play music, to make sound; sound consciously produced and shaped among others in timbre, rhythm, duration. If a musician does not do this in moments when a musical utterance is expected, such expectations are challenged. As soon as the code of a performance situation suggests that a musician is about to start playing, the negation of this very suggestion can have a radical effect on the audience and on the musician. Cage's *4'33"* is an early and paradigmatic example of a work in which this expectation creates a heightened presence of the performer, which makes this composition relevant in the objective of this study, and for the reductive approach in (music) theatre.

What about no sound? - *4'33"*

John Cage's *4'33"*, often referred to as the "silent piece", can be considered as an early example of reduction in music, and is a central composition in the second half of the twentieth century, with a strong influence on artistic practice and theory up to our time. In its premiere performance, pianist David Tudor came on stage and sat at the piano. After taking a stopwatch and starting it he closed the lid and opened it again. He repeated this procedure two more times. This took 4 minutes and 33 seconds in total, and not once did Tudor play a note or even placed his fingers on the piano keys.

Since its creation in 1952 many accounts on the piece have been written, with its peak a whole book entirely devoted to *4'33"* [183]. In general most of the accounts on the piece emphasise the emancipation of accidental and everyday sounds *as* music, "by nothing more nor less than a temporal frame with which the frame of concert music was broken." (Meyer in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 83) As such, *4'33"* is not a silent piece at all, but on the contrary a piece that wants to demonstrate the impossibility of silence. What is interesting is that it has been discussed in more

[183] Gann, Kyle (2011). *No such thing as silence. John Cage's 4'33"*. Yale: Yale University Press.

academic disciplines than music theory, but also in musical theatre studies, theatre, and performance studies. With *4'33"*, John Cage introduced an awareness that all audible sounds (of the performers, the audience, external sounds like rain on the roof of the building in which an event takes place) during a performance are an intrinsic part of a specific event's sound world, and that all these sounds contribute to the coming into existence of the event, with the potential to be music. This includes the coincidental appearance of many sounds, and accentuates the space outside the performance space: "The performative space looses its boundaries; they open for spaces that lie outside of them. The boundaries between inside and outside become permeable." (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 216, my translation)[184] Zachary Dunbar refers to *4'33"* as "a landmark piece of music [theatre]" instructing "a pianist *not* to play the piano". (Dunbar 2013: 202) With this formulation, although not explicitly working it out further, Dunbar implicitly suggests a reductive perspective - a musician who does not play. However, one should be reminded that a performance of *4'33"* is usually part of a musical setting, of a concert setting, and consciously not set in a theatre.[185] The radical effect that the piece has, especially on an audience that experiences it for the first time, certainly results from the expectation of the music to be heard. By taking away the music (and very explicitly not sound[186]), for sure the surrounding sounds get into focus. But something else happens as well. In his dissertation on "composed performers"[187], composer Paul Craenen rightly hinted at an aspect of the piece that in most instances is not notified: the heightened bodily presence of the musician.

> In the silence of *4'33"* not only surrounding sounds, the aleatoric or noise is becoming emancipated. One of all the sideways experiential effects in the silence of the discussed works is an increased awareness of the bodily presence. (Craenen 2011: 48, my translation)[188]

Paradoxically, exactly while *not* playing, the body of the performer becomes more present. I would like to elaborate a little bit on this aspect to make the relevance of *4'33"* for the reductive approach in theatre clear. Craenen describes the experience of *4'33"* as a temporal extension of the usually short experience of silence and tension just before the musicians start playing. (Craenen 2011: 45) This short moment of not-yet-playing makes both the performers' and the audience's presence sensible; the audience experiences the body of the musician as more present, and through this

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[184] "Der performative Raum verliert so seine Grenzen; sie öffnen sich für Räume, die 'außerhalb' seiner liegen. Die Grenzen zwischen Innen und Außen werden durchlässig."

[185] This was certainly the case at the premiere and many more performances of the piece I know of. I am not aware of any "real" theatrical performances of the piece, as in a theatre. An interesting example is the performance by Dutch conductor and pianist Reinbert de Leeuw live at the television show *De wereld draait door*. Here, the absence of music and movement is compensated (and to a certain degree made theatrical for the purpose of a popular television format) by subtle yet extensive studio lighting and camera movements, such as moving close-ups on De Leeuw in alternation with long shots on the audience or other studio guests. However, Cage clearly intended the piece to be performed on a concert stage, as obvious at the premiere performance during which the piece was performed together with other, more traditional pieces.

[186] "They missed the point. There's no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began patterning the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out." (John Cage in conversation with Kostelanetz, 2003: 70)

[187] Craenen, Paul (2011). *Gecomponeerde Uitvoerders* (Doctoral dissertation). Leiden: Leiden University.

[188] "In de stilte van *4'33"* komt niet alleen het omgevingsgeluid, het aleatorische of het ruisachtige tot emancipatie. Eén van de al dan niet zijdelingse ervaringseffecten in de stilte van de besproken werken, is een vergroot besef van collectieve lichamelijke aanwezigheid."

process of waiting, acknowledges one's own presence as well. From a theatrical point of view, Cage zooms in on this moment in-between not-yet-playing and almost playing, and extends it to the length of a complete piece. Related to this aspect of an in-between moment, it is rather questionable if Cage's idea of the surrounding and accidental sounds is really experienced as music in the first place. Not that this is impossible, but I agree with Paul Craenen that what is much more likely, is the "being aware of the collective experience of something that has not happened yet. What will be experienceable in the waiting is the embodiment of that waiting." (Craenen 2011: 45. my translation)[189] This "embodying of waiting" is both irritating and theatrical. One could easily associate this situation with theatre pieces such as Samuel Beckett's famous play *Waiting for Godot*, or other works of absurd theatre treating waiting as a topic. Christoph Marthaler comes to mind - a director who is a master in staging the waiting, thinking about his actors in *Murx den Europäer! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn ab!* (1993): while several individual actors are speaking short monologues of no more than three sentences or are singing songs sporadically, the rest of the ensemble is sitting, lying or even hanging around at several spots on stage.[190] The waiting for musical action or musical playing does not only heighten the bodily presence of the musician, and allows the view *on* this body in two respects: first, there is *time* for looking at the musician. No musical action is carried out, the score and the pianist literally give the audience time to watch. Second, no instrument covers the view on the musician's body, no musical action disturbs the view on this body. By taking away the musical action, a space is created for experiencing different things other than predominantly music or sound.

Before I close with this short observation of *4'33"*, I would like to draw the attention to an aspect already introduced in the discussion on *I/II/III/IIII* earlier. Andrew Hugill observes this aspect related to the heightened presence of the not-playing musician in *4'33"*:

> Cage used the device of a musical time frame […] to force our attention elsewhere. […] Contrast this with a concert given in a blacked-out theatre or concert hall, through loudspeakers only. Because the loudspeakers fail to provide the listener with any visual indication of the sources of the sounds heard, the imagination of the listener may be thoroughly engaged. No musical performer, no visible sound source, just listening. This is an enforced listening situation that, once again, produces a state of heightened aural awareness. (Hugill 2008: 16-17)

Although Hugill describes a situation from a somewhat opposite point of view to what I discuss here, the idea is the same. By making use of reduction, other aspects of a performance's experience may be heightened. By cutting away or reducing one element (in Hugill's example the visual elements), the audience's senses could be opened into other directions. A specific medium (such as sound, or visual elements) that is usually just one part of the experience could be reinforced by taking away another, and the experience of this medium gets heightened, making it more present. As *I/II/III/IIII* already did, this aspect of *4'33"* offers a glimpse on what I earlier called the *double logic* of the reductive approach: despite, or perhaps because the strategy is reduction, other aspects of the experience may be experienced as heightened or extended. It is exactly *because* of the not-playing that the bodily presence of the pianist in the here and now is

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[189] "bewustwording van het gezamenlijk meemaken van iets dat (nog) niet gebeurt. Wat in het wachten voelbaar zal worden, is de belichaming van dat wachten."

[190] On http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thCMIPYe2I0 one scene called "Backen ohne Mehl" ("baking without flour") illustrates this paradigmatically.

heightened. Referring to the quote by Andrew Hugill above, *4'33"* could be called an enforced waiting situation, or an enforced situation of experiencing the performer's actual body.

Beyond silence

The idea of silence became a more prominent idea among music makers during the 1950s and 1960s, which can be seen as part of a more general phenomenon of staging absence in the performing arts. Making consciously produced sound absent is one possible approach among a larger aesthetic idea: absence of dramatic narration or character in text-based theatre, or specifically trained bodily movement in dance are only two possible phenomena which contribute to an aesthetic that makes specific parameters absent in order to request an "imaginative personal contribution" (Siegmund 2006: 10) from the audience. In music, besides *4'33"* several other pieces have been created since the 1950s up to the present that tend to take away sound, or production of sound from the musician.[191] Many of them have a somewhat theatrical approach, several composers of pieces including elements of silence have also directed them, or asked others to direct. Several of these pieces are experienced by the audience as theatrical, which might result from the already heightened bodily presence that musicians have when they are expected to play, but do not.

In this context Dieter Schnebel's *nostalgie* (1962) for solo conductor is a specifically interesting work that uses the idea of reduction in musical, or music theatrical, performance, though with a different approach towards how the absent music is treated. While Cage accentuates the impossibility of absent sound, Schnebel wants his audience and performers to imagine music. With only a conductor's rostrum and several music stands on stage the conductor has to project his performance towards an imaginary plane, which suggests the otherwise absent orchestra (see image). With a variety of "expressive gestures and countenances of the conductor, an imagined music is evoked." (Craenen 2011: 44, my translation)[192] By taking away sound, Schnebel makes every sound possible through the imagination of the audience. The performative utterances of the conductor merely guide the audience towards this imagined music, its "realisation" lies in the individual audience members. Compared to *4'33"* the bodily presence of the conductor in *nostalgie* is even more heightened. This is because of the expectation of music that does not sound, and even more because of the gestural activity of the conductor-as-performer, which shifts the heightened bodily presence more towards theatricality that is not directed to extra-musical meaning, but directed to itself, to a first of all *musical* meaning, individual for every member of the audience.

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[191] Besides taking away sound completely, also works have been created that just thematise silence (not seldom with a theatrical effect), as the cadenza for solo conductor in Sofia Gubaidulina's symphonic work *Stimmen… Verstummen.* (1986) In the middle of the energetic, fragmented eruptions of the piece, the orchestra falls silent, and the conductor silently performs a cadenza, using arm movements that are organised according to the Fibonacci sequence. The audience experiences an enormous tension in the concert hall due to the sudden silence confronted with the physical activity of the conductor.

[192] "[…] via de expressieve gebaren en gelaatsuitdrukkingen van de dirigent, [wordt] een verbeelde muziek […] opgeroepen."

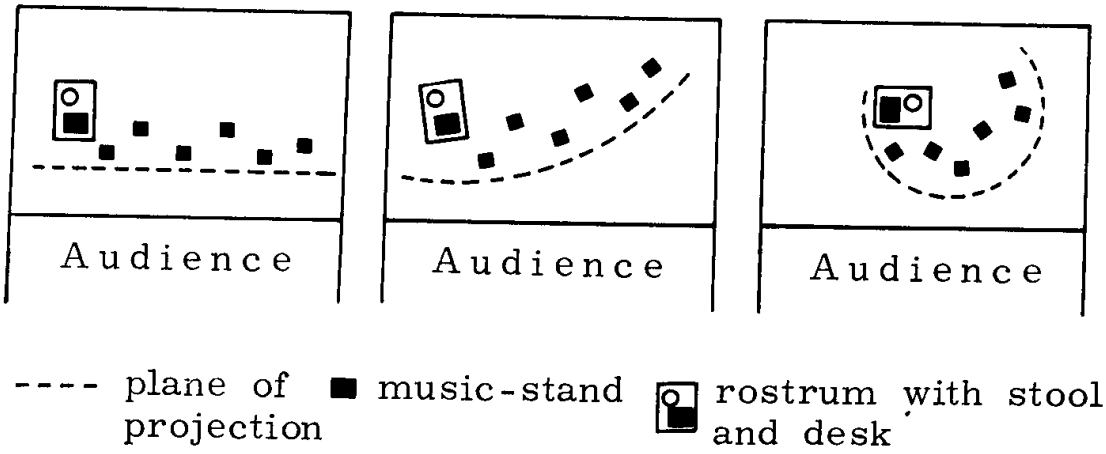

Image 4.5: stage layout in Dieter Schnebel's score of *nostalgie* including the "plane of projection" (Schnebel 1962: 4)

4'33" and *nostalgie* are probably the best known (silent) pieces in the music repertoire of the second half of the twentieth century. It might therefore not be by accident that Paul Craenen discussed exactly these two pieces, together with Kagel's *Con Voce* (1972) for three mute instrumentalists[193], in his imaginary "silent concert program" as part of his dissertation *Composed Performers*. More than *4'33"* Craenen rightly labels both *nostalgie* and *Con Voce* a "theatrical staging of powerlessness with the help of soundless musical gesture." (Craenen 2011: 47) But other pieces with similar approaches to taking away sound from the musician exist, such as the *Concerto for Solo Conductor* (2006) by composer Francis Schwartz.[194] In this work the conductor Roberto-Juan Gonzalez, to whom the piece is dedicated, performs an "imagined musical landscape", miming various famous historical conducting moments: the opening of Beethoven's fifth symphony, the scherzo of Mahler's fourth symphony, the overture of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and a part of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Performing this piece requires a very profound knowledge of the symphonic repertoire, which has an explicit claim on the heart of the classical conductor's profession. The piece thematises the doing-as-if, as the conductor makes pretty much the same movements as he would when conducting the various pieces with an orchestra present. This is at least suggested by the setting of the piece - why would Schwartz want the conductor refer specifically to Mozart's *Figaro* if the conducting movements were not the ones necessary for conducting this piece? Even more, would it make sense to suggest this piece if the movements would not suggest it as well?

What stands out is that several of these compositions dealing with silence, or with the taking away of sound and music at all from the musician, are conceived with the conductor as performer, or have taken the professional identity of the conductor as subject. Besides the mentioned pieces the musician, film and performance maker Thierry de Mey created *Silence Must Be!* (2002) for solo

[193] In *Con Voce*, three instrumentalists have to mime a number of melodic motives with their instruments. They are only allowed to make vocal utterances such as humming or whistling, any instrumental sound is forbidden. The choice of instruments is left to the performer, as is the choice of playing techniques to perform the melodic motives. The length of both the melodic fragments and the total performance is left open to the performers.

[194] A video recording of the piece can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cY5ux_l2ZiI.

conductor, and *Light Music* (2004) for conductor, projection and interactive device.[195] Both pieces are explicitly created with the idea of conducting movements as both choreographic material and visual input for electronic processing. But when it comes to the question of what could be taken away from a conductor, one of the most obvious ideas is that the ensemble or orchestra is taken away, the musicians who are usually conducted by a conductor. The musicians of an ensemble are the most important co-subjects for a conductor in a musical performance or rehearsal situation, they actually produce the sound on which the conductor is working with them. Taking them away from a conductor leaves a considerable gap in the carrying out of her profession. If a conductor has no one to conduct, and no one who responds to his conducting movements, what is actually left?

Musical movement as choreography: *almost equal / meistens gleich*[196]

My performance *almost equal / meistens gleich* (called *almost equal* from here on) ties in with this question, exemplifying the absent sound, taken away from the musician, and specifically the conductor. The work takes a slightly different approach compared to the pieces discussed above, as it adds a specific theatrical-choreographic perspective to the musician's performance that is less developed in these other works. In 2010 I created *almost equal* as a silent music theatre for conductor and trombone player, in close collaboration with Bas Wiegers (conductor) and Koen Kaptijn (trombonist)[197]. In this piece I seek to push the concepts further that I developed in earlier pieces, two primarily: first, I elaborate on the idea of a *musical choreography*, which I used explicitly in *Thespian Play*. In *almost equal* I develop an autonomous yet musical movement language, and create a music theatrical choreography for conductor and trombone player. Second, the conceptual idea of the research - abstracting away central elements of the musical profession - is taken to a new limit by taking away not only the instruments, but also sound as the central medium and the primary goal of every effort of a musician. In contrast to *Thespian Play*, *almost equal* also takes away the sound. Whereas *Thespian Play* lets the musician remain in his traditional playing position, *almost equal* uses the musical movement (without its corresponding sounds) merely as point of departure and basis for developing a choreographic language. With regard to the concept of the internal and external elements of musical performance, *almost equal* could be seen as making use of taking away both internal and external elements. Obviously the external elements such as the trombone are absent, but also several crucial internal elements are either taken away or transformed to something else, which I will discuss in the following pages.

Without sound, the performance happens in silence. There are no instruments on stage, the two players perform a choreography of musical movements. Even stronger than in *Thespian Play*, the perception is directed towards the bodies of the two performers. The link between reductive approaches to musicians on the one hand and the accentuation of bodily movement and choreography on the other becomes very obvious. Unlike Schnebel's *nostalgie*, which "[brings] the music to an imaginary existence" (Cobussen 2002: n.p.), the two musicians in *almost equal* do not

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[195] http://www.compositeurs.be/en/compositeurs/thierry_de_mey/47/catalogue/, last retrieved October 3, 2012.

[196] Parts of this section have earlier been published under the title " 'as if you would...' " In Craenen, Paul (ed.) (2010). *Beginning with music, continuing otherwise.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam School of the Arts.

[197] A video of the performance can be seen on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qca_biJCYz8.

perform silent music, but rather a choreography based on musical movements that are rooted in their professions. With *almost equal* I seek to research the possibilities of developing musical movements towards choreographic material, and to push the boundaries of musical performance towards choreography. While the bodily movements in *Thespian Play* are still tightly connected to the sounds from the loudspeakers, and every movement is precisely the one that is needed to produce the actual sound if it had been played on a saxophone, such originally musical movements are merely the point of departure for the movement language in *almost equal*, where they form the basis of autonomous choreographic material.

Image 4.6: scene from *almost equal / meistens gleich*

Apart from the focus on bodily movement, the creation strategy has been directed towards the interplay and communication between the two musicians who are relieved from their hierarchical positions in the orchestra (or forced to leave them) and the connected social implications. As being part of a theatrical performance, the conductor does not act as a musical director, but as a performer equal to the trombone player. This social aspect was one of the starting points for the development of performative material, and also the narrative structure of the piece as a whole. The social shift in hierarchy applies first and foremost to the conductor, who is even somewhat subordinated to the director. The unchanged position of the trombone player as part of an ensemble works as a point of reference or comparison with the changed function of the conductor. As such, *almost equal* is based on a close and intimate relation to the forms and rites of classical orchestral performance practice. A specific interesting detail about the two performers of *almost equal* was that they do play together in a variety of different situations (orchestra, chamber ensemble and a trio in which Bas Wiegers plays the violin), which gave me, as director of the piece, the possibility to create a rich and varied relationship between the two.

Conceptual problem 1: Necessity

A musical choreography becomes strong and convincing at the moment when the performer fills the movement with musical meaning. If a director or choreographer just lets the musicians produce abstract movements, there is a risk that they appear meaningless or amateurish, as they do not belong to the experience of the musician. I aim to create an intense and tight relationship to musical movement, because at the moment when the musician can link the movement he performs to a musical action or musical instrument, he can fill the movement with meaning and intensity. For instrumentalists the problem is a solvable one, because they are highly skilled in knowing what their instruments produce under various physical circumstances (such as fingerings or the speed of a drum hit).

In the case of the conductor this becomes more complex. For a conductor the instrument - an ensemble or orchestra - is always different, depending on the ensemble, on the piece being played, and on the mood of the performance. With her movements, the conductor not only precedes any played note, but also reacts strongly to the sounds she hears from within the orchestra. Despite the preparatory rehearsals for a concert this can only partly be rehearsed, since the sound happens in the here and now of the performance, potentially different from the rehearsal situation. The conductor needs the orchestra in order to produce the catalogue of her movements. The problem in this case is not the track from the conductor to the (missing) orchestra, but from the orchestra to the conductor. If there is no orchestra, there is no feedback to react to; why should he conduct?

One possible, elegant solution for this problem could be that the conductor in the end simply won't be a conductor anymore; he becomes a performer, rendering the orchestral feedback unnecessary. As a task-based performance, the conductor could try to convince the audience of a certain sound he has in his mind: a forte-accent by the strings does not only sound different than the same accent played by the brass, it certainly also looks different when watching the conductor. It would be possible to collect material by breaking the orchestral direction-practice down into various elements (different dynamics, different orchestral groups, articulations, phrasings and tempos), search for all the small and large differences between the different specificities of the movements, and in doing so generate the performance material. With such a strategy the close reference to orchestral conducting remains present, but the conductor is freed of the necessity of feedback from the orchestra. Ultimately, I am looking for the musical energy and presence of the movements more than the music itself - it is in fact arguable whether I am creating music at all. If one imagines a percussion player moving as if striking a large tam-tam with full energy, only without the beater and without the tam-tam, one can almost hear the sound, and can certainly feel the energy.

Conceptual problem 2: "… *as if you would…*"

I attempted to work with the performers on movements which bear a strong reference to their musical practice, such as using specific positions of the trombone, or giving a cue to the imaginary orchestra to play a short *fortissimo*-accent. In contrast to *Thespian Play*, two musicians have to imagine the sound completely, without any physical or audible feedback. Thus, in a way I am

asking them to move *as if* playing a trombone or directing an orchestra; I am asking them to pretend to do something that they in fact do not do, or to reproduce something that is not really present on stage. According to Michael Kirby this approach can be understood as a way of dealing with musicians as if they were actors; do the musicians have to act as if they were a conductor and a trombonist? At the outset of the rehearsal process it was clear that it could not be the right way to let the musicians do any acting, as this could easily end up in a performance with musicians doing something they are not very good at. I attempted to solve this conceptual and practical problem by starting with the profession of the musicians. All movements have their origin in the musical movements either of Bas Wiegers' conducting or of playing trombone. From this starting point I wanted to expand the quality of the movement, by slowing it down, stopping in the middle of a movement, letting one movement fade into another, or combining it with movements from everyday life such as taking a cup or lifting a chair. The original musical movements become transformed into performative, choreographic movements; for the audience these movements do not necessarily have to have a recognisable relation to their origin; most important is that the performers can link every movement they do to its origin, and thus to their professional practice as musicians. At the point where that succeeds, the musicians could be able to perform the choreography convincingly and will be able to fill it with energy and meaning. Thus even in silence their professional identity as musicians becomes manifested in the choreography, although these movements are displaced, dislocated and transformed from musical into performative or choreographic movements. This resonates with the earlier proposition of identity being understood as constituted by performative acts. The movement, especially for the performer, refers to the musical action. This musical action usually serves the need to produce sound, thus is merely a means to reach the actual goal of producing sound. In *almost equal* this action is accentuated, and transformed into the central element of performance. The movement is no longer a means (naturally in traditional musical performance the movement to produce sound also has performative potential), but the sole focus, as there is no sound.

From process to product - creating a musical choreography and transforming musical to performative-choreographic movement

In general, when external elements such as the instrument are taken away, what is left and what a composer or director decide to stage as left over becomes crucial. Removing the instrument may introduce the idea of musical choreographies, using the musical gesture, unlocked from its usual effect - the sound -, as autonomous choreographic material. The bodily movements of the musicians remain, and are staged as the central element of the performance. Besides the possibility of getting access to another theatricality of musicians, it is crucial not to forget that the resulting choreographic movements can only be performed by musicians. Even without instrument, the saxophone player in *Thespian Play* and the two musicians in *almost equal* are performing the pieces on the basis of their life-long training on the instruments and the conducting experience with ensembles and orchestras, using finger movements, breathing and lip techniques. This results in a theatricality - although for parts of the audience not recognisable as musical - that is exclusively bound to the performer as musician.

In my own work, in order to realise that the musicians can fill the bodily movements with musical meaning, I attempt to maintain a close link to their professional daily practice, to create an intense and tight relationship to musical movement. At the moment when the musician can link the movement he performs to a musical action, he can fill the movement with purpose and intensity. In general I try to prevent the previously described as-if situation, which would mean to ask the performer to imagine *as if* he would play a trombone and thus to act. In order to achieve this in *almost equal*, we worked essentially in three ways:

First, we created performative scenes based on everyday situations in the professional musician's life, more specifically on different social situations and encounters between conductor and trombone player. At the outset of the creation process of the piece there were several possibilities for relationships between conductor and trombone player, depending on the size and nature of the music ensemble.[198] These relationships resulted in various ways of behaviour and phenomena closely connected to the traditions and conventions of the western classical concert music. Such a convention in a symphony orchestra might be that musicians (including the trombone players) stand up during the applause after having performed a composition or a concert, but do not bow. Bowing in this case is only granted to the conductor. When a conductor enters a rehearsal space, in general a trombone player would not look at the conductor to greet him; he follows the group, not the conductor. With such concrete situations of behaviour we built several moments in the piece, such as the opening section. Kaptijn already sits on a chair when the audience comes in, and after all noises become silent Bas Wiegers enters the stage, asks Kaptijn to stand up by gesture, and bows to the audience.[199]

Second, we used movement patterns from everyday practice as performative acts, such as daily exercises without instrument, warming up and turning the arms. In one scene Kaptijn performs a stretching exercise where his whole body turns down in slow motion, and becomes a kind of breathing sculpture for a moment. The pattern from his daily practice is transformed to a choreographic moment. He does something which is not directly connected to making music, but something which precedes that action of making music. He does something which is completely normal for him, something which he is perfectly familiar with and is able to perform easily; it has a purpose he can refer to. However, although it is originally an exercise, this is not perceivable by the audience. Because it is explicitly staged in a performance situation, it is not perceived as exercise, but as performative act.

As a third strategy, I composed passages of movement, such as a solo for the trombone player, or a duet for conductor and trombone player in the end of the piece. This uses the concept of musical choreography as in *Thespian Play;* both sections are composed and fixed in notation (see image 4.7), so that the performers could practice and perform them with the same precision as they would when they have to play music. However, unlike in *Thespian Play*, during the rehearsals the performers found it problematic to mime the complete playing or conducting in a one-to-one fashion. Partly this was caused by the feeling of having to fake or act, reinforced by the absence of music that could me mimed, as in *Thespian Play*. We decided to abstract the

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[198] The in-depth information about these different possible relationships was the result of talks with Bas Wiegers and Koen Kaptijn, based on their concrete experiences made during their professional careers.

[199] See video at 0:20.

movements more, such as in the solo for the trombone player in the end of the piece.[200] The performer does not try to make use of all necessary movements as if he would mime this part, but instead he only uses his right hand. The left hand which usually holds the trombone is not used, neither does he breath or mime the tone producing mouth and breathing movements and techniques.

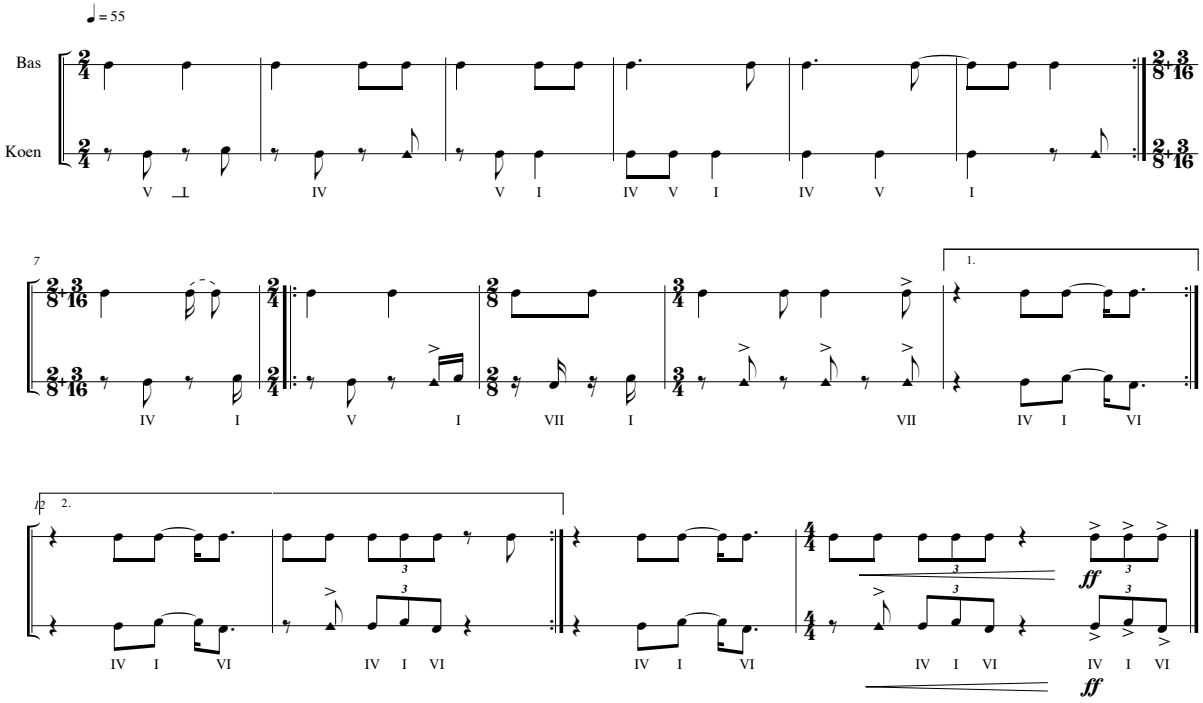

Image 4.7: score of the final section of *almost equal / meistens gleich*

The conductor's movements are treated in a similar way: in one section in the middle of the piece[201] the conductor uses his original conducting movements only as a starting point, but the actual conductor's movements are completely absent. The only remaining reference to conductor's movements is the position of the hands and fingers, how they are formed; but from this point of departure, the choreography consists of very precise rhythmic-geometric figures of the arms. This way there is indeed a clear reference to the profession as conductor, and the quality of movement also communicates the same specifics, such as very precise and detailed control of the movement, the tempo, cues and moments of standing still. All this communicates a very specific inherent musical quality, and makes the movement, though separated from the actual musical context, musical and choreographic at the same time.

[200] See video at 8:34.

[201] See video at 4:25.

Conclusion

When evaluating the creation process with the two performers, it was striking that the relation to sound is one of the most important references for them in order to be able to perform the piece. When thinking about why it actually worked for them to perform *almost equal*, both found that everything they do has a clear reference to what they are used to do, but is not exactly the same. The two musicians abstract their usual acts and in doing so transform them to an individual performative language. This language was not obvious in the outset of the rehearsals, it was one that had to be found, tried out and experimented with. Both Kaptijn and Wiegers described their experience of working on the performance as an "adventure"; it was obvious that they had to cope with several obstacles and uncertainties to find their way into the central idea of the piece. In a performance as radical as *almost equal*, it is striking, perfectly consequential and logical that the two musicians rely on their professional experience, which in the end lies in creating sound, hearing, listening and reacting again, both in movement (conductor) and in the creation of sound (trombonist). As stated in Chapter One, in the end it is sound which is the ultimate reference for the musician - even when there is no sound and the musicians produce movements based on sound, but do not create any sound by themselves. This adds an interesting perspective to what a musician is and could be, and what could possible belong to the profession of a musician when performing in theatrical contexts. But, similar to Thierry de Mey's *Silence Must Be*, in *almost equal* the musicians do not even have to perform original musical movements with the aim of miming or reproducing music without the sound. Neither do they produce a kind of visual music as in *nostalgie*. They produce a movement language based on musical movements, therewith communicating an energy, presence and concentration which is typical for musicians and for the reception of classical concert music. The reception oscillates between experiencing the movements as theatrical or choreographic on the one hand, and specifically musical on the other.

Unpretentious tensions: *Living Room*

Besides the possibility of literally taking elements away, there are other ways to stage the playing musician in a way that she is hindered or even prevented from actually making music. In the *Emergency Solos*[202], Christina Kubisch chooses a framework that thematises the act of musical performance as such. She uses everyday objects to make the playing of the instrument almost impossible. By being hindered from actually playing the flute as usual, the flutist of the *Emergency Solos* is transformed into a theatrical performer. Kubisch's approach in this work still bears a direct relationship to the absurdistic ingredients of Instrumental Theatre or to the tradition of performance and concept art.

In 2011 I created the staged composition *Living Room* for harp, harpist, requisites, soundtrack and video, around a similar idea of reducing the musician, in the setting of a solo concert. The initial interest of the piece was asking questions about the reality of daily audiovisual media such as television, radio and online news feeds. *Living Room* combines the live performance on and around the harp with the same performer on video. During the performance the seemingly incidental and marginal actions of the live performer meet, merge and clash with the complex video part, filmed with a hand camera and edited together with the audio part to a piece of music which pretends to be faithfully documenting a harp performance "as it happened", but in fact far from being possible to be played on a harp.[203]

Non-presence as concept and staging technique

In *Living Room* the performer is set into a staged competition with her own video double. The techniques used in the staging process could equally be described with the vocabulary of the expansive approach as well, because the performer has to execute several simple performative tasks, like setting her harp into position, or switching on the lamp that stands next to her. The approach of the piece fits in the discussion on reductive approaches due to the fact that these assignments almost tend to prevent the harp player from playing the harp, while the video performer has difficult and virtuosic, at times impossible sections of music to play (made possible by means of editing techniques). Instead of being located in the performer, the resulting tension is rather located in the experience of the audience who sees a partly absent performer who is in fact not doing that much, opposed to a video which seems to take over the function of performance and performer. The central question connected to the research was how a live musician is perceived whose presence on stage is fairly reduced, in contrast to a complex video that seems to be more important and perhaps even more present than the actual live performer. This is closely related to how Heiner Goebbels sees the musicians performing in his pieces, concretely in *Schwarz auf Weiss*:

> Presence is doubly reduced in *Black on White* by the rather amateurish 'non-presence' of the musicians, who never did anything similar before. You can observe the un-expressive, un-dramatic, but highly

[202] See p. 11.

[203] A video recording of the full performance can be seen at www.falkhubner.com/LivingRoom.html.

> concentrated faces of the performers, who do not pretend to be anyone other than themselves as musicians in that very space and moment while we watch them. (Goebbels 2010: 7)

It is interesting and necessary to note that although I labelled Goebbels' work an outstanding example of the expansive approach earlier, he himself tends to speak about his work more in terms of reduction or absence. He also does not link his ideas so much with "additive" terms like extra-musical assignments, performance or performative tasks. The reason for this is a difference in focus. While I am observing and analysing the musicians' actions in relation to their "original" profession, Goebbels does two different things: First, he describes the musicians' presence specifically while carrying out the extra-musical assignments, rather than discussing the relationship between these assignments and the musicians' "purely musical" activities. Second, he implicitly compares the musicians' appearance to the probably more expressive or dramatic presence of actors. Even when the musicians do various extra-musical tasks such as the ones in *Schwarz auf Weiss*, they do not pretend to be anyone else than themselves. But the high concentration is in a mode in which they always perform, regardless of what they do - playing their instruments or playing dice.

The idea of non-presence applies to the harp-performer in *Living Room* as well. After the opening section with video only[204], in which neither the performer nor the instrument are yet on stage, the live harpist starts her performance by entering and leaving the stage, performing preparatory actions such as taking the instrument from backstage to the spot where it should be placed for the performance, and placing the music stand. During this opening section, the harp player remains fairly unpretentious - as in a living room she enters and leaves the place, making preparations for her performance (or perhaps just for a rehearsal?). Also in the next section, while the video focuses on augmenting several aspects of the harp-playing such as the immense foot-work and the resulting noises during an extremely chromatic section in the music, the live performer does not do more than a sparse improvisation with small metal objects on the harp strings. Here the non-presence is supported by the staging, as the harp player is standing behind her instrument, making her scarcely visible in the dimmed light, next to the active, concentration-demanding video.

In the third section the harpist is absent again for most of the time, giving space to the unfolding of the more extensively manipulated sounds and images on the video and in the soundtrack. Only in the second half of this part the live harpist joins again, playing some small phrases, filling in the audible space between the phrases of the film sound. The unpretentious actions or utterings of the live performer continue in the fourth part, while the video image gets manipulated more drastically, more explicitly framed in an unusual camera position (see image 4.7).[205] The live performer is just standing behind or in front of her instrument and preparing the harp, putting the same metal objects on the strings of her instrument than the ones in the video. This does not generate any significant sound, and the timeline seems to be corrupted or blurred, as the live performer seems to prepare her instrument for the performance that can be seen on the

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[204] In the opening of the performance, the harpist on video plays a piece of music. The screen shows a moving close-up shot, thoroughly capturing the mechanics of the instrument, before slowly moving towards the harpist and finally arriving at her hands. The music contains quarter tones that are impossible to play on the harp; they are the result of subtle editing.

[205] The strings filmed from the top, getting prepared with little alligator clips. This shot is changing the usual perspective on a harp during playing even more than the previous section.

screen. Only in the final section of *Living Room*, the live and video harpists finally perform a duo of complementary, rhythmically intersected passages of chords and harmonic motives. The performance ends with the harp player preparing her harp with more of the same objects that were previously visible in the film, finishing the imaginative time-circle, in which the harp player prepares the instrument for the film-shooting of which the audience just saw the result.

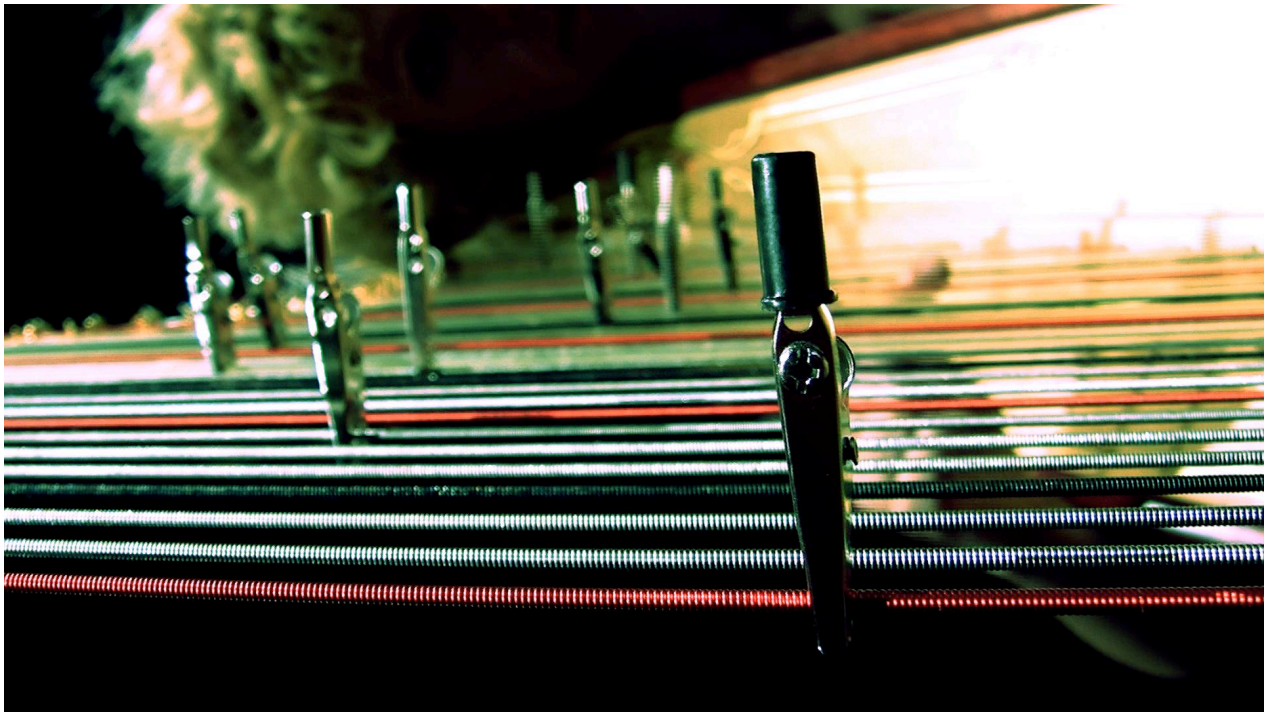

Image 4.8: *Living Room*, still from the video part of the fourth section

In-between the live and the mediated performer - staging an oscillation

The specific tension that results in a theatrical perception, is a result of the somewhat reduced presence, or even non-presence of the harpist throughout the performance. Comparable to *4'33"*, the audience has expectations while visiting a solo harp performance. These expectations are not fulfilled, as the harpist hardly plays; she even leaves her instrument alone for a longer time than she spends playing on it. The staging guides the eye much more towards the video screen than to the live performer, yet the live performer is present on stage, performing. In the moments that the performer is doing something (not just walking in or out the performance space to fetch necessary utensils), attention is naturally directed to her, but the unpretentiousness of her actions and utterances make it easy for the audience to "fade away" and direct their concentration and awareness to the video (which is present all the time). At the same time, one wonders why she is there, what she is doing ("If she is there it must have a purpose, mustn't it?") and keeps having an eye on her. The audience's focus oscillates between the live and the video performer, without clearly knowing what their precise relationship is or which of both is actually more important. The way in which the video and the performer are staged is provoking an intermedial reception of the two, which is by all means another approach than the multimedial reception of the live and video

performer in Van der Aa's *One.*[206] Compared to Barbara Hannigan and her double, *Living Room* does not add the performer and her video to one whole consisting of two complementary parts, but stages a tension and oscillation between the two (except the final section of the piece).

No performer - The ultimate reduction?

"It's absolutely fantastic when you disappear." [207]

As a last and final stage of reduction, in the remaining sections of this chapter I would like to elaborate on works that take away the musician, or the human performer entirely. This will also show the limits of the reductive approach as I framed it so far. A performer who is absent can obviously not be theatrical, so the initial question how a musician can be transformed into a theatrical performer is caused to collapse at this point. However, in the following paragraphs I will attempt to show that even in performances without performers, the theatricality of such pieces results from a fundamental desire for human presence in the context of theatre. Even more than the presence of non-human entities, pieces without performers work specifically with the absence of a performer who is actually expected to be there, situated at the borders of theatre as "the art of the performer" (Kattenbelt 2006: 29). This is the central point why these pieces do also have a relevance for my study. It is exactly the absence of humans that causes a great deal of this specific theatricality, which roots in reduction because it "gives space to what is usually invisible and inaudible, when an actor occupies the middle of the stage and attracts all attention." (Finter 2011: 135, my translation)[208]

A piece in which the provocation due tot he absence of performers is literally tackled is the staging of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* by Canadian theatre director Denis Marleau at the 2002 Avignon Festival. In this theatrical installation twelve faces of two actors are projected on styrofoam masks, on a stage that is furthermore completely held in black, "reminding of the stage of Samuel Beckett's *That Time*." (Finter 2011: 128, my translation)[209] Two other works I would like

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[206] For more information about the piece see p. 72-73.

[207] Stage designer and visual artist Magdalena Jetelova after a rehearsal of Heiner Goebbels' *Ou bien le débarquement désastreux* to the actor André Wilms, after he was disappearing in the gigantic pyramid she created for the piece. The enthusiastic utterance made the actor so angry that Heiner Goebbels had to kindly ask the set designer not to visit any more rehearsals. (Goebbels 2010: 2)

[208] "[…] gibt dieses Theater auch dem Raum, was normalerweise unsichtbar und unhörbar bleibt, wenn ein Schauspieler die Mitte der Bühne besetzt und alle Aufmerksamkeit auf sich zieht."

[209] "Die Gesichter von zwei Schauspielern leuchteten dort als auf zwölf Styropor-Masken projizierte *Video Heads* aus der schwarzen Bühne in einer Weise hervor, die an die Bühne von Samuel Becketts *That Time* gemahnte."

to discuss in the next paragraphs are Kris Verdonck's short performance *Dancer #1* and Heiner Goebbels' performative installation *Stifters Dinge*.

A one-minute tragedy: *Dancer #1*

In *Dancer #1* (2003) by Kris Verdonck, a grinding wheel with a big steel L hangs from the ceiling. When the disc starts to turn, the L twirls round uncontrolled. The motor races and, after a time between 45 seconds and 1:30 minutes, it burns[210] and the performance is over. The concept of the piece surrounds a central desire for Kris Verdonck in theatre, giving shape to death on stage.

> […] death on stage… it's not possible. You can't let anybody die on stage. But what you *can* do is to let objects break. Objects may indeed burn and explode; and it's real. And the danger of real machines, that's *real* danger! So finally I had something real on stage, something that I could not control. I had something that is really there, in the moment. (Personal conversation with Kris Verdonck)

The turning disk in *Dancer #1* produces exactly this moment of death, the moment of real danger. The short piece provokes similar tensions than death as something acted out - only then for real, as the disk burns for real. Also the reactions by the audience in the times when I saw the piece were expressing a certain compassion with the "dying object". This is specifically interesting, many people were expressing a kind of regret or sorrow when the machine burnt, as if something happened to a human being present. It was an actual emotional reaction, a moment of identification with the machine, supporting the "human side [of the spinning rod] by turning itself to breaking with a spark and a sigh."[211] This human side, the moment of human presence is provided in the moment of dying. It is the absence of a human performer that makes the human-like presence of such an object possible. Through both the absence of a human performer and the phenomenon of a dying machine, the presence of the object is heightened and makes the theatrical possible - the audience is free to fill in what or who the object is, embodies, symbolises or means.

Pianos and water: *Stifters Dinge*

Opposite to the miniature format of *Dancer #1*, *Stifters Dinge* (2007)[212] by Heiner Goebbels is a full-length performance without actors or musicians. Goebbels himself calls the piece a "no-man show, in which curtains, light, music, and space, all the elements that usually prepare, support, illustrate, and serve a theatrical performance and the actor's dominance, become […] the protagonists, together with five pianos, metal plates, stones, water, fog, rain, and ice." (Goebbels

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[210] I saw the piece live at the 2008 Avignon Festival, and had a video recording at my disposal.

[211] "Zo kreeg de tollende staaf uit *Dancer* ineens een erg humaan kantje door zichzelf in een vonk en een zucht kapot te draaien." (de Regt 2008: 36)

[212] "Stifter's Things is a composition for five pianos with no pianists, a play with no actors, a performance without performers […]. First and foremost, it is an invitation to audiences to enter a fascinating space full of sounds and images, an invitation to see and hear. It revolves around awareness of things, things that in the theatre are often part of the set or act as props and play a merely illustrative role. Here they become protagonists: light, pictures, murmurs, sounds, voices, wind and mist, water and ice." (program book of the performance, Theatre Vidy-Lausanne: n.p.)
I have seen the performance on 28.4.2011 in the Koninklijke Schouwburg Den Haag (Royal Theatre The Hague), and had a video recording at my disposal.

2010: 14-15) At the outset of the creation, *Stifters Dinge* could almost be called an artistic research project, with the underlying question if the spectator's attention will be kept long enough if the presence of an actor as an essential assumption of theatre is completely neglected. (ibid.: 14) Only in the first quarter of the piece, the stage is not completely deserted from human beings. Two technicians are making preparations, such as throwing salt in large basins and releasing water from tanks into these basins. Besides the preference of Goebbels for the ritual moment of these actions, their presence could be understood as a paying tribute to the unusual high amount of creative input from the technicians - not only the two on stage, but the whole team - for the production. The program book of the performance explicitly states: "With the artistic and technical collaboration of the team of the Théatre Vidy" (program book *Stifters Dinge*, Théatre Vidy-Lausanne: n.p.) In the outset of the creation process, the aim of the performance is defined in two opposing views. First, there is the explicit absence of human performers, and second the heightened presence of the usually accompanying elements.

An element that for a large part generates the theatrical presence in *Stifters Dinge* are bodyless, immaterial voices. In the course of the pieces the audience listens to an old man reading texts by Adalbert Stifter[213], and to the recorded voices of Claude Lévi-Strauss, William Burroughs and Malcolm X. Theatre scholar Helga Finter localises a "space between hearing and seeing" (Finter 2011: 127) in the context of the disappearance of live voices on stage in favour of recorded voices. The bodies of these recorded voices may remain invisible and absent.[214] According to Finter these voices' presence is mainly resulting "from their own timbre, a special melos and a characteristic prosody." (Finter 2011: 134, my translation)[215] Exactly by leaving out the bodies, and thus the human presence on stage that gives body to these voices, the imagination of the audience is challenged and invited to fill in this empty space between the recorded voices on the one hand, and the objects, machines and events happening on stage on the other. The audience connects the words and voices heard with the visual elements, and every audience member is invited to construct a causality by him- or herself. This way "the sensitive intelligence of the audience stages itself, when it weaves and reads its own audiovisual text." (Finter 2011: 132, my translation)[216] The specific attraction lies in the presence of the voices which relates to the absent body of a performer. It is exactly the absence of this performer that makes the strong presence of the recorded voices possible, which results in a potential for a variety of interpretations and meanings.

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[213] These texts are recorded in the language of the country in which the piece is performed, and therefore the voices of different actors reading.

[214] The separation of the sound of a voice and its body is something which Goebbels did earlier already, and which in fact is an important part of his aesthetic. He is using microphones also in his compositions, to create a distance between sound production and the sound itself; a distance to be bridged by the audience. He used disembodied, pre-recorded voices earlier as well, as in his orchestral composition *Surrogate Cities* (1994). The use of these kind of voices in *Stifters Dinge* is therefore not a new element in his oeuvre, but more a radicalisation of his approaches in earlier works, and used more consequently.

[215] "Die ausgestrahlten Sprechstimmen haben Präsenzwirkung durch ein ihnen eigenes Timbre, ein besonderes Melos und eine charakteristische Prosodie."

[216] "So inszeniert die sensible Intelligenz des Zuschauers selbst, wenn er seinen eigenen audiovisuellen Text webt und liest […]."

The end of theatre?

Does a theatre without performers mean the end of theatre? All three pieces I mentioned answer this question with a clear "no". They all produce theatrical situations with the absent performer as specific point of departure, and each one in its own way. *Les Aveugles* reminds the audience of the actors by bringing them on stage in the virtual form of the actors' video projections, whereas *Dancer #1* evokes human presence through the staging of a machine's death. Finally, *Stifters Dinge* invites the audience to bridge the gap between bodiless voices and a variety of objects and events, to construct the actor in one's imagination. In none of the pieces theatre as the art of the performer is abandoned, even if the performers are absent. Exactly *because* they are taken away from the stage, the desire for a human presence of whatever kind increases. This desire is not literally fulfilled, which creates a black spot, an open space to be filled in by something else. The projections, pre-recorded voices, images, objects, machines and lights can occupy this space and they become in this way objects of attention and subjects of theatricality. This specific presence is a direct consequence of the performer's absence, and would be impossible with human presence on stage. Even this radical stage of reduction preserves the overall phenomenon labelled several times as the *double logic* of the reductive approach, and in the forthcoming Conclusion of the book it will be the time to go into detail into this complementary dichotomy between extension and reduction, between presence and absence.