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Mauricio Kagel and His Multifaceted Lieder-oper, Aus Deutschland

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Mauricio Kagel
and
His Multifaceted Lieder-oper,
Aus Deutschland

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Language and Literature

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York,

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To my supportive and fantastic family, and to my loving boyfriend, who
always encourage me and never let me give up

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Introduction

The aim of this senior project is not only to present a broad perspective of Mauricio Kagel's innovative "lieder" opera *Aus Deutschland*, but also to show what this radical composer represents –with this particularly ingenious piece – after experiencing Germany's post Second World War environment. Kagel, who became German by his own choice, was not only a versatile innovator and at the same time a multifunctional and unique figure of the 19th and 20th century, but also became one of the most important composers of the 20th century art. Kagel allows us to understand, appreciate, and learn about Germany, by deconstructing the existent and reconstructing it into something completely new. This exclusive way of composing distinguished him from other major composers who endeavored to write something new but avoided using anything that was already written because of the potential critique that their pieces might sound too similar to someone else's. Out of nearly one hundred pieces he wrote, many of which requires theatrical playing, *Aus Deutschland* is the only opera, which already shows its huge significance. This is the best piece of all that proved that Germany needed the healing power of Kagel's art as much as he needed the creative frictions of Germany's vital culture scene. The premier was in 1981 which was twenty-four years after Kagel moved to Germany; therefore, he lived there long enough to be able to observe societal and political problems which occurred after the war. Performing such a piece thirty-six years after the end of World War II was eye-opening for the society.

Kagel, as a native of Argentina, was born in Buenos Aires in 1931 where he studied some clarinet, cello, piano, conducting, and eventually singing. At the age of thirteen, Kagel was diagnosed with Tuberculosis so a doctor's recommendation was to take singing lessons which

eventually not only saved Kagel's life, but also "instill[ed] in him a lifelong fascination with the voice."¹ His uniqueness had begun to take shape in his childhood, because he did not want to learn or study in a so-called ordinary way as everybody else did. As a matter of fact, even though he became a composer, he never studied composing formally. He had opportunities to take lessons with some of the greatest teachers around Buenos Aires at that time. Although, Kagel a few years later claimed that he was "educated by inadequate teachers to become an autodidact."² In a contradictory way these teachers helped him to develop his own, independent way to produce music, nevertheless. His main instinct was not to repeat the past by copying a teacher, but to perceive, process, and finally create his own composing style. This kind of inventive and unorthodox way of thinking, learning and music making led him to become a successful composer later in his life.

In 1953, the French composer Pierre Boulez³ travelled to Argentina "as a musical director"⁴ of a theatrical production at the *Teatro Colón*⁵ - where Kagel was involved in music making at the time and by the age of twenty-five had become the "rehearsal pianist and assistant conductor."⁶ During Boulez's visiting, Kagel showed him one of his unfinished scores, which impressed Boulez so markedly that he told Kagel "that in order to pursue a career as a composer he would have to leave Argentina."⁷ Interestingly enough, this time around Boulez recommended

¹ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 2006, p. 7

² Ibid. p. 8

³ NPR music, Anastasia Tsioulcas "French composer and conductor, he was one of the most recognized figures in 20th century classical music." 2016

⁴ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 2006, p. 14

⁵ "leading opera house in Latin America" – Ibid. p. 8.; headquarters of the *Argentine National Symphony Orchestra*

⁶ Ibid. p. 10

⁷ Ibid. p. 15

Kagel to go to France to study *musique concrète*⁸, but during a second visit in 1954, after seeing the finalized version of the previously mentioned score *Sextet*, he suggested Kagel to go to Germany, since Germany could provide a more extensive perspective on in experimental and electronic music.

There were two significant reasons why taking leave helped Kagel to become successful. The first one came from the serious issues between Perón's⁹ regime and art during the 20th century; as Björn Heile addresses in this book "Perón's autocratic rule had a paralyzing effect on Argentina's arts scene [...]."¹⁰ By 1956, "Perón's government was replaced by military rule" which was not advantageous for the Jewish, left-hand representative, and member of the "anti-Perónist student movement"¹¹ Kagel. His "severe criticism of the social conditions" had started during this time. "It [composing] was his way of opposing the Perónist government's dictatorial-political control."¹² As one can see it later, criticisms of severe social problems, society, and Romanticism are key elements in *Aus Deutschland*.

The second reason is a contingent consequence of the apparent political issues in Argentina. In order to reach his goals in musical development, Kagel had to live in an environment that was rich of art, such as music, literature, and theatre. European countries formed a different approach than South-America did because they had to deal with more political problems, impacts of various leaderships, and wars that originated in religious conflicts, for a longer amount of time. All these problems shaped their culture and had a huge impact on their

⁸ „French: “concrete music”, experimental technique of musical composition using recorded sounds as raw material. [...]The fundamental principle of *musique concrète* lies in the assemblage of various natural sounds recorded on tape (or, originally, on disks) to produce a montage of sound.”

⁹ Juan Domingo Perón, president of Argentina (1946-55 and 1973-74)

¹⁰ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, p. 9

¹¹ Ibid. p. 15

¹² Makoto Mikawa, *Anarchy in the Unity: Compositional and Aesthetic Tensions in Mauricio Kagel's Antithese für einen Darsteller mit elektronischen und öffentlichen Klängen* (1962), 2012, p. 27

tradition which, as a result, allowed Europe to develop Impressionism, Dadaism, Expressionism and other major cultural movements. This does not mean that America did not have a rich culture, moreover they were well-known for their “great indigenous civilizations [...] which established [...] urban settlements, agriculture, civic and monumental architecture, and complex societal hierarchies”¹³ but in terms of new music Argentina still could not compete with European countries.

In 1957, after Kagel heeded Boulez’s advice and moved to Cologne, Germany to fulfill a scholarship opportunity from the DAAD¹⁴, he started working at the ‘Westdeutscher Rundfunk’ (WDR) in town, which is a well-known Electronic Music Studio, with already in demand composers, such as Stockhausen¹⁵ and Ligeti¹⁶. Soon after his educational and personal achievements, which I will be elaborating on in the following paragraphs, at the age of 29, Kagel got accepted as a faculty member to the famous Darmstadt International Summer Courses¹⁷ for New Music “as one of its youngest members”¹⁸ and later he became its permanent lecturer.

During these years, thanks to Darmstadt, he met and developed strong relationships with major avant-garde composers of the era, such as the previously mentioned Ligeti, and Stockhausen, and more other phenomenal composers such as Nono¹⁹ and Cage²⁰. Starting in

¹³ New World Encyclopedia, *Pre-Columbian Civilization*

¹⁴ the German academic exchange service

¹⁵ Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007) - „German composer, widely acknowledged by critics as one of the most important but also controversial composers of the 20th and early 21st centuries”, Wikipedia, *Karlheinz Stockhausen*

¹⁶ György Sándor Ligeti (1923-2006) – „was a composer of contemporary classical music. He has been described as "one of the most important avant-garde composers in the latter half of the twentieth century”, Wikipedia, *György Sándor Ligeti*

¹⁷ *Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt*, According to the creator of Darmstadt, the most important way to stabilize Germany after that was through musical and cultural regeneration.

¹⁸ David Sauer, *What rulebook?* The Guardian, 2003

¹⁹ Luigi Nono (1924-1990) – „Luigi Nono, 86, a leading avant-garde Italian composer who gained initial success in West Germany. A member of the Italian Resistance during World War II, he became a member of the Italian Communist Party and in his work searched for new techniques in composition. His music often made political statements.”, Los Angeles Times, *Luigi Nono; Avant-Garde Italian Composer*, 1990

1969, he became the director of the “*Institut für Neue Musik*” at the Rhineland’s conservatory and also directed the *Kölner Kurse für Neue Musik*. He taught as professor in the *Neues Musiktheater alla Kölner Musikhochschule*. The scholar Kagel, by living in the country and being in touch with major German or German related composers, acquired remarkable amount of information about Germany’s history, including post-war societal and political issues, literature, and music. With this essay I intend to explain and analyze the phenomena of *Aus Deutschland* and explain that even though the piece is barely performed, it contains one of the most powerful and meaningful messages of all of Kagel’s pieces. A reason for this is its underlying complexity within the work that regards the fact that “Irony and cinematic techniques in music had been used [...] long before Kagel was born, but despite the example of Dada, no composer has so systematically explored the absurd aspects, not just of classical music, but of the whole culture industry.”²¹ *Die Badische Zeitung* published their critique based on a performance in Freiburg which was exactly thirty years after the premier of *Aus Deutschland*. They say „Kagel zertrümmert den Mythos der Romantik“²² which corroborates with the idea that the avant-garde composer deconstructs the existent and then reconstructs it into something new by presenting it in an entirely different context. Henceforth, let us see how Kagel achieves this goal.

In the following four chapters it will be discussed why *Aus Deutschland* is not just an opera in the traditional sense. The piece’s significance and meaningful message for German society is essential and the way how Kagel brings the idea of coherence, criticism, death, and Romanticism together is exceptional. Understanding the intricacy of the title and the dynamics of

²⁰ John Cage (1912-1992) – „American composer John Cage, among history's most influential artistic innovators, strove to broaden the definition of music and introduced chance operations into the compositional process.” Michael Rodman, *John Cage Biography*,

²¹ The Guardian, Adrian Jack, *Composer Mauricio Kagel*, 2008

²² „Kagel smashed the myth of Romanticism.” - Johannes Adam (2011), *Kagel-Oper in Freiburg: Hitler tanzt mit dem Gartenzweig*

the plot are crucial components to recognize the two main representatives of the whole piece, namely the narrator and death.

Chapter I

Aus Deutschland, the complexity of the title

The first remarkable decision that Kagel makes is giving the multifaceted title, *Aus Deutschland* to the opera. He generates a clear connection between the significant fact that the piece is strongly rooted in German culture and the opera itself. This particular title can be construed from different points of view. The expression *Aus Deutschland* has appeared earlier in the French literature, as *De l'Allemagne*²³ by the baroness and writer Madame de Staël²⁴. As Björn Heile explains it “[...] the reference to Madame de Staël makes it clear that Kagel does not simply assume the mantle of German identity but is more interested in a juxtaposition of internal and external perspectives.”²⁵ As an outsider Kagel has to develop different perspectives from native German composers regarding how to approach and write about German political and societal issues that have been mentioned earlier. As a member of the German society who observes governmental concerns through an objective lens, Kagel tries to interpret these ideas on stage: “[...] there is no doubt that Kagel as a critical observer of the Austro-German tradition valued the huge range of subjectivities [...] many of which challenge bourgeois norms by depicting social outsiders.”²⁶ As it will be presented later, the appearance of *Schubertiade* in the opera is a perfect example of criticizing these bourgeois norms.

²³ of Germany

²⁴ „Madame de Staël (1766 – 1817) was a French woman of letters of Swiss origin whose lifetime overlapped with the events of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. She was one of Napoleon's principal opponents. Celebrated for her conversational eloquence, she participated actively in the political and intellectual life of her times. Her works, both critical and fictional, made their mark on the history of European Romanticism.” Wikipedia, *Germaine de Staël*

²⁵ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 2006, p. 129

²⁶ Alastair Williams, *Music in Germany since 1968*, 2013, p. 41-42

The title does not only contain a very strong inner movement – because of the preposition ‘aus’ – but also major associations that are connected to Germany. As I mentioned earlier, Kagel was not a native of Germany, but he became a citizen in the early eighties which was around the time of the premier *Aus Deutschland*, so he technically could have said ‘Ich komme aus Deutschland’ or at least that this piece of art ‘kommt aus Deutschland’. One does not exaggerate when enouncing that even the smallest detail in this piece is related to Germany. Another concrete link between German literature and the title is presented by the German poet, Heinrich Heine. German ears, or people who are familiar with Romantic German literature, can easily notice the relation of the first line of the poem *Nachtgedanken* ‘Denk ich an Deutschland’ and ‘Aus Deutschland’. The importance of Heine and his work throughout the whole piece, will be discussed further in this essay, but now one shall see the historical relevance of the piece.

Hearing the word ‘Germany’ or ‘Deutschland’ immediately creates an unavoidable association with German history after World War II. The dark impression makes people think about death, suffering depression, and different kinds of emotional impacts that the society was experiencing during and after the war. This influence creates a direct emotional impression even before listening or seeing the piece. Related to this dark environment, let us talk about the two most significant questions that emphasize the complexity and multi-layeredness of this piece: namely, what Kagel is trying to express, in other words what the aim of *Aus Deutschland* is, and how he succeeds doing that.

Although it is not the main intention of the piece, Kagel succeeds in recreating the environment, which has been present for a long time after the Second World War, by staging this music theatrical collage. In an artistic way, he holds a distorted mirror in front of German society in order to make them realize what emotional hardship they went through. Older German

generations, which experienced the war, try to avoid talking about and dealing with emotional, political, environmental or any sort of impacts after the war because of the enormous shame they are struggling with inside. However, younger generations want to finally be released and be able to forget. However, until the fall of the Berlin Wall the emotional recovery is inefficient. It is always easier to cope with the past when one has no direct connection to it. The first step in the progress of releasing this tension in the society is to articulate the problem and not be afraid to face inconvenient and depressing consequences. Kagel, with *Aus Deutschland*, visualized and set to music – which notion can be considered the voice of language, theatre and literature – his criticisms or more likely his opinion about Nationalism, gender inequality and identity, and racial identity. This to some extent didactic piece helps the audience to get an insight of a politically and socially problematic life of Germany in the second half of the 20th century through music, literature and history.

Kagel impressively represents darkness, depression, frustration, disturbance, violence, and as an in common element of these all, death. *Aus Deutschland's* environment has a remarkable association with an important but just as dark work from Arnold Schönberg²⁷, called *Ein Überlebender aus Warschau*²⁸. This piece commemorates the innocent victims of World War II by using a refugee's narrative who escaped from a concentration camp in Warsaw. Schönberg helps us to use our imagination because the emotional impacts through music are so real and expressive that one could place oneself in the situation of being surrounded by the victims, Hitler's soldiers, and the camp itself. Kagel creates the same absurd and disturbing environment in his piece where 'death' has one of the most significant roles; in the same way it has had a

²⁷Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951). „ [He] was an Austrian composer and painter. He was associated with the expressionist movement in German poetry and art, and leader of the Second Viennese School. With the rise of the Nazi Party, by 1938 Schoenberg's works were labelled as degenerate music because he was Jewish.”
Wikipedia, *Arnold Schoenberg*

²⁸Arnold Schönberg, *A Survivor from Warsaw for Narrator, Men's Chorus and Orchestra*, 1947

major role in Germany in the 20th century. The German government's order after the war was to execute people who were responsible for any brutal crime. Consequently they answered 'death' with 'death'. Kagel picks upon this idea and completely contorts it. 'Death' becomes a permanent symbol and character throughout the whole piece, which will be shown in detail in Chapter IV.

Another important concept that Kagel presents is the criticism of Romanticism. The complexity to express this idea comes from the interconnection between the 'what' and the 'how'. "Kagel's strong respect for the canon, qualified by his restless desire to deconstruct it, is apparent in [...] *Aus Deutschland* (1977–80), an opera regenerating the world of lieder through Schubert."²⁹ As Kagel writes in his essay *Über Aus Deutschland*, his fundamental principle, when composing the libretto, is to reconsider the "selection of topics that represent the core themes of romanticism."³⁰ But why or more importantly how would somebody want to reconsider something that has been the tradition for long decades? In this opera Kagel uses a compositional technic which has never been used before; furthermore, as he explains it, "with regard to current developments [...] one fundamental feature can be observed: - the breaking up of traditional boundaries of genres and typologies, the clearest case being that of the new music-theatre"³¹ as opposed to other major avant-garde composers from the era, whose goals are only to create something new without incorporating traditional ideas. In other words, the way he achieves this idea is to take something already existing and by reinterpreting it, create something new.

Kagel addresses in his essay *Über Aus Deutschland* that the reason why he chooses to use Schubert songs – which are the most eminent representative of Romanticism, namely *Love*, *Nature*, and *Death* – is because they have enormous potential but Schubert did not submerge

²⁹ Paul Attinello, *Kagel, Mauricio (Raúl)*

³⁰ „[...] die Auswahl der Themen, die die Schwerpunkte der Romantik repräsentieren.“ – Mauricio Kagel, *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Libretto, p. 5

³¹ Zachàr Laskewicz, *The New Music-Theatre of Mauricio Kagel*, 1992

deep enough in the topic to get the most out of them. Schubert composes songs then combines them into song cycles “He [Schubert] used imaginative motifs that immediately suggested images of the text. [...] He made these motifs crucial structural elements, infusing the Lied with his passionate response to the poem.”³² This explains that music was a powerful tool for Schubert to represent text, as opposed to Kagel who takes the original texts and uses them to exploit the potential that they contain. This kind of practical implementation allows Kagel to erase the regular association between these poems and Romanticism, and embody them radically differently. He uses the purity of these ‘simple poems’ without additional garnish, which in this case means the overwhelming romantic elements. Kagel never criticizes these songs but emphasizes the idea that there is a lot more in them to take advantage of and one should use more than what appears to be there superficially.

According to Kagel the people who perform the original song cycles are “Vortragskünstler der Vergangenheit”³³ or “elocutionist of the past” “who made pathetic drama monologues from simple poems.”³⁴ Kagel’s reconsideration of the songs changes even more after Liszt labels the Schubert songs as *Miniature operas*³⁵. Even though, the original art form of opera comes from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries’ Italy, thus “opera is part of the Western classical music tradition,”³⁶ the idea of ‘miniature opera’ did not appear until the Schubert Song Cycles or more specifically until Liszt’s innovative appellation. As a result, the associations in

³² Royal Opera House, Rachel Beumont, *A guide to Lieder: Operas in miniature*, 2014

³³ Mauricio Kagel, *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Libretto, p. 5

³⁴ „Man denke an Vortragskünstler der Vergangenheit, die aus schlichten Gedichten pathetische Schauspielmonolog machten.” – Ibid. p 5

³⁵ Miniatur-Opern

³⁶ Wikipedia, *Opera*

one's mind change dramatically because "it [miniature operas] indicates the differences between silently read or recited or sung poetry."³⁷

„Mit der Bezeichnung "Lieder-Oper" im Untertitel des Werkes wird auf ein Genre hingewiesen, das es zwar nur als Kompositum gibt, jedoch durch die Zusammenfügung beider Begriffe konkrete Vorstellungen erwecken dürfte.

Einerseits sind Lieder tatsächlich die thematischen Quellen dieser musictheatralischen Komposition, exemplifiziert an den vornehmlich im XIX. Jahrhundert verwendeten deutschen Originaltexten. Das Libretto von 'Aus Deutschland' entstand so als Reflexion auf die deutsche Romantik ausschließlich aus Dichtungen, welche bereits vertont wurden und meistens zum festen Repertoire von Liederabenden gehören.

Andererseits wird hier der dramaturgische Inhalt der Liedertexte in Szene gesetzt, um jene theatralische Dimension zu gewinnen, die in der Dichtung unter der „untheatralischen“ Oberfläche stets vorhanden ist. (Jedes Goethe-Gedicht, von Schubert oder Schumann als Träger musikalischer Gedanken verwendet, könnte ebenso von Faust oder Margarete auf der Bühne gesprochen werden.)

Ähnlich wie Opernkomponisten oft auf Texte des Sprechtheaters zurückgriffen, um Tragödie und Komödie zu musikalisieren, wird in diesem Werk der Versuch unternommen, die unterschwellige Theatralik der Liedertexte, um aus einem statischen Vorgang par excellence dynamisches Musiktheater zu gestalten."³⁸

As one can see, Kagel was really specific by calling his composition 'Lieder-Oper.' He was definitely interested in the idea of combining two existing genres, namely 'Lieder' and 'Oper.' They already contain great information regarding classical music tradition, since they have been part of it for long decades. By creating a new genre he exemplifies that there is always a new point of view from where certain things can be observed, more specifically in this case, by writing a piece in the genre of 'Lieder-Oper,' Kagel reveals an unknown area. Another reason why Kagel uses poems, which were already set to music and present on the 'Liederabend'³⁹, is because 'Lieder' was a key element of Romanticism. He also picks upon the idea that there is a

³⁷ „[Liszt] weist auf die Unterschiede zwischen stumm gelesener oder rezitierter bzw. gesungener Dichtung hin.“ – Mauricio Kagel, *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Libretto, p 5.

³⁸ See Appendix

³⁹ Liederabend is the phenomena „when musicians and lovers of music would gather at someone's home, and one or more singers would perform the songs of composers of the day. In the field of classical music, these songs are referred to today as "art songs"” – New England Conservatory, *Liederabend*

‘dimension’ between surface and content and this ‘dimension’ is what he wants to see and reinterpret on stage. As he addresses his aim is “to unfold the subliminal theatrics of lyrics to form a dynamical music theatre”, in other words, to combine outstanding poems with extraordinary music.

One of the most significant tools that Kagel uses to maintain absurdness and often disturbance is ‘tension’. As he says in *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, “An exaggerated interpretation of the original poems conduced as aesthetic requirement of composition: by its literal transposition on stage, the texts should be staged as tableaux vivants⁴⁰ of the Baroque theater. [...] As a contrast to this assembly, almost no musical quotation occurs to maintain tension in the listener, which is established in well-known verses.”⁴¹ He plays a mind-game with the listener’s association since people usually expect familiar music after hearing familiar text. In this case Kagel does the complete opposite: the music is so new, it has nothing to do with the traditional texts. As he states, “music quotes would bring the split consciousness of the listener back into balance” so he wants to avoid them. Even though he says “the listener may experience *Aus Deutschland* calmly with unsettled ears: It sounds like Kagel but is reminiscent of Schubert”⁴² he knows if he retains the tension between traditional texts and new music for too long, the listener will lose interest and will become incurious. To avoid this problem Kagel inserts so-called Leitmotifs which help the listener to remember. Memory is an important term in music and is used to allow the audience to relate to the piece easier, in other words it is a musical sense of connection. The more often a motif happens, the more impact it carries exactly because of its

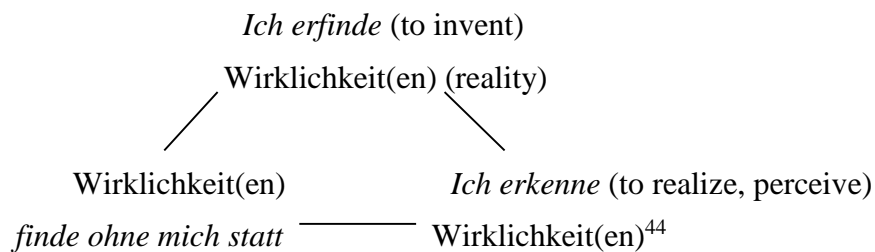
⁴⁰ „a silent and motionless group of people arranged to represent a scene or incident” – Oxford Dictionaries

⁴¹ „Eine überspitzte Interpretation der Originalvorlagen diene als ästhetische Voraussetzung der Komposition: durch ihre wortwörtliche Transposition auf die Bühne sollten die Textten wie Tableaux vivants des Barcktheaters in Szene gesetzt werden.” - Mauricio Kagel *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Libretto, p. 5.

⁴² „Der Zuhörer darf "Aus Deutschland" ruhig mit unruhigen Ohren erleben: Es klingt nach Kagel aber es erinnert jedoch an Schubert.” - Ibid. p. 5.

previous appearances. Without memory the listener can get confused fairly quickly and Kagel makes it clear that he is not aiming for that; “[...] confusion [...] is neither useful nor sufficiently contradictory” but tension clearly is useful because of its ambiguity.

In the essay *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Kagel uses a phenomenal metaphor when he talks about reconsidering the great idea of Romanticism. He says that Romanticism is nothing more than a “Sud” or ‘brew’ which contains a plenty of important ingredients, such as “unspoken feelings and longings”⁴³. He is overwhelmed by Romanticism being a melting-pot of great literature, music, theatre, and everything from the first half of the 19th century. What Kagel does with it is that he pulls out some of these smaller components and gives them more importance. The first thing he points out regarding this idea is that it is really important to place oneself in terms of reality.



„Die Romantik ist zunächst eine gleichzeitige Auseinandersetzung mit zwei Realitäten. Davon entspricht die erste dem, was man sich unter Wirklichkeiten vorstellt, wie sie beschaffen sein könnte; die zweite ist, nebbich, die Realität, wie sie ist - und als solche nicht akzeptiert werden darf. Aus dem Spannungsfeld entsteht Romantik und jenes Dreiecksverhältnis, das sie konstruiert:

Der Hinweis auf eine Vermehrung mehrzähliger Wirklichkeiten, wie ich sie in der Visualisierung vornahm, ist ein unumgängliche Ergänzung. Jede der beiden

⁴³ „Ich stelle mir den Romantizismus als Sud unausgesprochener Empfindungen und Sehnsüchte vor, [...]” - Mauricio Kagel *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Libretto, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 5

erwähnten Realitäten setzt sich eigentlich aus verschiedenen Wirklichkeiten zusammen.⁴⁵

This illustration is also from Kagel's essay *Über Aus Deutschland*. The top of the triangle shows one as an inventor and says that reality does not happen without one creating it as opposed to the other two where one is either irrelevant or just a passive perceiver. Kagel, the creator, characterizes the narrator of *Aus Deutschland* not only with the ability to invent reality, but also with an observing role which allows the character to monitor. As these roles alternate between each other one can see how the narrator continuously perceives the surroundings and invents atmosphere. In terms of content and structure, reality becomes incredibly complex and ambiguous; therefore understanding the plot is of paramount importance.

⁴⁵ See appendix

Chapter II

Plot, Content, Structure

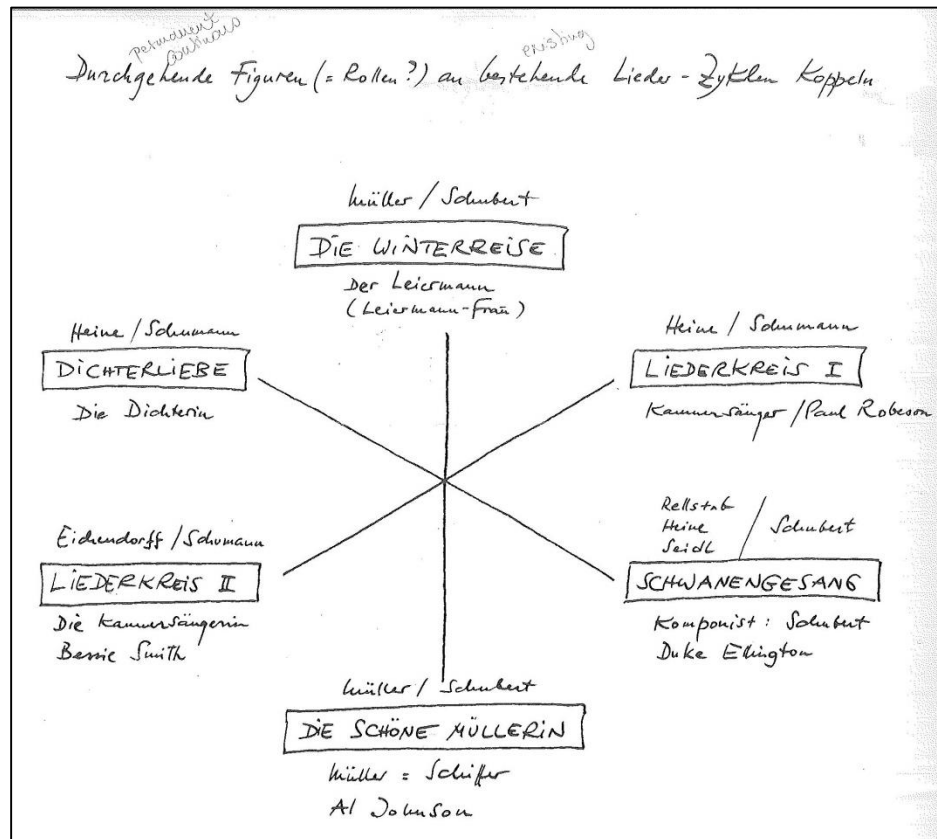
Aus Deutschland contains twenty-seven so called tableaux which are three to ten minute long scenes. “On a simple level, *Aus Deutschland* enacts scenes from some of the most well-known lieder on stage, notably from Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Die Winterreise* and Schumann’s *Liederkreis* [...]”⁴⁶ As Heile furthermore addresses “[...] the point of the work is [...] to reinterpret the essence of romanticism.”⁴⁷ According to a journalist of the *Badische Zeitung* “The project begins and ends with the "Winterreise". [...] At the end there is emptiness. In between is a Panopticon. Love, nature, dark, death: all inclusive. Violence is close.”⁴⁸ But one allowably can ask: what is the plot?

Besides all of these crucial information about the opera, based on many critiques and secondary literature, the storyline in a traditional sense can hardly be articulated not only because of the thirty-two characters, some of whom has multiple roles, and not only because the piece is sectional and fragmental, but, on top of it all, because of its lack of timeline, which altogether make the whole story fairly surreal and incredibly complex. Kagel provides a so-called skeleton (see below) of permanent figures in the libretto, which highlights the main characters of the opera and makes it easier to observe the piece as a whole. In this chapter the most important tableaux will be discussed in depth, other ones will be briefly mentioned in order to understand the dynamic of the whole piece.

⁴⁶ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 2006, p 128

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 129

⁴⁸ „Das Projekt beginnt und schließt mit der "Winterreise". [...] Am Ende herrscht Leere. Dazwischen liegt ein Panoptikum. Liebe, Natur, Dunkel, Tod: alles inklusive. Gewalt ist nah.” *Badische Zeitung*, Johannes Adam, *Kagel-Oper in Freiburg: Hitler tanzt mit dem Gartenzwerg*, January 2011



One can see that Kagel put the titles of song cycles in boxes and right above them he indicates the poets of original texts and the composers who set the original text to music. Under the boxes he puts the characters who sing excerpts from the certain song cycles, in other words the main representatives of each poem. As one can see there are four names, the “Empress of the Blues”⁴⁹ *Bessie Smith*, *Al Johnson* “who made a name for himself in the world of soul music”⁵⁰, the “American jazz pianist, composer, and bandleader”⁵¹ *Duke Ellington*, and *Paul Robeson* who was an “American singer, actor, and black activist.”⁵² These musicians become relevant in certain

⁴⁹ bio. *Bessie Smith Biography (1894–1937)*

⁵⁰ Daily Press, *Al Johnson, soul singer and Newport News native, dead at 65*

⁵¹ bio. *Duke Ellington Biography (1899–1974)*

⁵² ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA, *Paul Robeson (1898–1976)*

scenes where Kagel gives the instruction to the singer to sing in the given musicians' style and sometimes to do it in English.

As the libretto reveals it, in some cases Kagel is fairly strict about structural decisions, but, on the other hand, he does not address important information about acts that end up appearing on stage. It is clear that major decisions which change the story dramatically are not present in the libretto, in other words they were not made by Kagel but, as it will be shown, he was not against them. In terms of implementation, staging, and costumes he indicates a lot of details in the libretto "*Drei Vorhänge: 1. Hauptvorhang zügig hoch; 2. Vorhang langsam hoch (Bildmotiv ad libitum); 3. Vorhang zügig hoch (Bildmotiv ad libitum)*"⁵³, or "*Die alternde Dichterin – offense Haar, wallede Kleidung – übt mit der stummen halbnackten Magd Handspiele [...]*" but he also gives large enough freedom to the producer and the actors to express their own ideas. Since the opera was only produced few times, about six or seven, there is only one video recording available which is from 1997 by the *Schönberg Ensemble* and the *Nederlands Kamerkoor*⁵⁴ which was conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw and staged by Herbert Wernicke.

In this production the staging is a very important component of the whole piece and it is in correspondence with Kagel's staging idea. According to him the piano is one of the most important instruments of Romanticism, so it has to have a major role in terms of staging the opera. However, as a matter of fact pianos do not appear in their regular look. Kagel literally creates a war zone, a "battlefield of pianos"⁵⁵ by placing destroyed instruments next to and on the top of each other. As we are talking about an unusual staging it is also important to mention that

⁵³ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p38.

⁵⁴ Netherlands Chamber Choir

⁵⁵ Los Angeles Times, Mark Swed, *Composer Kagel Is a Clown but That's Not All He Is*, February 19, 1998

the orchestra pit neither in the libretto nor on the performance by the *Schönberg Ensemble* appears to be an ordinary pit. It is on a lower level but it does not have a roof which would normally cover half of the orchestra. This construction provides the singers the ability to have direct interaction with the musicians and the conductor by not separating the orchestra from the singers. Kagel attended the particular concert when the opera was recorded but unfortunately there is no available information about how much he was or was not involved in the production. All which can be concluded is that there are significant differences between the libretto and the production which were approved by Kagel.

The first and one of the greatest differences between the libretto and the performance is at the very beginning. Both of them start with the narrator, as Kagel calls them ‘Stimme’, speaking but in the libretto the narrator says “Drüben hinterm Dorfe steht ein Leiermann [...]” while she appears in the orchestra pit. This interpretation sets up the entrance of the ‘Leiermann’, as opposed to the production where the narrator stands in the middle of the stage, turning her back to the audience. In this case she says “Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht, bin ich um den Schlaf gebracht” then right after she takes her place in the pit, she continues with the previously mentioned Wilhelm Müller poem.

The two different approaches make two very different first impressions on the listener or viewer. The first one starts ‘in medias res⁵⁶’ and gives the audience a little more space to figure out all of the circumstances with only describing the place and mentioning the upcoming character, however; in the second one, the narrator immediately refers to the title with an excerpt from Heine’s *Nachtgedanken*. Kagel also highlights Heine’s importance before the appearance of

⁵⁶ „In medias res”, (Latin: “in the midst of things”) the practice of beginning an epic or other narrative by plunging into a crucial situation that is part of a related chain of events; the situation is an extension of previous events and will be developed in later action. The narrative then goes directly forward, and exposition of earlier events is supplied by flashbacks.” - ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA, *In medias res*

the narrator by dedicating the pieces to Heine. “Dem Andenken Heinrich Heines”⁵⁷ The narrator gives relevance with this quote regarding time ‘night’ and atmosphere *I am deprived of sleep while I am thinking of Germany*. Right after the ‘Stimme’ starts the piece the ‘Leiermann’ and three dogs enter. Interestingly enough, after the ‘Stimme’ says “Drüben hinterm Dorfe [...]” the ‘Leiermann’ continues with an excerpt from Willhelm Müller’s *Im Dorfe*. “Es schlafen die Menschen in ihren Betten / Träumen sich manches, was sie nicht haben, ...” The overlapping texts create a clean flow but also make the impression of a bizarre or even nonsense dream with the simultaneous idea of ‘Schlafen’ which is related to ‘Death’.

In the next tableau it becomes crystal clear that Kagel does not only use the texts from these phenomenal poets but also uses the protagonists of the poems. However; the ambiguity starts rising when instead of the ‘Dichter’ a ‘Dichterin’ appears and sings excerpts from Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*. At the end of this tableau we can see the second significant difference between the libretto and the *Schönberg Ensemble’s* production. The ‘Dichterin’ is clearly very lonely and depressed and as a result she commits suicide on stage, however it is not indicated in the libretto at all. After this tragic event the ‘Leiermann’ and the dogs come back. The ‘Leiermann’ says „Nun ist die Welt so trübe, / Der Weg gehüllt in Schnee.”⁵⁸ An interesting theatrical tool is that the snow is made of little pieces of papers, which will reappear in other tableaux as well. This little so-to-say ‘intermezzo’ leads us into our next tableau with the ‘Schiffer’ who “crosses the sea on his rowboat”⁵⁹ that is made of a piano and sings excerpts from *Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren* by Johann Mayrhofer. This is also the first tableau where the choir appears that becomes the significant voice of the crowd and mostly expresses emotional reactions with often nonsense texts for the rest of the piece.

⁵⁷ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p. 3

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 39

⁵⁹ „Ein großes Ruderboot überquert den See” – Ibid. p. 40

After this very slow and calm scene we get to our first truly violent tableau with 'Edward', his 'Mutter', and the invisible 'Solo-Tenor' and 'Solo-Sopran'. While the 'Mutter' tries to find out why 'Edward's' shirt is so bloody, the 'Tenor' and the 'Sopran' emphasize the tension between mother and son by intensely screaming "Aiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii" and "Ooooooooooooooh" either together or separately. Kagel uses Johann Gottfried Herder's ballade *Edward*, in which the son admits that he killed his father. As a result of this tension, at the end of the scene 'Edward' does not only kill his 'Mutter' but also commits suicide. To highlight the fact that this is not an ordinary representation of the Mayrhofer's ballade, Kagel places a 'Rüstung' (armor) on the side of the stage who becomes alive after the murder scene. "With clumsy, slow steps – á la Frankenstein – the actor goes to the two lying bodies"⁶⁰ soon after he starts talking to the dead 'Edward', waiting for an answer however there is lack thereof. The end of the scene it is very clear that "the armor falls apart"⁶¹ which symbolizes the decadence of Romanticism.

In tableau six "one of the paramount figures of German literature and European Romanticism"⁶² appears, namely Goethe. Kagel recreates Goethe's portrait *Goethe in Campagna* by J. H. W. Tischbein by clothing him in "a large wide-brimmed grey hat [...] and a creamy white traveler's duster."⁶³ There are multiple essential ways of interpretations which have not been used in earlier scenes. The first one is that at the beginning of the tableau the singer's skin color has to be darker and throughout the tableau it has to whiten. He suggests using make-up on stage, but the *Schönberg Ensemble's* idea is a lot more creative. Instead of making the actor painting himself on stage, they accomplish the same result by applying different lights. At the beginning when 'Goethe' sits at a table, they use a warmer and darker colored light and let the hat

⁶⁰ „Mit ungelinken, langsamen Schritten - etwa á la Frankenstein - der Darsteller geht auf die beiden liegenden Leichen zu." Ibid. p. 44

⁶¹ „Die Rüstung bricht auseinander." – Ibid. p. 44

⁶² Thelemapedia , *Wolfgang von Goethe*

⁶³ Wikipedia, *Goethe in the Roman Campagna*

cover half of his face, but as soon as Kagel indicates the skin color change, they use a very bright spotlight on 'Goethe' which makes him look incredibly white. This is also the first tableau 'Goethe' sings Kagel's English translation of *Mein Ruh ist hin* from Goethe's *Faust*. The idea of the skin-color change and the sudden usage of English language can be connected to the conception of racial (and later) sexual identity which appears significant amount of times throughout the opera and will be discussed in details in Chapter III.

In the next tableau Goethe continues but the interesting twist is that the 'Dichterin' comes back. As Kagel writes in the stage description: "*Goethe steht abrupt auf, geht zu der Dichterin*"⁶⁴, which ends up appearing on stage as a sex scene. As we move towards the next tableau the 'Schiffer' reappears with the accompaniment of the 'Nacht' and the 'Frauenchor'. The three characters sing at the same time, but they sing different excerpts from different poems. One can hear Goethe's *Meeres Stille* from the 'Schiffer, Heine's *Abends am Strand* from the 'Frauenchor', and *Warte, warte, wilder Schiffmann* from Heine's *Liederkreis* from the 'Night.' A perfect example of Kagel's vague stage direction is at the beginning of this scene when he uses the first Heine poem as a material of the libretto as well as a stage direction. The very first instruction he gives is: "*Abends am Strand / Vorne eine Fischerhütte, am Horizont fährt ein Schiff*"⁶⁵ but he does not specify how he wants this illusion to be presented. At the end of the scene the 'Stimme' appears as narrator and closes the scene by addressing the disappearing ship.

The next scene is a mixture of so-called 'permanent figures' and characters who only play in this scene. The 'Leiermann' becomes the narrator – while the actual narrator just observes the environment – of Heine's *Die beiden Grenadiere* and introduces the two beaten-up French grenadiers. They embody the characters from the poem and by doing so, they only sing the lines

⁶⁴ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p. 45

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 45

from Heine's poem, which were written in first person singular. As the '1. Grenadier' says "Wie weh wird mir, / Wie brennt meine alte Wunde!"⁶⁶ Towards the middle of the scene Kagel uses a 'Militärkapelle' on stage to emphasize the wartime state while the two grenadiers are suffering from lethal wound, and a 'Bursche', who wears the same costume as the other two, cleans guns. Soon after one of the grenadiers dies and falls into a piano, which in this case symbolizes a coffin, the 'Schwarze König' enters, wrapped in a torn French flag and sings or as it is indicated "nasalizes"⁶⁷ Kagel's English translation of the Heine poem. "I feel (...) / When I care / What do (...)" The dots in parenthesis are "rapid tongue Tremolo[s] through lightning-quick sticking out and retraction of the tongue"⁶⁸ which make the text impossible to understand. It has been indicated that Kagel does not use already existing musical excerpts except here, where he uses a disfigured version of *Marseillaise*. Interestingly enough, as Schumann composed the music for this Heine poem he also used the theme of *Marseillaise* which creates a bizarre connection between the two composers.

The next tableau is the first one where 'Der Tod' appears as a concrete character carrying his scythe, wears a black mantle as opposed to the 'Mädchen' who wears a white dress and a flower wreath. During this short scene which ends with the death of the 'Mädchen', Kagel uses three different poems⁶⁹ which all are related either to 'der Tod,' or to 'das Mädchen,' or both. The composer also takes advantage of the stage set-up in this tableau, when she literally stands next to and yells at the conductor to save the 'Mädchen' from 'Tod,' after taking the flower wreath from the 'Mädchen' and putting it on her own head: "Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind

⁶⁶ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p. 47

⁶⁷ „stets etwas nasalierend singen” – Ibid. p. 49

⁶⁸ „rasches Zungentremolo durch blitzschnelles Herausstrecken und Einziehen der Zunge” – Ibid. p. 74

⁶⁹ Matthias Claudius, „Der Tod und das Mädchen”; Heinrich Heine, „Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht”; Friedrich Schiller, „Des Mädchens Klage” – Ibid. p. 74

zurück!”⁷⁰ Despite the fact that according to the libretto the ‘Sprecherin’ should be invisible. Tableau eleven is an intermezzo with ‘die Nacht’ who sings Heine’s *Mondschein* which leads the listener to the first and last ‘dance scene’ with “*Die vier Musiker des Salon-Ensembles*”⁷¹ where ‘Der Tod’ tries to dance with the ‘Mädchen’s’ dead body but after he realizes this cannot happen he puts straps on her body and she gets pulled up on a wire – as her soul goes to heaven. After this scene the order of the tableaux are mixed up in the production, but I will stay with the order according to the libretto.

Tableau thirteen is the so-called peak of ambiguity since it is not only in the middle of the work, but also has a special connection to the whole piece. The very first line the ‘Chor’ says is “Still, ’s ist nur ein Traum”⁷² which reiterates the idea that what the listener experiences is ‘just’ a weird, absurd dream, then the protagonists enter, namely the ‘Rattenfänger’ and the ‘Rattenchor’ with the accompaniment of the ‘Chor.’ In this scene the singers are told to “improvise with excited exclamations or short words”⁷³ whenever they see this “(- - - - -)”⁷⁴ which creates a huge mess in terms of clarity of sung words on stage. As the ‘Rattenfänger’ disappears in the crowd, we reach tableau fourteen, in which the listener discovers the occurrence of ‘Hyperion’ and the ‘Dichterin.’ During the first half of this scene ‘Hyperion’ only says excerpts from Friedrich Hölderin’s *Die Eichbäume*. On stage he is dressed as a tree by wearing a leaf wreath, however, in the libretto he should be sitting or lying under a “Riesenbaum.”⁷⁵ As he starts singing

⁷⁰ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto. p. 52

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 52

⁷² Ibid. p. 53

⁷³ „(- - - - -) = mit aufgeregten Ausrufen oder Kurzworten improvisieren” - Ibid. p. 74

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 54

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 55

the ‘Dichterin’ “passionately” and “vulgarly” sings “Ich hab’ im Traum geweinet, / Mir träumte, du lägest im Grab.”⁷⁶

After a quick light change, one shall see or at least imagine a ‘*Biedermeister-Salon*’ or more likely as it appears on stage a concrete recall of a *Schubertiade*. Finally, the protagonist of the whole piece, ‘Schubert’, appears and accompanies the ‘Kammersänger’ on the piano. As the ‘Sprecher’ narrates the actions on stage “... er trinkt ihn aus: O Trank voll süßer Labe!”⁷⁷ the ‘Kammersänger’ gets out of control and starts laughing “diabolically.”⁷⁸ Schubert, as an answer, expresses his dissatisfaction regarding the singer’s lack of talent “Vergiftet sind meine Lieder”⁷⁹ and tears pages out from his music. By the end of the scene the ‘Kammersänger’ cannot process ‘Schubert’s’ behavior and dies.

In tableau sixteen which is closely related to the previous one, we see the character of the ‘Leiermann’ except he is embodied by a woman, namely as ‘Leiermann-Frau.’ Kagel uses the idea of Leitmotif which makes it easier for the audience to realize the connection: “*Aus der Kulisse ist der Leierkasten hörbar.*”⁸⁰ As the ‘Leiermann-Frau’ goes towards the body of the ‘Kammersänger’, he resurrects and starts singing Giuseppe Carpani’s *In questa tomba oscura*⁸¹ but by the end of the scene he lays into a piano, closes its top, and dies forever. After another quick change, we are still in a ‘*Biedermeister-Salon*’ but this time it looks more like a brothel where the two most significant roles are the ‘Kammersängerin’ and ‘Schubert.’ The ‘Kammersängerin’ appears as a double role, one of them is played by a new character and the other one is by the ‘Sprecherin’ in order to allow the freedom to the character to keep singing

⁷⁶ Heinrich Heine, „Dichterliebe” Nr. 13 - Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto. p. 56

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 57

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 57

⁷⁹ Heinrich Heine, „Vergiftet sind meine Lieder” - Ibid. p. 57

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 58

⁸¹ English translation: „In this dark tomb”

while having sex with ‘Schubert.’ The whole scene is sung in English until the very end when ‘Schubert’ sings Eichendorff’s *Wehmut* from *Liederkreis* and is presented in ‘*Himmel*’ by using very bright lights.

Tableau eighteen is a unique scene because the ‘Sprecherin’ – here as ‘Kartenlengerin’ – is the main character. Not only the stage, but also the music indicates the environment of a carnival with the usage of tape recorders one of which plays a “montage of continuous and spotty noises of a fair”⁸² and the other one plays an “Allegro phrase on a honky-tonk piano.”⁸³ This scene will be discussed in chapter III because of its importance. In the next scene there are multiple differences between the libretto and the production. First of all the ‘Nachtigall’ is dressed as a rook, however nothing indicates that in the libretto; secondly ‘die Musik’ and the ‘Nachtigall’ should be invisible until the middle of the scene, as opposed to be the first ones who enter right at the beginning; thirdly ‘die Musik’ should be wearing a “magnificent costume”⁸⁴, but in the production she is in a black dress with two wings on her back, which appear to be piano lids. Meanwhile the ‘Leiermann’ sings scornful about art and encourages the ‘Nachtigall’ to fly away: “Entfleuch, Entfleuch! (O Nachtigall!)”⁸⁵ Interestingly enough, at the end ‘Leiermann’ is the one who has to escape from the chasing dogs who reappear from tableau one.

Tableau twenty is the second keystone regarding to the importance of ‘der Tod.’ The colors of the costumes compared to tableau ten are the exact opposite, ‘der Tod’ wears a white mantle and a white mask; even though according to the original concept he should be wearing “pink”, and the ‘Jüngling’ wears a black suit. In this scene the audience observes the ‘Jüngling’s’

⁸² „Montage aus kontinuierlichen und punktuellen Geräuschen eines Kirmes” - Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto p. 61

⁸³ „Allegro-Satz auf einem honky-tonk-Piano” – Ibid. p. 61

⁸⁴ „prächtiges Kostüm” – Ibid. p. 63

⁸⁵ L. Ch. Hölty, „An die Nachtigall” – Ibid. p. 63

death throes, while hearing excerpts from Spaun's *Der Jüngling und der Tod*, Shenkendorf's *Todessehnen*, Goethe's *Nähe des Geliebten* and *Nachtgesang*, and other major literary works;⁸⁶ however 'der Tod' is trying to dissuade the 'Jüngling' from committing suicide: "... Ich bin bei dir, du seist auch noch so ferne / Du bist mir nah!"⁸⁷ By the end 'Der Tod' sings so-called lullaby "[Schlafe ein] / [Schlaf' schlafe ein]"⁸⁸ which puts both of them to sleep, but as soon as the 'Sprecherin', who in this tableau is called the 'Sprecher,' starts talking they both startle and leave the stage. The text that the 'Sprecher' says will be analyzed in Chapter IV because of its close connection to death.

The next tableau, according to the libretto, is called "Stumme Szene: Scheinfinale mit Variationen;"⁸⁹ which gives the freedom to the producer to finish the pieces as he will, intriguingly this scene is left out in the *Schönberg Ensemble's* production; instead they jump to tableau twenty-six, called "Verwandlungstanz." This title expresses an interesting interpretation of movement between the scenes that already happened and a so-called cadence in which Goethe's 'Mignon' plays the leading role. The way how Kagel achieves to create this transition is by using a new character, 'Mignon' as well as old characters. These known characters do not sing they just, in a way, reinterpret events that the audience has experienced earlier.

Tableau twenty-two is the second scene where the narrator plays a double role and becomes the personification of the 'Mignon's' inner personae, and simultaneously articulates what happens in the protagonist's mind. The two most important instruments that Kagel uses are the *harmonica* which is played by 'Mignon,' and the *wind machine* which symbolizes life and

⁸⁶ J. N. Craigher de Jachelutta, „Totengräbers Heimweh“, Justinus Kerner, „Alte Leute“ – Ibid. p. 75

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 65

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 65

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 66

death since as soon as it falls⁹⁰ – as it is indicated in the libretto – ‘Mignon’ dies. On stage ‘Double’ is the one who hands a gun to ‘Mignon’ whereby he commits suicide. In tableau twenty-three appears a ‘Frauenchor’ on stage who should be wearing variations of clothes that have already used by ‘Mignon,’ but they rather appear as cleaning ladies. As Kagel indicates “each singer holds a distinctive requisite of German Romanticism”⁹¹ so in the production they carry piano parts, since the piano is a definite prop of Romanticism.

Tableau twenty-seven is called “Ende und Fortsetzung”⁹² whereby Kagel makes it clear the end is not definite; however it has a strong relationship with the beginning because the ‘Stimme’ is the only character who talks at the end and closes the whole play. Kagel makes it really clear in the stage directions that he wants the end to be a representation of Otto Böhler’s *Schubert im Himmel*⁹³, which appears not only as a complete parody of Renaissance with all the musical angels, but also a corny eversion of the mentioned silhouette. This dubious ending is an anamorphosis⁹⁴ of the idea of Biedermeier and a metamorphosis of the characters.



The libretto of *Aus Deutschland* also contains Kagel’s original sketches which he uses to compose the opera. At first sight they appear to be random drawings and words that, in some way can, be connected to the piece, but after searching for satisfying relationship between these

⁹⁰ „fällt auf die Windmaschine” – Ibid. p. 68

⁹¹ „Jede Sängerin hält ein charakteristische Requisit der deutschen Romantik” – Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto p. 68

⁹² Ibid. p. 73

⁹³ Otto Böhler, *The celebration of Franz Schubert's 100th Birthday in heaven*, silhouette

⁹⁴ disfigured representation

‘words’ and the opera, it turns out that they are titles of Schubert songs. Even though Kagel does not use every single one of these songs, he uses their characters or at least atmospheres. The songs that appear in these sketches are: *Gute Nacht*, *Die Wetterfahne*, *Gefrorene Tränen*, *Rückblick*, *Irrlicht*, *Einsamkeit*, *Die Krähe*, *Letzte Hoffnung*, *Im Dorfe*, *Täuschung*, *Der Wegweiser*, *Das Wirtshaus*, and *Der Leiermann*. These titles not only emphasize the importance of Schubert, but also basically summarize the whole piece in terms of emotions.

The literal deluge of information that the listener experiences after the first time seeing this piece, leaves a sort of awkward and overwhelmed feeling of “What just happened?” in the listener. It could be because the twenty-seven short rather meaningful tableaux are too rhapsodic and it is hard to maintain attention; therefore, the listener gets thrown off fairly often and quickly. As a first impression this is totally valid, however this is also the reason why the piece is so intriguing. The listener constantly receives different impacts that he or she does not have time to process, but the tableaux leave diverse impressions. The thread of these impressions takes the listener by the hand and leads one through these so-called speed bumps with the help of the narrator, who in a way embodies a guide with her presence on stage throughout the whole opera. As Kagel suggests, “the libretto is based on the technique of collage, does not appear as a potpourri with different poems, but should give the impression that it was written from a single source”⁹⁵ which means that he wants to keep the opera as a coherent whole.

⁹⁵ „[Für die Sprache des Stückes war mir wichtig, daß] das Libretto, [gerade weil es] auf der Technik der Collage fußt, nicht wie ein Potpourri verschiedener Gedichte wirken, sondern den Eindruck erwecken sollte, es sei aus *einer* Hand geschrieben.” - Mauricio Kagel, *Über „Aus Deutschland”*, Libretto, p. 5

Chapter III

A multi-functional Narrator

After going through the plot of the opera, the narrator does not appear to be one of the important characters; however after a visual experience in the production her importance is unquestionable. Even though, there are certain scenes when she does not actively do anything, and as a consequence she is not mentioned, she observes and uses objects which help the viewer to understand what the context of the certain tableau is or what it refers to. It will be shown that some of these objects have huge significance regarding the relationship between the narrator and other characters. Her nearly random appearances between tableaux, which are also not indicated in the libretto, make the transitions smoother and create a so-called forward motion from scene to scene.

Normally, the first decision one should make in terms of the importance of the narrator is to determine what kind of a character one is dealing with, and by doing so, to identify whether she/he is a first or third person narrator. A ‘first-person narrator’ always speaks from her or his subject’s position and fulfills the role of a witness or a protagonist in the story. A ‘third-person narrator’ is usually not part of the story, but either omniscient or has a limited point of view. However, the narrator of *Aus Deutschland* is a multifunctional mixture of these categories, who does not only represent Kagel’s versatility throughout the entire piece, but also has her⁹⁶ own significant multi-role. The narrator’s multifaceted and important roles hold the story together very tightly; furthermore, this adaptability makes her character the most interesting out of all the

⁹⁶ In this essay I am referring to a production by the Schönberg Ensemble from 1997, Amsterdam, NL where the narrator was played by a woman.

figures. The connection that she creates during the piece helps the audience understand the context since the story itself is remarkably complex; hence, without the narrator it would be almost impossible to understand it. Her diversity creates the big picture between the tableaux not only as direct performer/singer of certain scenes, when she also becomes an actual character, but also as an observer.

The whole opera starts with the ‘Stimme’ turning her back to the audience, and she says “Denk ich an Deutschland” which right away gives importance to the title “Aus Deutschland.” This phenomena powerfully collaborates with the idea that the opera is an “engagement with the cultural tradition of Kagel’s adopted homeland.”⁹⁷ In one of his essays, *Denke ich an Argentinien in der Nacht*, for instance, Kagel’s narrative of his view on Argentina is not just pessimistic, but even hopeless. Right after moving to Germany, his homesickness made him write this essay about Argentina, interestingly enough it implies a direct connection to Heinrich Heine’s *Nachtgedanken*. Approximately forty years later his approach to these two lands – Argentina and Germany – has shifted. By using the actual Heine poem, and becoming citizen of Germany, he expresses his affectionate relation towards Germany; however in an interview from 2000, he stated: “I was regarded there [Buenos Aires] as a European, and here [Germany] as a South American [...] I feel a little foreign everywhere.”⁹⁸

This relationship between the ‘Stimme’ and Kagel changes as soon as the ‘Stimme’ becomes the ‘Sprecherin.’ Kagel is very specific about the ‘Stimme’ later becoming the narrator right at the beginning of the whole opera. The first note Kagel writes in the libretto: “Bei der Beziehung “Stimme” kann die Partie – durchgehend oder abschnittweise – mit der Sprecherin

⁹⁷ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 2006, p. 129

⁹⁸ Mauricio Kagel in conversation with Max Nyffeler, *There Will Always Be Questions Enough*, 2000 (English translation by Richard Toop)

oder dem Sprecher besetzt werden.”⁹⁹ As it is already indicated here, Kagel does not specify the sex of the characters. He expands this idea in his essay *Über Aus Deutschland*, where he explains that using female characters instead of male ones, or vice versa, allows the composers to take advantage of different “dimensions of eroticism.”¹⁰⁰ The narrator does not appear as a ‘Sprecherin’ until tableau ten – when ‘der Tod’ enters the stage. The difference between these two significant roles is that as a ‘Stimme’ she only describes events, atmosphere, and actions; as opposed to the role of the ‘Sprecherin,’ which is an active character of certain tableaux, and whose message is important in terms of the clarity of discussion.

The next remarkable role, or more specifically double role, of our narrator is her presence as a ‘Kammersängerin’ and as ‘Double’ in tableau seventeen and twenty-two: “[...] the most striking feature of *Aus Deutschland* is the splitting up and multiplying of the characters, since most of the main characters are given a counterpart.”¹⁰¹ In both cases, the narrator is an example of this ‘multiplying’ character. Even though, these roles can appear secondary, and a duplication of a leading character, her existence is crucial in order to understand the context, but it is conspicuous that if one compares the roles, the personification of the ‘Mignon’s’ inner self is a lot more important than her multiplying role as a ‘Kammersängerin.’ Without the character of the dependent but singular role of the ‘Double’ the whole scene would be nonsense, as opposed to the ‘Kammersängerin’ who is one character in two bodies, of which the narrator is only one. While the narrator sings, she allows the other woman to do physical actions on stage. Interestingly, before the appearance of the ‘Kammersängerin’ a ‘Kammersänger’ appears, that

⁹⁹ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, p. 74

¹⁰⁰ „Die Tatsache, daß Worte durch Musik eine neue akustische Sinnlichkeit erfahren können, befähigt den Komponisten, solche Dimensionen der Erotik zu präzisieren.” - The fact that words can experience a new acoustic sensibility through music enables the composer to clarify such dimensions of eroticism. - Mauricio Kagel, *Über „Aus Deutschland”*, Libretto, p. 7

¹⁰¹ Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, 2006, p. 129

can be considered as a male counterpart of the female character, but also as an individual character. Their only in common feature is their strong relationship to ‘Schubert.’ As it was discussed, Kagel uses alternative male and female characters in order to present the same character from different approaches; for instance, the ‘Leiermann’ and the ‘Leiermann-frau.’ They dressed the same, play the exact same role, and share the same Leitmotif, consequently the only difference between them is their voice: “The fact that words can experience a new acoustic sensibility through music enables the composer to clarify such dimensions of eroticism.”⁹³

Throughout the whole opera the only scene where the narrator appears as protagonist is when she plays the role of the ‘Kartenlegerin’. There are many aspects in this scene that prove the decisiveness of the narrator. As a fortune-teller, she recites Chamisso’s *Kartenlegerin* in its full value with the exception of one, single line: “Ein Geschenk auf artge Weise.”¹⁰² The reason why it is unique is that throughout the whole opera this is the only poem which is almost fully represented. Other times Kagel only use fragments of texts not even in the right order of lines. Interestingly, after the end of the mentioned poem he pastes Platen’s *Die Liebe hat gelogen* and Heine’s *Lorelei* which altogether create extra ambiguity. “Nein, die Karten lügen nicht. / Die Liebe hat gelogen, / ... / Betrogen ach! ... [...] / Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten (...) / Daß ich so traurig bin ...”¹⁰³ During the act of the ‘Kartenlegerin,’ one can discover the importance and creative usage of colors throughout the scene and as an impact throughout the whole piece. She is the only character of all who wears a red dress, everybody else appears in black or/and white; however in this scene she puts a black scarf around her head and upper body to clearly differentiate her roles from each other. Her versatility evolves after one observes the different language and elocution she uses. This is the only scene when she sings in German. As a ‘Stimme’

¹⁰² Adelbert von Chamisso, *Die Kartenlegerin*

¹⁰³ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p. 62

and 'Double' she talks in German but never sings, and as a 'Kammersängerin' she only sings in English. It is really hard to determine which one of these roles is the more important but one can have the impression that this latter role is definitely a significant one.

Her importance becomes the most apparent when one realizes that she does not only start, but also ends the whole opera, whereby creating a frame to the whole piece. As it has already been discussed in chapter II, she turns her back to the audience and whispers her first line "Denk ich an Deutschland in der Nacht, bin ich um den Schlaf gebracht"¹⁰⁴ from Heine's *Nachtgedanken*. This beginning does not only define the environment of the entire opera, but also creates an especially particular atmosphere. However, Kagel closes the piece with the line "Gute Nacht!"¹⁰⁵ said by the narrator, which brings up the question whether the listener is about to experience an ambiguous dream, or because of the effect of this ending the piece has a lot more to do with reality than one would imagine. Kagel indicates aging even if a hidden way, namely some of the characters as they reappear seem to be older than in the previous scene; time in its general sense becomes totally irrelevant.

As it was introduced at the beginning of this chapter the narrator is also very important when she does not play an active role. The objects she holds, touches and wears are all extra features that often help understanding the context. However other times they make the plot even more complex, nearly confusing. Two of these objects are the flower wreath from the 'Mädchen' which is a symbol for innocence and a skull which represents death. The narrator takes the flower wreath, after it falls on the floor as the 'Mädchen' dies and puts it on her own head. As she becomes 'Sprecherin,' literally a spokesperson, she tries to approach the conductor to call 'der Tod' back but it is too late. After this scene, she goes back to her table and sets the wreath onto

¹⁰⁴ Heinrich Heine, *Nachtgedanken*

¹⁰⁵ Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p. 74

the skull that has been present since earlier. This scene does not only symbolize how ‘der Tod’ takes away the ‘Mädchen’s’ life, but also points out that the narrator is the only person who cares about the ‘Mädchen’. The picture below shows the incident as the narrator falls asleep after, despite all attempts, fails to save the ‘Mädchen.’



Throughout the whole piece the narrator is the only character who touches the skull, which shows her direct connection to the symbol of death. This creative but also dark interpretation and the narrator’s act of creating an altar where the flower wreath and skull appear in the same way as it is shown above suggest the importance of death with the guidance of the narrator.

Chapter IV

Mr. Death

As I alluded earlier, ‘death’ has multiple significant roles throughout the opera and it appears not only as a character but also as a symbol. In this chapter I will go through the most important tableaux where death is relevant. In the mid-twentieth century Paul Celan writes *Todesfuge* which describes the essential environment of Germany after the war. The idea “der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland”¹⁰⁶ is a forceful connection between German literature and Kagel’s *Aus Deutschland*. Especially as one sees the title of the opera can be considered as a direct quote from Celan’s poem.

While Celan refers to death “to offer a stark evocation of life in the Nazi death camps”¹⁰⁷ Kagel uses it to emphasize darkness and rigidity. However, this is not the only connection between *Todesfuge* and *Aus Deutschland*. One of the conspicuous similarities is the in common usage of characters, namely the ‘Rüden’ and ‘Margarete’ in Celan’s poem, and the ‘Hunde’, and ‘Gretchen’ in Kagel’s work. In *Aus Deutschland* ‘Gretchen’s’ character is replaced by the ‘Dichterin’ who is seduced by ‘Goethe’ after he spins on the spinning wheel. There are also numerous incidental motives, such as *smoke, gold, grave, Deutschland* that become crucial elements in both pieces and because of their significance they make both pieces very sectional: in Kagel’s case these motives are the important component of each tableau, which create a similar structure with the paragraphs in *Todesfuge*. Besides all these similarities, the most outstanding correspondence in the two pieces is the role of ‘Death’.

¹⁰⁶ "Death is a Master from Germany" - Paul Celan, *Todesfuge*,

¹⁰⁷ Poets.org, *Paul Celan*

Death's first symbolic appearance in *Aus Deutschland* happens in tableau two, where the "aging"¹⁰⁸ Dichterin commits suicide. At the beginning of this scene, the 'Dichterin' throws naked plastic baby doll parts towards the 'Stimme' and sings "Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine." Absurdity emerges when 'die Nacht' appears. Shortly after the character enters, the two figures start singing simultaneously, which symbolizes conflict or carelessness regarding each other's message. However, by the end of the scene they harmoniously sing together: "... sah die Nacht in deines Herzens Raume, ..." ¹⁰⁹ which is an excerpt from Heine's *Winterreise*. The ambiguity of this is that 'the night' from the text appears as a character. On the other hand, mentioning *night* in text also reiterates the timeless environment, a so-called emotional black hole which was present in Germany's life for decades. The stage directions emphasize darkness even more, because they do not appear to be real instructions but rather emotional directions. Kagel writes "aroused," "heartbroken," "faint," "bleak," "aged," "very lonely"¹¹⁰ regarding to the 'Dichterin'. Interestingly enough, the 'Dichterin' later comes back in tableau seven which brings up the question whether the act of suicide is only a symbolic appearance of death, or it is just a tool to strengthen the importance of death.

In the tableau with 'Edward' and his 'Mutter' death's relevance intensifies when it occurs in a lot more violent manner than it has appeared before. As it was described in Chapter II, 'Edward' admits that he killed his father; he kills his 'Mutter' then he kills himself. After this insane scene, Kagel refers to 'Frankenstein' when he describes the acts of the 'Rüstung.' 'Edward' suffers from inner pain in the same way as the phenomenal monster of German literature did who after killing his creator, which are the parents in 'Edward's' case, regrets his actions and runs away. 'Edward's' solution is more drastic than that by committing suicide.

¹⁰⁸ „Die alternde Dichterin” – Mauricio Kagel, *Aus Deutschland, Eine Lieder-Oper*, Libretto, p. 38

¹⁰⁹ „...saw the night within your heart...” – Ibid. p. 39

¹¹⁰ „erregt,” „untröstlich,” „matt,” „trostlos,” „gealtert,” „sehr einsam” – Ibid. p. 39

Im Grabe so friedlich, so kühl!
Doch ach! wer legt mich hinein?
Ich stehe allein, so ganz allein!

Von allen verlassen, dem Tod nur verwandt,
Verweil ich am Rande, das Kreuz in der Hand,
Und starre mit sehndem Blick hinab
Ins tiefe, ins tiefe Grab!

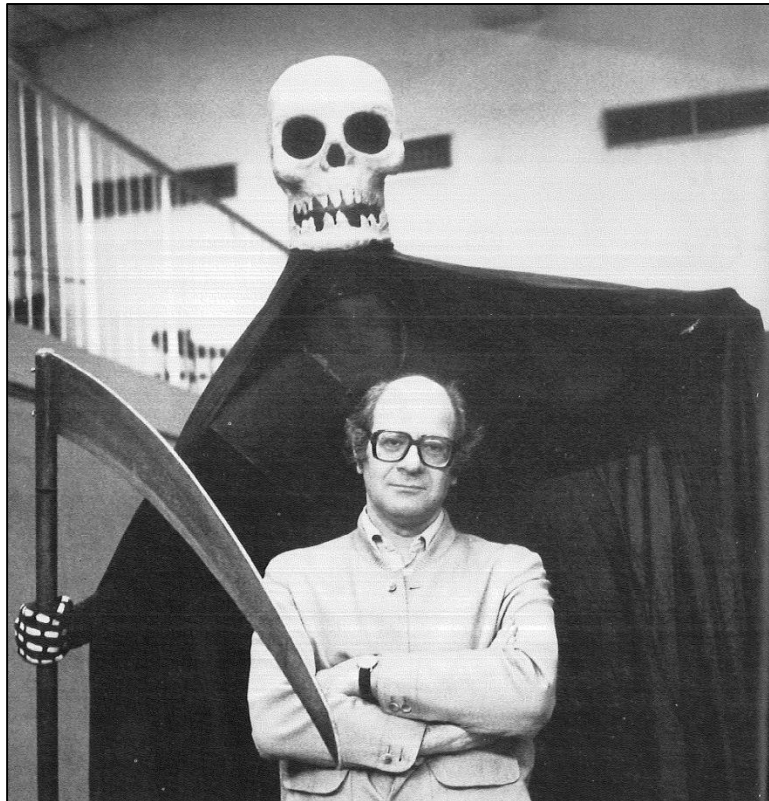
O Heimat des Friedens, der Seligen Land,
an dich knüpft die Seele ein magisches Band.
Du winkst mir von ferne, du ewiges Licht,
es schwinden die Sterne, das Auge schon bricht, -
ich sinke, ich sinke! Ihr Lieben, ich komm!”¹¹³

The words that are said by the narrator are highlighted to see how Kagel applies only the essence of the poem. Kagel uses “Ich stehe allein” which shows that, he as creator still feels like an outsider and a “little foreign everywhere.”¹¹⁴ The informal compellation of ‘Du’ in the opera apparently refers to death, whereas in the poem, in the context of ascension, one would associate ‘Du’ with God; however as it has been shown, death in this scene is characterized and interpreted as God. The most important motives of the poem, such as *grave*, *homeland*, and *stars* are mutual concepts not only in *Aus Deutschland*, but also in Celan’s *Todesfuge*. “Von allen verlassen, dem Tod nur verwandt” is the main concept of Kagel’s opera, not only because of the permanent death-related emotions it contains, but also because this is the idea that Kagel shows Germany and the world in the distorted mirror. After the Second World War, Germany was only known for its deathly impacts that the war left behind, but Kagel radically points out that it is over and one must move on in terms of creating and inventing something new. The last strophe describes the whole idea of ascension to heaven which is the end of the opera as well incorporating the idea of *Schubert im Himmel*. Kagel’s *Aus Deutschland* is a literal projection of this poem.

¹¹³ See appendix

¹¹⁴ Mauricio Kagel in conversation with Max Nyffeler, *There Will Always Be Questions Enough*, 2000 (English translation by Richard Toop)

The libretto starts and this chapter ends with the picture of Kagel and 'der Tod'. The composer's crossed arms suggest some sort of self-containedness, as opposed to 'der Tod' whose arms are wide open and embrace everything. As one can see the major features of death, both symbolic and as a character, are present on this picture, namely the skull, black mantle, and the scythe.



Conclusion

Mauricio Kagel created a phenomenal work with *Aus Deutschland*, in which he does not only connect old, traditional texts with contemporary interpretation, but also uses the image of a distorted mirror to show German society what they have been dealing with since the end of World War II. He chooses one of the most important characters of Romanticism, Schubert, on one hand to reinterpret the motion from darkness to light, and from dying to ascension to heaven; on the other hand he teaches people the concept of acceptance with the idea of *Schubert im Himmel*.

Kagel's determined goal was to use what major composers and poets left for the newer generations, instead of just relying on what one has learnt and only using its impacts. This, so-called 'literal recycling', is pointed out in his essay *Über „Aus Deutschland“*: „Hier [in *Aus Deutschland*] findet keine Akkumulation von Erkenntnissen, vielmehr eine Bestätigung von Vorkenntnissen statt.“¹¹⁵ – *Here is no accumulation of knowledge, but rather an acknowledgment of prior learning instead*¹¹⁶. His distinguished way of composing allows him to become “a main exponent of modern musical theater.”¹¹⁷ Conclusion can be made that Kagel with *Aus Deutschland* achieves to create a fragmented but coherent criticism of Romanticism through death. Because of this ambiguity one of the most unique attributes of the piece is that nothing can be generalized because as soon as one makes a statement there is always an exception. Kagel tears apart and pastes back together the most well-known characters from the 19th and 20th century.

¹¹⁵ Mauricio Kagel, *Über „Aus Deutschland“*, Libretto, p. 10

¹¹⁶ Translation by Petra Elek

¹¹⁷ Ionarts, *Maurizio Kagel (1931 – 2008) Mourned by More Than Will Miss His Music*, 2008

Appendix

36)

With the term “Lieder-Oper” in the subtitle of the work, it points towards a genre which exists indeed only as compound; however, through the assemblage, both notions could inspire concrete ideas.

On one hand, the songs are actually the thematic sources of this musical theatre composition, exemplified by original German text used especially in the 19th century. The libretto of *Aus Deutschland* originated as a reflection on German Romanticism exclusively from poems which have already been set to music and belong mostly to the firm repertoire of ‘Liederabends’.

On the other hand, the dramaturgical content of the lyrics is staged in order to achieve that theatrical dimension, which is always available under the ‘untheatrical’ surface of the poem. (Each Goethe poem, used by Schubert or Schumann as carriers of musical ideas, could also be said by Faust or Margaret on the stage.)

Similarly to opera composers who often recourse to texts of the ‘spoken theatre’, in order to set tragedy and comedy to music, in this work it is undertaken to unfold the subliminal theatrics of lyrics in order to form a dynamical music theatre out of an already excellent static process.¹¹⁸

44)

Romanticism is initially a simultaneous examination of two realities. Therefore, the first corresponds to what people assume of actuality, as it can be arranged; the second is the reality, as it is - and as such must not be accepted. Romanticism emerges from the area of tension and that tripartite what it constructs. The evidence of the proliferation of multiple actualities, as I undertook in the visualization, is an essential supplement. Each of the two realities are actually made up of different realities.¹¹⁹

98)

O mankind, O life! What does it mean? What is it worth?
Dig out, fill in! Day and night without Rest!
The hurrying, the driving, why? O why?
“In the grave, in the grave, deep down!”

O fate, O sad duty,
I bear it no longer!
When will you for me sound, O hour of rest?
O death! Come and press these eyes closed!

¹¹⁸ Translation by Petra Elek

¹¹⁹ Translation by Petra Elek

To live, it is ah! so oppressive, ah! so oppressive!
In the grave so quiet, so cool!
But ah! who lays me therein?
I remain alone, so completely alone!

By all forsaken, death my only kin,
I linger at the edge, a cross in my hand,
and stare with longing gaze down
into the deep, into the deep grave!

O homeland of peace, the blessed land,
the soul is bound to you by a magic band.
You call me from afar, you eternal light,
there the stars disappear, my eye already dims,
I sink, I sink! My loved ones, I am coming!¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Jonathan Retlaff with IPA transcriptions b Cheri Montgomery, „Exploring Art Song Lyrics” *Translation and Pronunciation of the Italian, German & French Repertoire*, 2012

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