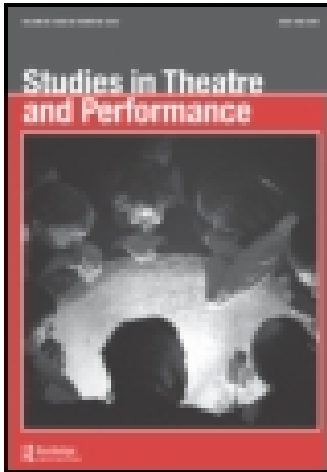


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## ***Raumwirkung*: the case of *Wozzeck***

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This review article of the Royal Opera House production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* takes a close look at the visual scenography (set design by Stefanos Lazaridis) and the stage direction (Keith Warner) in order to assess the concepts and effects of *Raumwirkung*, or spatial impact, of a modernist work of musical theatre known for its complex vocal and orchestral compositions. The original musical spatialization of sound, intended by Berg, is here critically examined in regard to the scenographic design and dramaturgy, in order to arrive at an aesthetic re-evaluation of contemporary intermedial staging techniques (for example in productions by Robert Wilson and Katie Mitchell) that prioritize visual allegories but also experiment with aural and visual scores in ways that challenge the dramatic cohesion of the operatic.

**Keywords:** *Raumwirkung*; scenography; choreography; counterpoint; *dispositif*; film-in-the theatre

Not being a regular opera spectator, the return of a production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* to London's Royal Opera House meant an arrival for me – a first-time exposure to this complex modern work of music theatre (*Wozzeck* 2013). A new cast, new singers in the title roles (Simon Keenlyside as Wozzeck, Karita Mattila as Marie) and a new conductor (Mark Elder) arrived as well, and their performances were embedded in Stefanos Lazaridis's set design under Keith Warner's stage direction, first witnessed at Covent Garden in 2002. The impact of the spatial choreography, for which I will use the German term *Raumwirkung*, is the focal point for this article, as I seek to parse the dynamic qualities of the visual design and relate it closely to current concerns with acoustic spatialization in music and sonic art, and thus with the advanced possibilities of polyphonic and hyper-immersive auditory experiences enabled by multimedia technologies. For an investigation of contemporary intermedial scenography, it will be indispensable to have a greater awareness of the spatial formation or 'topography' of sound (LaBelle 2010, 3) while realizing the interplay of choreography and scenography in the poetic rhythmicizations of space we owe to Adolphe Appia, and later visual stage directors such as Robert Wilson, Achim Freyer or Romeo Castellucci who were influenced by Appia (Beacham 2011; Birringer 2012).

Lazaridis's scenography for *Wozzeck* is so striking that I will begin my reflections with a close look at the visual staging, before turning to the musical experience of Berg's expressionist composition, promoted for the London audiences with a Royal Opera House trailer on YouTube that looks like an eerie thriller from the repertoire of horror films: *Wozzeck* runs across a dark moonlit forest to dissonant strains of music looking for the knife with which he killed his lover (Royal Opera House 2013a).

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Lazaridis and Warner do not give us a forest; their psychological or symbolic landscapes are largely internal, enclosed and encased. The town where Wozzeck lives is a miniature set inside a glass vitrine. It goes up in flames in the first scene. There are other glass tanks, initially covered with cloth to hide their contents. They are filled with water or formaldehyde, ready to receive scientific specimens; strange things float in some of them just as Damien Hirst once submerged a rotting shark – titled *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) – in a glass container, its gaping mouth open to our forensic imagination.

The visual scenography for the horror of Wozzeck's tribulations begins, before the first sound is heard, with a wide open stage above which the audience can see a projection of the cross-section of a human brain, with arrows pointing to various parts of the brain and their functional relations to the nervous system and blood supply (*arteria infraorbitalis*, *arteria temporalis profunda*, *nervus vagus*, etc.). This scientific image looms large over a small semi-enclosed area downstage right, featuring a bed and an old upright piano. We see a young boy sitting at a table, his back turned towards us. He is writing or drawing, and stays there throughout the time it takes for the audience to fill the house. When the opera begins, the lighting opens out from this domestic space to the wider stage, which turns into a huge tiled laboratory, a cold white clinical prison with the four glass tanks set mid-stage. The laboratory-clinic is the central visual metaphor for this production, juxtaposed with the small domestic area downstage right – the home of Marie – and the regions beyond, opening out upstage at various points to reveal astonishing bird's eye views of a distanced imagination, perhaps figments of Wozzeck's mind and hallucinatory dreams, far removed from the toils of his existence as a common soldier and, in effect, guinea pig of the Doctor's experiments.

In a short essay on 'Violence, Tenderness, Catharsis' by Gavin Plumley, printed in the programme book, we read about Berg's score and orchestration, and when Plumley describes Berg's musical gestures, polyphonic textures and distributed instrumental forces (a large orchestra in the pit, as well as an offstage chamber orchestra and a

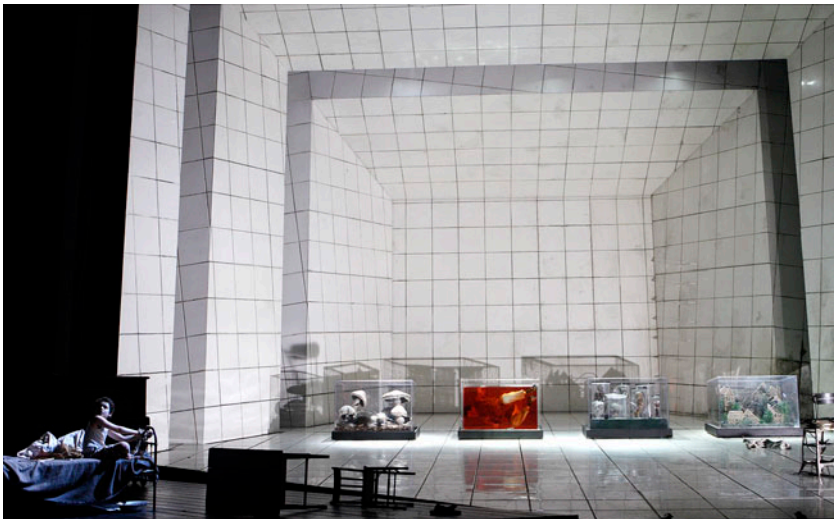


Figure 1. *Wozzeck*, Act I, Scene 1, Royal Opera House production, 2013. Set by Stefanos Lazaridis. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

second onstage military band and choir), he evokes the notion of *Raumwirkung* (spatial impact or effect), obviously owed to the music (Plumley 2013, 19). In this production it is also viscerally owed to the staging, the tripartite *mise en scène* of the score. I want to explore how the visual *Raumwirkung* relates to the aural *Raumwirkung* in contemporary theatre.

Act I opens with the Captain's duet with Wozzeck. We see them tumble into the bright white clinic, arguing over matters of eternity, time and Wozzeck's service to the military, which soon turns out to be a service to the Doctor's obsessive dietary and other clinical experiments on the human body. Georg Büchner's play *Woyzeck*, which is the source for Berg's libretto, clearly defines the soldier's role as one that is subjected to the nefarious machinations of power, here represented as a kind of German medical lab where military authorities carry out disturbing tests of the soldier's body and mind.

Berg started composing the piece in 1914 after seeing a theatrical production of *Woyzeck* in Vienna, making his own libretto from Büchner's fragmentary and unfinished play (a printing error on Berg's edition rendered the title *Wozzeck*). If the bleakness and brutality of Berg's libretto appear to owe something to the horrors of World War One and the surreal German expressionism of the 1920s, this is probably hardly coincidental, but it took Berg some years, after being released from military service in 1918, to get the opera completed and successfully premiered under musical director Erich Kleiber at the Berlin State Opera in December 1925. Notwithstanding its success, and favourable feedback by composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Kurt Weill, the run-up to the premiere was accompanied by belligerent press campaigns that claimed the 'frightful' music was unperformable. This, it turns out, is of course not the case, and the psychopathology of the subject matter and the difficult musical form surely make the work a desirable challenge for stage directors, designers, conductors and musicians.



Figure 2. Baritone Simon Keenlyside as Wozzeck, Royal Opera House production, 2013. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

Keith Warner is drawn to the exploitation of the main character's body and mind, dissecting the human tragedy of the soldier's increasingly deranged imagination and highlighting the sense of *Wir arme Leut*, 'wretched folks like us', as Wozzeck defines himself and his class in the opening scene, in psychological rather than social terms. Thus, a larger socio-political environment is absent, and even the presence of the military is played down, as the characters of Captain and Doctor tend towards exaggerated caricatures, and a fellow soldier, Andres, as well as the Drum Major, remain quite pale. The Drum Major is not even given the kind of glamorous uniform that attracts Marie's attention, as we are told by her neighbour Margret. What Warner and Lazaridis focus on is the biomedical operation in the lab, the modification of common man, 'unaccommodated', as Beckett once named him, existentially adrift but sociologically unspecific. Wozzeck is dressed by Marie-Jeanne Lecca in something like a grey overall, vaguely reminiscent of Maoist worker outfits. His behaviour is uneasy, stunted and subservient. When the domestic walls slide into the main laboratory space, from downstage right and from the top down, it looks as if an invisible machine of power momentarily closes in on the private world of Marie, and Wozzeck is barely allowed a few moments at home with his mistress before he must run off again to serve the sadistic Doctor. The Drum Major, sung by Endrik Wottrich, is allowed more time with Marie, and he perfunctorily takes advantage of her unfulfilled desires. Her body, sprawling lasciviously on a lawn in a distant view (beyond upstage), had appeared as inaccessible to Wozzeck in Act I as the back-projected blood-red sun that will loom threateningly on the horizon in the last act. Marie's sexual potency and *jouissance*, evoked in these projections and her lingering on the bed, are as unavailable to Wozzeck as reason or intelligible purpose for his treatment by the military. At one point he sneaks up to the domestic area to look at Marie through a small window in the dark triangular wall that has sliced the stage. He looks on, like a Peeping Tom, and this image again resonates beautifully with the music: Warner finds equivalent spatial expressions of alienation and disassociation in his *Raumpartitur* (spatial score).

The white-tiled laboratory with its raked floor and narrowing walls is the dominant element of this *Raumpartitur*,<sup>1</sup> as there seems to be no exit, no escape from it, for Wozzeck. The rising slant of the stage floor conveys a sense of instability, evoking the risk of falling that is also built into the precariously positioned stool with its uneven legs downstage left. In Simon Keenlyside's moving portrayal of the role, the protagonist appears weary and vulnerable. At several points during the performance we see him push the glass vitrines back up when they had begun to slide downward, their positions loosened by invisible gravitational pull.

His subservience to Captain and Doctor is painful to watch, and in the second scene ('An open field' in the libretto, here staged inside the lab) we become aware that there is no outside, even as Wozzeck's brain hallucinates a light falling onto the grass, heads rolling on the hollow ground, an abyss opening up, a world on fire.

Der Platz ist verflucht! Siehst Du den lichten Streif da über das Gras hin, wo die Schwämme so nachwachsen? Da rollt Abends ein Kopf. Hob ihn einmal Einer auf, meint', es wär' ein Igel. Drei Tage und drei Nächte drauf, und er lag auf den Hobelspänen. (Berg, *Wozzeck*, I.2)<sup>2</sup>

Wozzeck's *Sprechstimme* (a pitchless, melodic or dynamic use of the voice between speaking and singing) here creates a jarring contrast to the simple hunting song that Andres is singing, and the discordant harmonies in Berg's score are always particularly

striking when set against such folksongs and lyrical moments, for example the lullaby that Marie sings to her young boy, the out-of-tune pub piano called for in the tavern scene and the swirling late-Romantic orchestral harmonies. Commentators like Plumley have noted the quasi-cinematic technique with which Berg alternates between diegetic music and non-diegetic accompaniment, the rapid shifts in Act II between large orchestra and onstage chamber orchestra, and the dizzying range of *Sprechgesang* allowing the singers freedom of aural interpretation and intonation to colour their feelings. In the absence of a clear tonal centre, the challenges to the vocal protagonists are formidable. As conductor Mark Elder points out in a pre-show interview, there are four ways to deliver the words in Berg's libretto: speech, *Sprechstimme*, half-singing and singing (Royal Opera House 2013c). He then adds that in most performances the singers are nowhere near the right notes, but Keenlyside's Wozzeck (baritone), Mattila's Marie (soprano) and John Tomlinson's Doctor (bass) all make excellent use of vocal expressionism that affects the psychodrama of *Wozzeck* and its reverberations in our unconscious.

This *Sprechgesang*, in fact, pushes sound beyond words and the meaning of language, and Warner's staging tends to capitalize on the Freudian, psychoanalytic undertones of *Entstellung* (distortion) in such sonic surplus. As we listen, we overhear something from the fantasmatic scene which we do not understand yet. The voice is always *nachträglich* (retroactive) and thus connected to an enigma or trauma (Dolar 2006, 136). The young boy in Warner's production therefore delivers a symbolic role throughout; he is present from the beginning and listens to, overhears, everything he cannot yet understand, and when the Drum Major comes to the house to fuck his mother, the boy lies under the bed and hears the 'uncanny sounds' (*das unheimliche Geräusch*). Freud tries to explain hysterical fantasies and obsessional neuroses through this traumatic exposure of the child to the primal scene. In the context of opera and Berg's use of the expressionist *Sprechgesang*, it is the seductive and destabilizing affordance of voice – powerfully enacted in Mattila's shrieks – that we grasp on a sensual level, and we perceive *Wozzeck* as grown-up child framed by the setting. The science lab and the Doctor's strange instruments (which get pulled out of a drawer in the wall, then hidden away again) convey a sinister irony about male fantasies and the presumption of medical scrutiny into *Wozzeck*'s bodily fluids. The alterity of the voice is precarious and uncanny, as unintelligible as the (silent) images that populate our dreams and nightmares.

Warner's staging expands the fantasmatic dimensions of the music, and especially the dissonant and atonal passages, by rendering the laboratory as a claustrophobic environment where *Wozzeck*'s hold on reality continuously shrinks, regresses and becomes more desperate. In the second and third acts, the white-tiled walls appear dirtier, an effect achieved through the brilliant lighting design by Rick Fisher, as if mould were creeping up the walls. As the drama of *Wozzeck*'s despair and sexual jealousy moves towards its inexorable conclusion of murder and suicide, conductor Mark Elder unleashes the ominous, Stravinsky-like waves of orchestral power in Berg's score. There is a particularly striking scene near the end of Act II (the tavern scene) when Warner gradually fills Marie's room, and then the whole stage and the backstage area, with a hallucinatory mass of ghoulish folk, chorus and onstage band in a swirling crescendo of music, movement and vocal extravagance (especially well performed by Jeremy White and Grant Doyle as First and Second Apprentice but also by Mattila's Marie). The scene is a Dionysian orgy that isolates *Wozzeck*; his discovery of Marie's infidelity might be a product of his fantasy or feverish brain, and here Warner uses again the astonishing



Figure 3. *Wozzeck*, Act II, Scene 4. Royal Opera House production, 2013. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

bird's eye view of the opened-up backstage area. As the ghoulish folk slowly dance off into the background, Wozzeck has a vision of numerous glass tanks rising on the horizon, with bodies floating inside them – a vision that anticipates his own death.

The third act opens with a solo viola into a very quiet and intimate scene in Marie's room with the singer reading the story of Mary Magdalen and comparing what she is reading with her own life. Berg again employs *Sprechstimme* when Marie reads from the Bible, the young boy listening as she then sings to him her hauntingly beautiful



Figure 4. *Wozzeck*, Act II, Scene 4. Royal Opera House production, 2013. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.



comment on what she has read. The orchestral music grows fiercer as the drama proceeds to its murderous climax, Wozzeck approaching Marie with the knife:

WOZZECK

Fürchst Dich, Marie? Und bist doch fromm?

*lacht*

Und gut! Und treu!

*zieht sich wieder auf den Sitz; neigt sich, wieder ernst, zu Marie*

Was Du für süsse Lippen hast, Marie!

*küsst sie*

Den Himmel gäb' ich drum und die Seligkeit, wenn ich Dich noch oft so küssen dürft!

Aber ich darf nicht! Was zitterst? (Berg, *Wozzeck*, III.2)<sup>3</sup>

Noticing her fear, he tries to kiss her and asks her about their life together. As the moon rises, Wozzeck stares into the water tank, then steps behind Marie and draws the knife across her throat. Berg's musical response is an interlude consisting of two long *crescendi* on the note B natural, beginning quietly on solo horn and continuing through the whole orchestra in a deafening *fortissimo*. The cathartic climax is suspended, as Scene 3 interjects a sudden polka rattled out on the out-of-tune piano, and we see Wozzeck among a crowd of dancers, flirting with Margret until she sees blood on his hand. Wozzeck panics and runs looking for the knife with which he killed Marie, and when he finds it and stumbles upon her corpse, he throws it into the tank of blood-red water, then drowns himself. In Berg's libretto, he disappears from view (Scene 4): the Captain and the Doctor arrive and hear a strange noise as if a human being were dying ('*Das war ein Ton.... Das stöhnt als stürbe ein Mensch. Da ertrinkt jemand!*'). Berg



Figure 5. *Wozzeck*. Royal Opera House production, 2013. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

now scores an eloquent D minor *adagio* which forms the opera's climax, a grieving lament for Wozzeck.

In Warner's staging, Wozzeck does not disappear but sinks into one of the glass vitrines on centre stage, and astonishingly, for another nine or ten minutes, remains afloat under water. This disturbingly incongruous tableau has a powerfully visceral effect on our empathy, and it is of course calculated to jar, and at the same time become intertwined with the musical *adagio* which Berg had intended as a means to bring coherence and closure to Wozzeck's plight. Yet in a lecture Berg delivered on his opera in 1929, he writes that he also wanted to add a fifth scene (featuring the silent boy riding on his hobby horse while being taunted by other children):

The closing scene of Act III, and thus of the whole opera, is based on constant quavers, a sort of perpetuum mobile movement, which depicts the games and the play of the poor working-class children amongst whom is the completely unsuspecting child of Marie and Wozzeck, now orphaned twice over [Vocal score: Act III, p. 229, bar 372 and previous upbeat to end]. And thus the opera ends. And yet, although it again clearly moves to cadence on to the closing chord, it almost appears as if it carries on. And it does carry on! In fact, the opening bar of the opera could link up with this final bar and in so doing close the whole circle [Vocal score: Act III, p. 231, last bar & Act I. p. 9, bars 1-3]. (Berg 1929)

Berg mentions several times how much he was concerned with introducing polytonality and 'enormous diversity' of musical-acoustic material (e.g. the first scene comprising a suite of older, stylized musical forms; the variations such as passacaglia, fugues, interludes, ariosos and song-like pieces; the sonata-form first movement followed by a fantasia and fugue on three themes, a slow movement (the *largo*), a scherzo and, finally, the 'Rondo marziale con introduzione') while aiming at a closed (ABA) structure in the

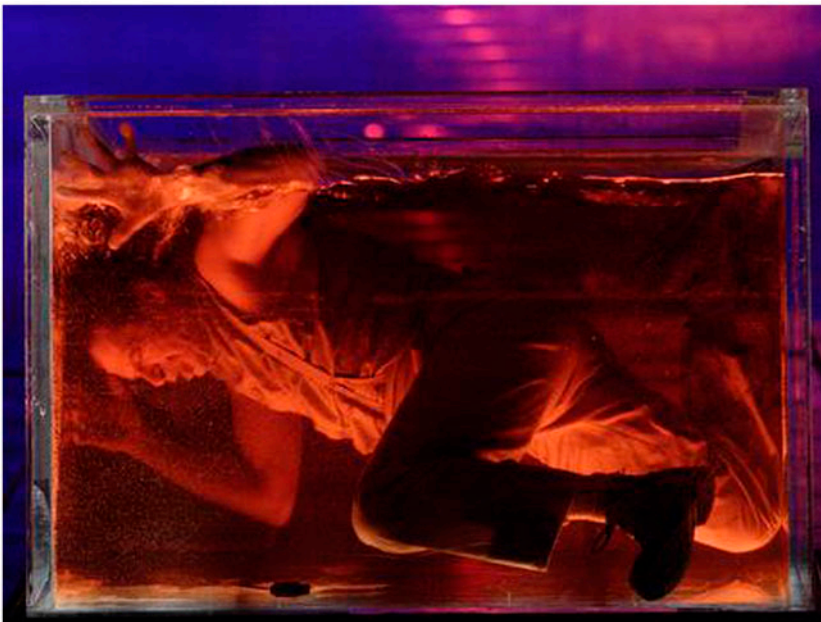


Figure 6. The drowned Wozzeck, Act III, Scene 4. Royal Opera House production, 2013. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

overall large-scale architecture of the opera, which he refers to as ‘symmetry of time’ (Berg 1929).<sup>4</sup>

Warner seeks to achieve the visual, architectural symmetry of his psychoanalytic reading of *Wozzeck* by letting the young boy begin and end the performance. There is no hobby horse, and the shouts of the other children’s taunts are rendered as whispered voices (from surround loudspeakers) that gradually mingle with Berg’s concluding dissonant, ‘quavering’ music, stretching ‘the very limits’ of D minor. The boy walks up to the water tank and looks at the floating *Wozzeck* for a long time, as if facing a strange apparition, then turns and looks at the audience, as if echoing Berg’s comment that this epilogue can be understood as ‘a confession of the author who now steps outside the dramatic action on the stage. Indeed, it is, as it were, an appeal to humanity through its representatives, the audience’ (Berg 1929).

The musical and visual impact of the final scenes is hard to describe since they are of course filled with emotional affect, and Warner’s visual symmetry does not resolve the implicit ‘perpetuum mobile movement’ of the music which hints at deferral, a deferral of transcendence much as his bird’s eye view mirror scenes ironically pointed to perspectival illusions earlier in the staging of this opera. One of the vexing issues that arrives with opera productions, I would argue, is the problem of scale; the dramatic and traumatic potential of the voice within the vast musical universe of the composer’s score creates inevitable problems for a spatial dramaturgy seeking to translate narrative forms of musical theatre into acting and stage design, and to confront what Nicholas Till has called the ‘pervasive metaphysics of subjectivity at work in operatic singing, which derives its potency from the interplay of interiority and transcendence’ (Till 2012, 186).

Warner resorts to psychological realism or naturalism in his dramaturgy, accompanied by the symbolism of his primary setting: bedroom and science laboratory. The neglected child and his paranoid illegitimate father constitute the psychoanalytic microcosm, but *Wozzeck*’s poverty and bare life are hardly examined in this production,



Figure 7. Boy (Sebastian Wright) and drowned *Wozzeck*, Act III, Scene 5. Royal Opera House production, 2013. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.

nor is Warner inclined to direct Mattila's characterization of female desire or her attraction to the Drum Major. The overwhelming spatial metaphor of the science lab soon becomes ineffective once we realize that neither the Captain nor the Doctor are given room to explore the *dispositif* of biopolitics or the changing conditions of what qualifies as life or the unaffordable morality of *Wir arme Leut* ('wretched folks like us'). The musical complexity of Berg's score, thus, tends to be extenuated into the vast space of the Royal Opera House production of *Wozzeck*. It evaporates, so to speak, without being given the contours of the subjects' links, or their organism's connection, to the social and the symbolic. How does *Wozzeck* see himself as a case study, a 'specimen', and how are we to read the Doctor's experiments? The huge laboratory with its moving glass tanks is an overpowering clinical metaphor that lacks any specificity. If this is a lab where nature and human beings are dissected, examined and processed, we are not shown why or how, and thus Warner's world cannot actually tell us anything about biotechnologies and ethics, even as it shies away from the more rigorous formal abstractions that mark Robert Wilson's opera productions.

In regard to the *Raumwirkung*, Wilson's staging of Büchner's *Woyzeck*, first presented in Copenhagen (2000) before coming to London's Barbican Theatre (2001), eschews any approach to psychological interpretation, in keeping with the formalist painterly visual architectures of his own proscenium productions (e.g. *Einstein on the Beach*, *the CIVIL warS*). His take on Büchner's play uses music by Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan, seemingly inspired by Brechtian epic theatre (and Kurt Weill's music), but his visual *mise en scène* is futuristic, filled with geometrically patterned gauze screens, strange objects and unreal colour tonalities in the lighting. Wilson isolates and abstracts *Woyzeck* as a lonely outsider (as he depicted Medea in his staging of Euripides' drama, standing still for almost the whole length of the performance), drawing attention to a kind of pure immanence of the individual bare life seen against



Figure 8. Jens Jørn Spottag and Kaya Brüel in Wilson's *Woyzeck* at Betty Nansen Teatret, 2000. Photo: Eric Hansen.

the vast and intimidating empty landscape. As so often in Wilson's work, the light is like an actor, modulating dense atmospheres and focusing attention on the gestures of the performers (their faces painted white) who are seen as black, silhouetted shapes against the horizon. While Wilson generally does not delve into political imagery or symbolism, his design for *Woyzeck* alludes to the force of alienation pregnant in the barren landscape. His spatial vision tends to work through a series of formal counterpoints between visual and aural score; the choreography of the actors' movement is so stylized (and often slowed down) that we become aware of the formal parallelism (or juxtaposition) of the gestural and the musical structures. Wilson, one might argue, constructs a spatial score that gives more room for sound (and gestural vocabulary) to expand.

The *Raumwirkung* of Warner's staging, in contrast, is largely owed to the overwhelmingly large presence of the white-tiled science lab and its connotations of scientific experiments. It makes the gestural presence shrink, almost dwarfing the aural space and its resonances in our imagination. And in modern opera and music theatre (after Wagner), we come prepared to work through the contrapuntal: music can be essentially gestural without needing visual illustration. Whereas Elder's conducting in *Wozzeck* is superbly sensitive to the complex orchestral arrangements and the *Sprechgesang* in Berg's score, Warner's spatial dramaturgy relies to a large extent on the tripartite segmentation of lab, domestic space (Marie) and backstage mirror projection. It is a visually impressive design, but it does not allow for any transformational possibilities and changes of location or visual atmosphere, which might be considered commonplace on grand opera stages.

In this respect, Warner's interpretation of Berg's score remains visually too static and cramped as the white cuboid laboratory cannot 'move' to the stereophonic and cinematic qualities of Berg's highly diversified musical score. The scale of large proscenium stages might in fact be a hindrance to experimentation with visual prisms and polyphonies, multimedia performance and aural choreographies. Some contemporary directors, including Robert Lepage, Katie Mitchell and Romeo Castellucci (who staged Dante's *La Divina Commedia* with his company Societas Raffaello Sanzio) work in



Figure 9. The killing scene in Wilson's *Woyzeck* at Betty Nansen Teatret, 2000. Photo: Eric Hansen.

non-conventional spaces to great effect. Composer Heiner Goebbels recently mounted his extraordinary audio-visual installation *Stifters Dinge* at Ambika P3, a former concrete-testing facility near Baker Street (London), opening up the workings of his electro-acoustic machines to audiences to walk around them and listen in very close proximity (Birringer 2012).

Mitchell's work is well known for her creation of live film-in-the-theatre, staging cinematic processes and analogue/digital sound production which invite a whole new way of looking/listening to compositional enactment, on both direct and reflective, meta-theatrical levels. Diverse contrasting angles or interpellations open up; actors mingle with technicians onstage, exposing the *dispositif* of production and the prototyping of the filmic-choreographic object.<sup>5</sup> In her recent production of *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino* (based on a script by Douglas Crimp adapted from Euripides' *The Phoenician Women*) for the Hamburg Schauspielhaus, she invites her audiences to a television studio, Studio Hamburg-Atelier A 9/10, and develops a site-specific dramaturgy for a chorus of unnamed women dressed in black who interrogate various protagonists of Greek tragedy (Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon, Antigone, Polyneices, Eteocles, et al.) in a crumbling mansion where plants and weeds are growing. The spatial impact of the two-storey mansion is paradoxical, as it seems to connote both an aristocratic palace undergoing a process of re-wilding, and a prison or asylum. The architecture is a complex set for a dark horror story that is enacted like a film noir without the film (but with continuous sonic references to the horror genre), giving ample space to the different voices of the actors from the House of Oedipus who are forced to retell (repeatedly) their deeds. Sometimes whole scenes of this imaginary war tribunal or chamber for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission rewind and are played backwards, while forensic evidence of their crimes is brought on and a few scarce video projections, in the corner of the room or under the staircase, accompany the confessions of the prisoners.

I mention Mitchell's staging technique because it is symptomatic of new developments in contemporary hybrid music/dance/film performance not too shy to disassemble



Figure 10. The chorus of women in *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, directed by Katie Mitchell, Schauspielhaus Hamburg, 2013. Photo: Stephen Cummiskey.

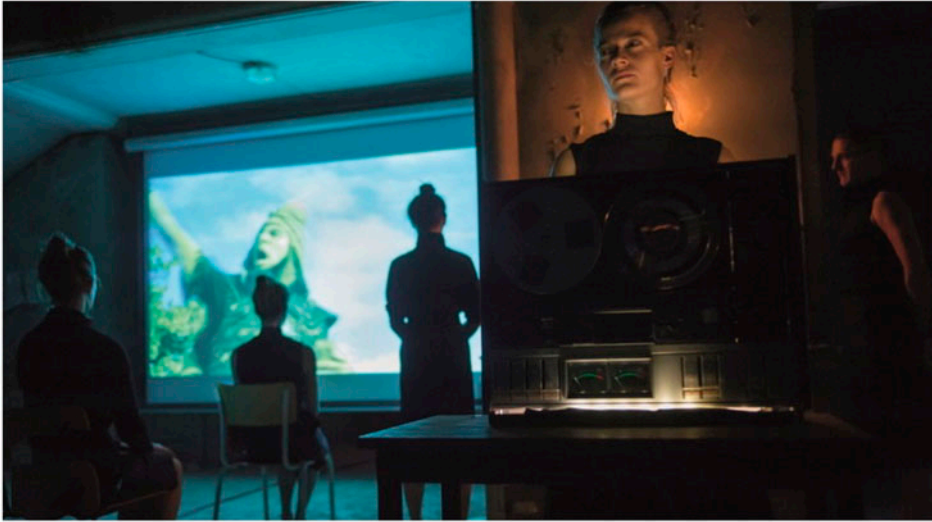


Figure 11. A scene from *Alles Weitere kennen Sie aus dem Kino*, directed by Katie Mitchell, Schauspielhaus Hamburg, 2013. Photo: Stephen Cummiskey.

the conventional stage apparatus, breaking up the score and self-reflexively displaying processes of audio-visual composition in real time that reveal how architectures and vocabularies of sound/movement are constructed, while themes of the politics and ethics of military conflict or ethnic cleansing are teased out in changing scenarios of interrogation. Mitchell is able to draw the audience into the Kafkaesque castle of these interrogating scenes, and her production succeeds in translating the dramaturgical concepts into spatial polyphony. The contemporary performance theatre thus also recasts its relationship to audiences, inviting new perceptual, critical engagements with the voices of reason, morality and legality, unwritten laws, passion and desire, lies and justifications in the (penal) colonies of our social/social media systems. South African artist William Kentridge, in my view, conveys a similarly gripping commitment to the revelatory power of historical consciousness – the first of his animated films that I once saw in New York was titled *The History of the Main Complaint* and dramatized a story of violent repression and memory, guilt and forgetting in his country – and uses the transformation of drawing (for projection) as a spatial medium of temporal movement evoking the oppressive rhythms of socio-economic polarization.

Kentridge has collaborated with Johannesburg's Handspring Puppet Company to create a stunning version, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, of Büchner's drama transposed into 1950s South Africa in a multimedia composition with animated film, music and hand-carved puppets. The theatre, in this respect, inevitably provides – or could provide – access to historical case studies (as Büchner did in *Woyzeck* and *Danton's Death*) due to its extraordinary polyphonic, transdisciplinary modalities. The theatre, to use Alban Berg's phrase of stepping 'outside the dramatic action on the stage' to make 'an appeal to humanity through its representatives, the audience', can bring us face to face with incomplete time, scarcity and chaos, with time-scapes of our failing and drowning in unjust and traumatic social experiences.

## Notes

1. The German term *Raumpartitur* (spatial score) has been used provocatively by video artist and designer Penelope Wehrli to refer to spatial composition and the translation of acoustic/musical ideas into scenographic *dispositifs*, exemplified by Wehrli's extraordinary rendering of *camera\_orfeo* (derived from Monteverdi's opera) as a visual multimedia installation in the vast hall of the Hellerau Festspielhaus (2010). For her theories of spatial scores, see *raum partituren* (2010), and her website <http://www.aether1.org>. In the history of German aesthetics, Alois Riegl's *Raumwirkung* refers to the parallelism between *Tiefraum* (deep space) and *Empfindung* (sensation), with which he sought to capture the connections between material arrangements, perceptual functions and psychological states (Riegl 1908). This has been taken up recently in dance and cognitive science research focusing on new insights into kinaesthetic empathy (Reynolds and Reason 2012).
2. This place is accursed!  
See how the mist is trailing over the grass there –  
where the toadstools are springing up.  
Each evening there rolls a head.  
Someone once picked it up, thought it was a  
hedgehog. Three days and three nights  
passed by, then he lay on a bed of sawdust.  
  
[Wozzeck, I.2, trans. Richard Stokes, Chandos Records, 2003.]
3. Frightened, Marie? And you so pious? (*laughing*)  
And good! And faithful!  
(*pulls her down again on to the seat*)  
(*bends over her in deadly earnest*)  
What sweet lips you have, Marie!  
(*kisses her*)  
I'd forfeit heaven and earth, even paradise, if I  
could forever kiss you so! But no, I must not! You're  
trembling?  
  
[Wozzeck, III.2, my own translation].
4. References to the vocal score represent excerpts from *Wozzeck* performed in the course of the lecture. First published in German in Redlich 1957, 311–327.
5. Analysing current experimentations by several contemporary dance companies and choreographers to present and document choreographic scores and movement composition, James Leach has written a provocative essay on 'Choreographic Objects: Contemporary Dance, Digital Creations and Prototyping Social Visibility' (Leach 2013). See also Birringer 2013.

## Notes on contributor

Johannes Birringer is a choreographer and media artist. As artistic director of the Houston-based AlienNation Co. ([www.aliennationcompany.com](http://www.aliennationcompany.com)), he has created numerous dance-theatre works, video installations and digital projects in collaboration with artists in Europe, the Americas, China and Japan. His recent production, the digital oratorio *Corpo, Carne e Espírito*, premiered in Brazil at the FIT Theatre Festival in 2008, and the interactive dancework *Suna no Onna* was featured at festivals in London. He is founder of Interaktionslabor Göttelborn in Germany (<http://interaktionslabor.de>) and director of DAP-Lab at Brunel University, London, where he is Professor of Performance Technologies. The Lab's mixed-reality installation *UKIYO* went on European tour in June 2010; the dance opera, for the time being, created as an homage to the 1913 futurist Russian opera 'Victory over the Sun', premiered at Sadler's Wells in 2014. His books include *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism* (1989), *Media and Performance* (1998), *Performance on the Edge* (2000), *Performance, Technology and Science* (2009), and two edited volumes on *Dance and Cognition* (2005) and *Dance and Choreomania* (2011).



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