



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical performer

Hübner, F.

Citation

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

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22342>

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

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



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

Author: Hübner, Falk

Title: Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical performer

Issue Date: 2013-11-13

Summary

The PhD research project *Shifting Identities* investigates the musicians' professional identity and how this identity might shift when musicians start acting as theatrical performers. In most of the theatrical situations where musicians "perform", their profession is *extended*. In the first instance they make music; they sing or play their instruments. Besides this, they have to perform additional tasks such as walking on stage or reciting text. As an alternative strategy to extension, this research introduces and focuses on *reduction*, which means the *abstracting away* of specific qualities or abilities of the musician's profession. By not being able to use specific elements of their profession, musicians encounter problems that are very different from the ones in the case of extension. The audience watches musicians *not* doing certain things that usually belong to their profession. Both the expansive and the reductive approaches are concepts of working theatrically with musicians, and have the potential to enable musicians to transform into theatrical performers. They are different, perhaps even contradictory strategies, but both bear the ability to enrich the musician's professional identity with a more theatrical appearance.

The research is conducted in and through artistic practice: artistic questions and struggles are the basis for the research and the following research question:

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

The relation between theory and practice is understood as a feedback loop, continuously influencing, feeding and inspiring one another. The ways the practical works are connected to the research question and to the theoretical part of the research differ from one artistic project to another. Whereas some of the projects might initiate theoretical ideas, others are resulting from or experimenting with newly developed theories. What binds them is the explicit connection with reduction.

The dissertation is subdivided into four chapters. The first two chapters provide the context of the study, the latter two deal with the two approaches of working with musicians in theatre: extension and reduction. In Chapter One, the discussion is started by framing and conceptualising the profession of the musician, in order to build an understanding of *what* is extended or reduced when the identity shifts from a musician to a theatrical (musician-)performer. Based on a diversity of practices of musicians, I develop a dynamic model that builds strongly on what musicians actually *do*, a model that categorises the musician's professional activities into internal, external and contextual elements. Internal elements describe technical abilities such as finger or breathing technique, and emotional or intellectual abilities such as sight reading. External elements are the instrument or necessary tools in order to play an instrument (such as drum sticks, bow or brass mutes). The context deals with elements such as the performance space or different social occasions in which the musician is executing her profession.

Chapter Two deals with the performative contexts of music and theatre that form the fields in which the theatrical musician acts. This chapter takes a closer look at the distinctive features of music theatre and related sub-genres. It elaborates on musicality, musical structure and musical thinking; on how the creation processes of music theatre works are influenced by them; and on the effects

these creation processes have on a musician. In many music theatre productions a musical structure or musical-compositional thinking is responsible for the theatrical product. In this sense it differs from e.g. text-based theatre, where the narrative and drama largely determine the course of a performance. Also the composer as a relevant actor in music theatre and an important collaborator for the musician-performer is discussed here. Several composers are introduced who developed their work not only through creating music, but also decided to direct their pieces themselves. Due to the different aesthetics and working methods a broad overview of what is asked from the musician is created here. This includes the effects on the musician's actions and thereby the professional identity of the musician. This overview sets the stage for the discussions about extension and reduction in the second part of the dissertation.

In Chapters Three and Four, I develop the two-fold distinction between extension and reduction, and conceptualise the two approaches. Chapter Three elaborates on extension as a strategy to transform the musician into a theatrical performer. The concept of extension is mapped to various stages, which have a varying impact on the performing musician. While the more simple kinds of extension are able to theatricalise the musician without having her actively contribute to this theatricalisation (such as a costume or stage design), the more complex kinds of extension leave the musician with a range of demanding performative assignments, and potentially force her to leave the initial profession temporarily. The latter can be the case when a director asks a musician to actually act without playing music anymore.

Chapter Four presents a close examination of the reductive approach, designating the taking away of specific elements of music making from the musician, developed and conceptualised through a series of case studies. Being the central chapter of the dissertation, it includes a close examination and discussion of artistic works connected to this research, and how these works transform the musician into a theatrical performer. Examples include works by John Cage, Heiner Goebbels, Xavier Le Roy, Sam-Taylor Wood, Dieter Schnebel and Kris Verdonck. My own artistic work, as the practical part of this doctorate research, plays an essential role here in order to exemplify different kinds of reduction. The examples present a panorama of how "blank spots" can be created by means of reduction, in order to invite the audience to develop an individual interpretation based on their imagination.

I conclude with a discussion of the interrelations of the expansive and reductive approaches, deconstructing and destabilising their alleged dichotomy. Whereas the strategy for a creation might be reduction, the audience can experience the result as an extension of the musician's profession. This paradox is elaborated on in the Conclusion: While extension and reduction are different strategies to work with musicians on the theatre stage, I argue that rather than regarding them as being opposed to one another, and the one excluding the other, they should be considered as two sides of the same coin, with the common aim to make possible that the musicians actions may cause a theatrical imagination.