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Beyond *Regietheater*:

The Oper Frankfurt Behind the Curtain, 1979 - 2015

A Dissertation Presented

by

Cordelia Elizabeth Chenault

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in Partial Fulfillment of the

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This dissertation focuses on the Oper Frankfurt, a musical institution that has played an influential role in the development of operatic staging since the 1980s. Through an examination of productions staged at the house in two different periods (1979 – 1987 and 2010 – 2015), I pay particular attention to the ways in which these contemporary stagings contribute to a discourse about recent opera—particularly in Germany—and what has frequently been called *Regietheater*. This polemical term, often translated as “director’s theater,” connotes a provocative, theatrically experimental, even massively re-envisioned reading of an operatic work, propelled by a visionary stage director. Using a broad analytical approach that examines not only what David Levin has called the “performance text,” but also the specific creative context in Frankfurt, I question the utility of that term. Although charismatic directors like Hans Neuenfels and Ruth Berghaus are important within this history, my analyses make clear that production texts staged in Frankfurt since the 1980s exhibit a conception of authorship more multiplistic and collaborative than the director-centric notion taken for granted within music scholarship, the opera industry, and the media. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the staging trends visible in recent productions—even the most radical—are not necessarily coupled with a novel conceptual apparatus advanced by a willful director. As my analyses destabilize the relevance of the *Regietheater* label, other meaningful patterns emerge that I argue are more germane to comprehending developments in opera production since the late 20th century.

My study is divided into two parts that parallel the periods profiled at the opera house: the “Gielen Era” and the last five years of the present administration. The first portion introduces my multilayered methodology, then examines radical stagings of the 1980s. The second half explores productions of the last decade and considers authorial voice, venue, experimentation and aura. In conclusion, I draw attention beyond a simple notion of *Regietheater* to more productive questions about today’s stagings, thus revealing an expansion of the parameters that define the operatic genre.

**In Memory Of
Mary Elizabeth Chenault**

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Introduction

Let me proceed with my... perhaps most obvious point, namely the distinction between a critical and a literalist production. Often the distinction is geographic (Europe vs. the U.S.), but, as I indicated above, I suspect the space separating the worlds I have in mind is more conceptual. ...Many of the famously radical Wagner productions of the last twenty years - such as the Chéreau and Kupfer productions of the Ring - are works from the New Bayreuth, what we might term Wieland's Bayreuth, while some of the most famously conservative productions - such as Otto Schenk's 1989 production of the Ring at the Met - are clearly (indeed, explicitly) an allusion to the Old Bayreuth. ... It is no coincidence that the Old Bayreuth appears to be alive and well in New York. In recent years, the Met has established a reputation as a house resolutely opposed to innovative stagings.¹

-David Levin, 1997.

The idea for this dissertation was prompted by the fairly simple observation that the German opera industry has grown vibrant in recent decades, known particularly for radically re-envisioned stagings that are highly theatrical, critical, experimental, or provocative, and usually of operas nestled deeply in the operatic canon.² I had initially become aware of such productions during my own work as a singer, and as a graduate student in musicology, my interest in the

¹ David Levin, "Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9 (1997): 52.

² The success of German opera in the last three decades can be observed from a wide variety of sources: from the sheer numbers of new productions listed in the season schedules of German houses visible on *Operabase*, a website used by opera professionals to research business-related information about opera houses, their productions, and the singers and creative professionals involved in their productions. See <http://www.operabase.com/index.cgi?lang=en>. Further evidence in opera blogs such as *Parterre-Box* or industry publications like *Opera News* confirms the impression that German productions lead the industry stylistically.

matter was renewed as I began to delve more deeply into the scholarly field of opera studies. I became particularly curious about why so many of the most remarkable opera productions at that time seemed to come from Germany. Furthermore, I found myself particularly intrigued by German opera companies, which seemed to thrive at a time when American ones so often struggled, as well as by the number of provocative, re-envisioned productions on German stages. My impressions of the contrasting situation for opera production in the two countries have been echoed by David Levin, who in the late 1990s described precisely that rift between the highly traditional, naturalist operas productions common in the United States and more critical, experimental, stagings produced in Germany's leading houses.³ My own desire to better understand the contrasts between German and American companies eventually formed the foundation for this dissertation: three years of immersive research and collaborative work at Oper Frankfurt, the leading opera company in Frankfurt am Main, Germany from 2010 – 2012.

Prior to that time, my research questions had centered both on artistic matters involved in these “experimental” German productions and also the context and the means by which such work—which I believe has greatly influenced the global direction of opera production in recent years—could come into being. The more I observed the industry and read the academic literature, the more I became convinced that stagings produced in the 1980s at the Oper Frankfurt had played a major role in solidifying the present direction of the operatic field by regularly offering audiences reconceptualized versions of canonized operatic works as centerpieces of the company's repertoire season after season.

³ In the first two decades of the 21st century, the differences between the German industry and the US industry have gradually become less distinct, as productions influenced by the German style are increasingly produced around the globe. This development will be discussed at length in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

With that discovery, this dissertation was born, a project with a threefold goal. First and foremost, the project is a study of an artistic institution; I begin with discussion of how several noteworthy pieces produced at the Oper Frankfurt from 1979-1986, years during which the house was led by intendant and conductor Michael Gielen, were brought to the stage.⁴ Afterwards, I proceed to examine pieces staged at the same opera house under its present administration. Having looked at work from both periods, I will consider the productions of the two periods comparatively. As I pursue the question of how opera productions have changed in Frankfurt since the 1980s, my dissertation creates a profile of the Oper Frankfurt over three decades, casting the institution as an influential entity within international opera houses at the forefront of today's industry. Second, in studying the recent history of this particular company, whose radical productions have been instrumental to the development of the present direction of the operatic field, my intention is not only to understand the workings of this house, but also to provide a deeper understanding of the trend towards experimental stagings in the modern opera industry often referred to as *Regietheater*. In service to that goal, I identify a variety of ways in which opera productions today prioritize innovation, and discuss reasons for that trend. Third, I prioritize a final objective within these two tasks: I aim to analyze opera stagings more thoroughly and contextually by incorporating a multiplicity of perspectives on the productions. I utilize multiple research methods and a broadened analytical apparatus in order to intentionally widen the view of the analytical object, which I define as the events of the production period as well as the staged performance. With that choice, I attempt to understand Oper Frankfurt productions not only as a critical spectator, but also with an awareness of the concrete events that

⁴ Henceforth I will refer to this period as “the Gielen Era,” as it is colloquially known.

shaped their creation, and the idiosyncratic perspectives supplied by those who brought these new readings to the stage.

Concretely, this study will first discuss a small handful of important productions staged at the Oper Frankfurt during the Gielen Era, then turn to a comparable set produced in the last five years. The six chapters of this dissertation will address not only artistic factors of the productions in performance, but moreover, they will focus on the myriad creative and administrative decisions that brought these pieces to the stage and profile some of the noteworthy individuals involved. Of course, socio-historical matters also influence the trajectory and development of how practical matters unfold, and those will also be addressed in my work. It would be an oversight to ignore the importance of factors such as Germany's longstanding history of radical theater, the struggles between the political left and right within West Germany during the decade preceding the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the growth of critical theory during this period (which was not only confined to the academy, but also affected artistic practice,) the local context and history of Frankfurt am Main, and the ongoing infrastructural adjustments and fiscal compromises made within the unified country after the former GDR (East Germany) and FRG (West Germany) were merged back into a single nation after the *Wende*.

The inclusion of matters related to the creation of a staging alongside analysis of the performed production makes clearer the links between social and political developments and the artistic shifts of the period. Discussion of the production period makes it easier to identify the concrete ways in which broader cultural changes influence practical decision-making within the production of these experimental stagings. Moreover, informed by this deeply contextual approach to analysis that addresses both cultural-political history and production-related matters,

my analyses ultimately provide a deeper understanding of radical productions as I identify the innovative aspects of the Oper Frankfurt's approach to opera staging in the last three decades. Relatedly, this detailed case study identifies the ways in which approaches to opera production at this leading international opera house have grown both more and less risqué over the course of the past two decades in ways that can also be observed within other international houses.

The topic of radical productions in the late 20th- and 21st centuries can scarcely be addressed without simultaneously discussing the matter of *Regietheater*. A variety of different associations accompany the term, all of which are loosely linked to recent stagings considered provocative, innovative, or experimental, and associated with the idea of a star stage director. *Regietheater* is thematized polemically, and its discussion permeates the discourse on contemporary opera productions, found universally in the scholarly, industry, critical, and popular discussions of today's craft. At least in part, my study of the Oper Frankfurt aims to unpack the complicated layers of meaning implicit in term and its relationship to the direction of stagings since the late 1970s, both in Frankfurt and beyond. As I will discuss at length in Chapter Six, the topic of *Regietheater* has become persistent and unavoidable to the extent that conversations about opera—be they scholarly, critical, or popular—exhibit a tendency to emphasize directors and their uncommon visions for canonized works. The theme has assumed centrality within what German musicologist Stephen Mösch has called the “endless discussion of tradition and renewal in *Musiktheater*” in ways that reveal anxiety over the potential destruction of the canon, and such discussions have become so pervasive that many other interesting points of analysis are overlooked or omitted—topics like the juxtaposition of contemporary and historical aesthetics, a growing emphasis on stage technologies, the increasing utilization of

unconventionally configured performance venues, or the expansion of the operatic repertory, all of which arise in the course of my production analyses in Chapters Two–Five.⁵ Understanding of the term itself is largely responsible for the problem, as it is usually translated as “director’s theater.” By emphasizing the figure of the stage director, the terms of discussion are automatically shifted onto the individuals seen as responsible for the productions. Yet assigning sole authority for a staging to the stage director is false in any operatic context, as my analyses will demonstrate, and such ascriptions will be revealed as particularly problematic with respect to the infamous Frankfurt productions of the 1980s.

The word *Regietheater* has been used for such assorted purposes in such a wide variety of contexts that the meaning of the term has become vague and riddled with complexity. Much of the imprecision and negativity comes from popular and press responses to contemporary productions, as can be observed in fan blogs or ezines like *Parterre-Box*, or in the critical reception, found in feuilleton pages or industry periodicals like *Opera News*. Such publications often use the word *Regietheater* synonymously with “Eurotrash;” both terms are used interchangeably by critics and opponents to refer to productions that sacrifice or denigrate what they believe to be the intentions or nobility of the operatic work in order to advance novel ideas or some (implicitly inappropriate or “vulgar”) directorial agenda.⁶ Although such usage is common enough to color its usage in the more serious scholarly contexts, more useful meanings

⁵ Stephan Mösch, “Störung, Verstörung, Zerstörung,” in *Angst vor der Zerstörung: Der Meister Künste zwischen Archiv und Erneuerung*, eds. Sollich, Risi, Reus, Jöris. *Theater der Zeit* 52. (Berlin: Verlag Theater Der Zeit, 2008), 218

⁶ For examples, see Anne Midgette, “The Age of the Director (V): Bring On the Eurotrash!” <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=19168>; or “Tosca” at the Séance,” Patrick Clement James | 12:53 pm | Jan 21, 2016. *Parterre Box*: <http://parterre.com/2016/01/21/tosca-at-the-seance/#more-43693>

of the term exist. While I would generally encourage discussions of contemporary opera production to move beyond Regietheater altogether, I do feel that the term itself can be used usefully to refer to stagings constructed in a way that approaches canonized operatic works from a critical perspective. As musicologist Joy Calico has recently discussed, and as will be discussed extensively in Chapters Three and Six, these sorts of productions often draw upon the Brechtian-style dialectics in the style of *epic theater* in order to educate and provoke thought about particular themes inherent within (or raised by) that operatic text.⁷ When I espouse the term within my own analyses, it is with this meaning.

In addition to the emphasis I place on the need to advance musicology beyond the problematics of most current discussions of *Regietheater*, it should also be noted that I have undertaken methodological approaches in this study uncommon for opera studies. The analyses featured in the latter half of this dissertation have been heavily influenced by my unusual position of having been immersed in production work at the company, first as a dramaturgical assistant on the creative team for the Nemirova *Ring* cycle (discussed in Chapter Four), and later in stage management. I was offered this opportunity by Malte Krasting, one of the company's dramaturgs, after he learned of my interest in the Berghaus *Ring*; I was first allowed to attend rehearsals of the Nemirova *Rheingold*, then later invited to act as Krasting's dramaturgical assistant on *Die Walküre*, a post that was later extended for the remainder of the Nemirova cycle. Those experiences would later lead to a second job in stage management working with supertitles for the company's broader repertoire. This work alongside the cast, directors, designers, and administrators provided me with an uncommon awareness of issues that are

⁷ Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008)

normally quite private. Without such an intimate level of access, many of the factors presented in this dissertation would have been unknowable.

Relatedly, it is important to recognize that my perspective on the decisions made and their import is by no means a neutral one; the understandings and analysis to be presented in the later chapters are influenced by my working relationships with creative professionals at the house and heavily informed by my own experiences of collaboration on the daily tasks and decisions involved in preparing a staging. Additionally, for the productions in which I took part in only a certain aspect of the preparation (such as the *Luci mie traditrici* featured in Chapter Five, on which I worked in stage management in only the final days of production and performance), or in which I did not directly participate (the Berghaus *Ring* in Chapter Three, or the Neuenfels *Aida* or Berghaus *Trojaner* in Chapter Two,) I relied on oral-history style interviews as an important source of information. Although the perspectives I rely upon here are not my own, the information revealed in those interviews is also not neutral due to my own involvement in the interview process. As such, these dialogues come with similar advantages and disadvantages to the ideas I acquired through my own work experiences as a participant-observer at the opera house.

Chapter One provides a largely theoretical discussion of the scholarly issues and methodological decisions that have prompted my approach. As explained above, since the core of my dissertation is comprised of analyses of opera productions that investigate both artistic results and the process of their creation, and also due to my partial reliance on research methods not customarily utilized within opera studies, this first chapter provides a theoretical framework from which to understand my approach. Analyses of Oper Frankfurt productions begin in

Chapter Two, which begins with a brief overview of Frankfurt am Main's artistic history and the basic socio-political context from which the artistic developments of the Gielen Era can be understood. This section also introduces the key administrative and creative figures within Frankfurt in the 1980s, who pivoted the company away from pleasing the conservative local bourgeoisie and instead began to advance experimental—even provocative—ideas and artistic techniques. The chapter centers largely on the 1981 staging of Verdi's *Aida* (dir. Hans Neuenfels,) accompanied by additional discussion of the 1983 production of Berlioz's *Le Troyens* (dir. Ruth Berghaus) and the 1979 setting of Janáček's *Januŕa* (dir. Alfred Kirchner). By profiling Neuenfels and also introducing two important additional figures, director/administrator Pamela Rosenberg and dramaturg Klaus Zehelein, this chapter lays the groundwork for assertions about this period's long-term importance within the larger global evolution of stylistic trends in opera production of the last quarter century. Not only was the work of these three figures important to the pieces profiled within this chapter, but their careers grew tremendously on an international level in the years that followed, which expanded their influence far beyond Germany's Rhein-Main region.

Chapter Three continues the discussion of the Gielen Era as it turns to a larger scale production, the 1985 – 1987 version of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* staged by the East German director Ruth Berghaus. Stagings created under Berghaus's direction took the company in provocative new theatrical directions, although they engage political issues less controversially than the Neuenfels productions. Berghaus's contributions are especially important within the context of theatrical history, and these productions cement Gielen-Era Frankfurt within the lineage of the twentieth-century musico-theatrical avant-garde. In addition,

her frequent appearance as a stage director in 1980s Frankfurt makes her work an important stylistic anchor for the company, and her approach to staging a recurrent methodology for production work in the period. Finally, her approach raises again the subject of the *Regietheater* discourse: As another “star director” staging opera in radical ways, Berghaus seems to illustrate a prime example of radical productions led by a strong-minded authorial director in her *Ring* productions influenced by Brechtian *Epic Theater*, Absurdism, and the symbolic use of gesture. At the same time, however, her collectively oriented approach to several aspects of the staging process calls into question the notion that the *Regisseur/in* (director) can be considered the unique author of the performance text.

Following Chapter Three is a brief section entitled “Interlude,” which presents the major historical and political events influencing the Oper Frankfurt at the conclusion of the Gielen Era. As Gielen left the company, a shift in the city’s political leadership occurred, which led to the redistribution of city arts funding to the opera’s disadvantage. This historical segment serves as a transition to the second, more contemporary half of this dissertation as it explains how the political shifts of the late 1980s and early ’90s caused organizational adjustments within the company, including the shift from what is known as a *Repertoire* season structure to a stricter *Stagione* format. The explanation of these functional differences between the company in the 1980s and the house under the present artistic administration sets the stage for Chapter Four. The first of two chapters to analyze Oper Frankfurt stagings of the present era, this installment examines the company’s newest productions of Wagner’s *Ring*, which was led by director Vera Nemirova and performed from 2010-2012. In particular, this chapter discusses the six-week rehearsal period of the 2011 *Siegfried* as it addresses features of the staged production, practical

matters encountered during rehearsals, and the organization of the creative process. Important here is that the unusually multiplistic analytical approach I undertake was enabled by my own role as a dramaturgical collaborator. The high level of detail revealed in my presentation of the preparations for the opera *Siegfried* also allows for discussion of administrative goals and the priorities for mainstage productions, of which the cycle offers a fairly typical example.

Chapter Five shifts the analytical lens away from the Oper Frankfurt mainstage as it focuses on the company's contrasting approach to stagings of a more experimental nature, most of which are performed at a secondary performance space known as the Bockenheimer Depot. Foregrounded in this chapter is the 2011 staging of Sciarrino's *Luci mie Traditrici*, (dir. Christian Pade) an excellent representative of the contemporary operas often presented in this more intimate space, a former railway station far removed from the venues more traditionally used for opera. This production can be taken as radical both because of the musical material and the unusual ways in which the production interacts with its nontraditional performance space to create meaning, and with that, projects a very different performance "aura" (to borrow Benjamin's term) than productions performed on the mainstage. Interestingly, the company's choice to physically separate its repertoire into two different performance spaces on the basis of theatrical style also foregrounds the fact that differing strains within contemporary operatic production can be identified, and furthermore, that the technique of channeling the most experimental work to a secondary venue is an increasingly common technique within the industry. In the case of the Oper Frankfurt, the addition of a complementary, contrasting theater run by the same company offers a dualistic approach to incorporating a wider range of artistic styles: the obvious differences in the construction and history of the spaces allows the company

increased freedom to mount productions of a more radical nature at the Depot, while the company can simultaneously continue to present opera in a traditional format on the mainstage.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation as I compare the approaches to creating experimental productions within the two distinct historical periods at the Oper Frankfurt, based on observations already enumerated in the preceding chapters about each period. I particularly focus on the present-day manifestations of the progressive minded motivation that underlies such experimentalism, and I discuss the historical precursors of that mindset in the Modernist artistic movement of the early twentieth century as well as its relationship to notions of German cultural identity traceable as far back as the late eighteenth century. In further exploration of a major theme that permeates the entirety of this dissertation, I explore various connotations of what can be meant when discussing experimental, radical, or progressive opera, and the historical origins for the growth in opera productions that fit that characterization. I also discuss more deeply the context of Frankfurt am Main in the 1980s as I explain how this local setting was conducive to the continued growth of novel, highly critical opera production styles. This focus on the local context is followed by discussions of the careers of two key Gielen Era figures beyond Frankfurt, during time spent in Berlin and San Francisco, and in so doing, these arguments eventually turn the discussion to the notion of *Regietheater*, its history, and its relevance to work being produced today, both in and beyond Frankfurt.

This chapter concludes my dissertation with an exploration of the experimental-minded stylistic, theatrical, musical, and even political developments that have become increasingly commonplace within contemporary opera productions over the course of the last three decades. Those observations lead me to question the utility of the *Regietheater* discourse as I direct

attention to entirely separate patterns observed within the prior chapters about opera production in the present day, matters that seem more fruitful for illuminating trends in the contemporary industry. Following this ending to my written prose, I provide four appendices, transcriptions of oral history interviews undertaken with Alan Barnes, Malte Krasting, David Levin, and Pamela Rosenberg, all of whom worked at Oper Frankfurt in a variety of differing capacities between 1979 and 2012. Viewed as a collection, the dialogues recorded here will paint a rich portrait of the opera house and the productions analyzed in this dissertation; the subjects have informed my understanding of the stagings discussed in this dissertation while also providing a basis for better understanding the opera company at the time of each opera's production.

Chapter One: Methodologies & Discourses

The examination of the Oper Frankfurt that I undertake in this dissertation is unusual in at least two ways. First, the project takes studies from several different scholarly fields as models; in addition to opera studies and musicology, important influences come from anthropology, ethnomusicology, performance studies, theater, and philosophy. Second, my research methodology integrates historical and archival materials, participant-observer research, and oral history style interviews; together, these comprise a hybrid approach that seems fitting, given my topic's intersection with several different disciplinary areas. Before I begin direct analysis of Oper Frankfurt productions in Chapter Two, this first chapter will clarify the components of the scholarly context from which I have compiled this amalgam approach.

The introduction has indicated that in two significant respects, my research methodologies differ from the approaches traditionally used by musicologists, particularly those who work in opera studies. First, I worked on-site at the Oper Frankfurt from 2010-2012 as a dramaturgical assistant, which enabled me to participate in the creation of several productions as I became acquainted with the company firsthand. Second, I embarked on a series of oral history style interviews with current and former employees of the company. Although these two research techniques are seldom used in opera studies or musicology, their combination with traditional archival research proved extraordinarily useful towards one of this dissertation's major goals: to

incorporate an analytical apparatus that addresses an opera staging within its creative context. More specifically, this means including a detailed investigation of the production period in addition to analysis of a staged performance.

Analysis undertaken in this spirit can reveal increased detail about the production as an event as it also produces a more multilayered understanding of a staging. Yet such a detailed, contextual discussion demands analytical consideration of more aspects than can be revealed solely by a spectator's perception of the production in performance. Knowledge from a multiplicity of perspectives must be recounted to produce such a rich analysis; to achieve this, research into multiple perspectives, from various individuals involved in the staging, must take place. Furthermore, if the artistic event itself is to be expanded beyond a spectator's point of view, it also follows that the definition of the analytical object should be broadened: it seems logical to undertake an expanded analysis that also considers the how the production was brought to the stage, the preparatory weeks known to the theatrical community as "the production period." In order to enable such a broad analytical apparatus, appropriate research methods need to be found to provide the expanded content necessary for discussion of the additional elements.

Research methods atypical for musicology have proved invaluable research tools for my attempts to produce analyses that incorporate discussion of the many "backstage" matters involved in preparing a production for the stage. Certainly, a great deal of information used for discussions of the production period emerged through on-site research I accomplished while immersed in work with the company. In addition to that, however, I also undertook oral history style interviews with a number of figures from the company, which further enriched the discussions and provided new perspectives on the house and its stagings. In fact, information

gained in oral history-style interviews provided me some of the most useful insights about the Oper Frankfurt stagings. Especially with respect to Gielen Era productions, for which most of the original rehearsal records had long since been purged, participant accounts were invaluable.

I began to consider the possibility of oral history techniques in earnest while grappling with some of the frustrations of archival research, and the approach proved extraordinarily fruitful in light of the missing documents. I was fortunate to meet dance scholar Jeff Friedman precisely at this point in my research, who happened to be working in Frankfurt during my first months there. Friedman is an oral historian working in the arts, and he trained me personally in the method. In several weeks of in-depth study, Friedman and I reviewed the theory and the practice of conducting oral history interviews, during which time I was able to effectively shape a methodology for gaining information about the earlier pieces through a number of sources still working at the opera house. When approached conscientiously, oral histories can prove invaluable to research on contemporary historical topics, particularly within creative artistic fields. As art historian Richard Cándida Smith has surmised:

Practices of art institutions... have been powerfully affected by government policies (and cash, or lack of it), even policies ostensibly having nothing to do with art. A complex interaction of bureaucratic practice, funding sources, employment patterns, intellectual and aesthetic preferences, and individual talent led to particular patterns... A study of ideology and culture expressed in interviews uncovers the various, sometimes contradictory, self-images that artists might adopt at given times and places during this century. Beyond biographical and sociological details, interviews provide clues to how creative practice mediates subjectivity, formal requirements, and collective dispositions. Oral history in the fine arts can help unravel the ways aesthetic choices, shaped by personal and institutional self-images, interacted with other aspects of society to create our cultural inheritance.⁸

⁸ Richard Cándida Smith, "Modern Art and Oral History in the United States: A Revolution Remembered," in *Journal of American History* (Sept 1991), 606.

Oral History as Research Methodology

Interviews in this style offer distinct benefits for those writing contemporary histories, particularly in artistic disciplines. As described by Donald Ritchie, good oral history interviews “consist of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format.”⁹ Recordings are transcribed... and placed in a library or archives.” Dialogue between interviewer and interviewee comprises the core of the process, as critical questioning from a skilled interviewer can provide increased accountability for the accuracy of the subject’s storytelling; this format encourages the subject to offer accounts consistent with established matters of historical record. As a result, sound recordings that lack such dialogue are not considered sufficient as oral history.¹⁰ The accepted oral history format therefore ensures a certain degree of support for historical facts. Pursued in this way, oral history supports the writing of traditional diachronic histories despite the fact that evidence for those narratives is compiled from detailed, synchronic moments recalled and ascribed meaning by individuals.¹¹

According to Daniel Bertaux,

stories about the past are told from the present, from a situation which may have changed over the years and defines a new relationship to the past. It is this

⁹ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

¹⁰ For further definitions, see Charles T. Morrisey, “Beyond Oral Evidence: Speaking (Con)structively about Oral History,” *Archival issues* 17 (Nov 2, 1992), 89 – 94.

¹¹ This observation should not be taken to imply that diachronic histories are superior to synchronic studies. In fact, the diachronic view of history has been problematized on the basis of troublesome reliance on binary distinctions of subject/object, continuity/discontinuity, similarity/dissimilarity. See Richard K. Emmerson, “Dramatic History: On the Diachronic and Synchronic in the Study of Early English Drama,” in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Winter 2005 35(1): 39-66.

relationship which underlies the whole story. ...Telling a story about the past is a way of expressing indirectly a meaning about the present.¹²

Moreover, oral history also provides a way to record the voices of participants involved directly in historical events in order to support a fundamental assertion of the discipline: “that the individual indeed matters.”¹³ Oral history intentionally embraces specific, even personal, perspectives, which makes it particularly useful for research with contemporary figures before narratives about the recent past have been fully established. In 1773, Samuel Johnson argued for similar methods when attempting to write contemporary histories; he reasoned that “a man, by talking with those of different sides who were actors in (an event) and putting down all that he hears, may in time collect the materials of a good narrative.”¹⁴ Similarly, the value of considering individual experience has been emphasized by Donna Haraway, who has argued for the feminist-inspired inclusion of “situated knowledge”:

The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections... relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. ...but it is precisely in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational... inquiry rests.¹⁵

She continues,

Subjectivity is multidimensional; so therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is

¹² Daniel Bertaux, “Stories as Clues to Sociological Understanding: The Bakers of Paris,” in *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe*, ed. Paul Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 98.

¹³ Ritchie, 127.

¹⁴ Paul Thompson, “Britain Strikes Back: Two Hundred Years of ‘Oral History,’” *Oral History Association Newsletter* 15 (Summer 1981), 4-5.

¹⁵ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, 14, 3 (Autumn, 1988), (584.)

always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another.¹⁶

Like Johnson, Haraway indicates that individual perspectives (whose particular situation is acknowledged) can be “stitched together” as greater knowledges to create a revised version of objectivity. Although she does not argue for oral history, directly, her conception of knowledge is also premised on the necessity of considering many situated perspectives. Viewed in this way, oral history has the capacity create a holistic view of an event composed of many diverse positions.

Relatedly, Joan Scott also articulates a similar imperative in her arguments for the incorporation of experiential evidence:

The evidence of experience works as a foundation providing both a starting point and a conclusive kind of explanation, beyond which few questions can or need to be asked. And yet it is precisely the questions... that would enable us to historicize experience, and to reflect critically on the history we write about it, rather than to premise our history on it.¹⁷

In this passage, Scott, like Haraway and Johnson, takes experience-based evidence recounted by individual subjects as the starting place for historical work. Each of these authors indicate the required presence of an additional person—here, the oral historian—who records, reflects on, and synthesizes the experience-based accounts of the participants’ highly situated knowledge(s). This valuable evidence provides the material necessary for the historian to create thoughtful, critical histories that involve the events recounted.

¹⁶ Ibid, 586.

¹⁷ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, 4 (Summer 1991), 773 – 797, p. 790.

Not only do oral histories incorporate the perspectives of individuals, but importantly, they also offer the advantage of providing a greater inclusiveness—and therefore a perspective that is more true—by featuring a multiplicity of perspectives. This stems from the fact that strong oral histories rely on many sources. Not only does this arise because of collaborations of “scholar and subject” within an oral history interview, but also because of intentional inclusion of voices that have often been omitted from history. Voices of racial and ethnic minorities so often omitted from traditional histories have begun to be recorded by many oral historians, and feminist oral histories now strive to include perspectives of women in areas from which their perspectives have been omitted in the past.¹⁸ And even more generalized efforts at inclusivity benefit study results; including the voices of players from a variety of perspectives on an event allows for the creation of an exceptionally thorough picture. As oral historian Donald Richie explains: “Those at the center of events can well recount their own accomplishments, but those on the periphery are often better able to make comparisons between the principal actors.”¹⁹

Given that perspectives of individuals form the core of oral history, the discipline relies heavily on the process of memory, as it is only through recall that an interviewee’s stories can be extracted and preserved. Even with oral history gradually gaining scholarly acceptance among traditionally trained historians, the discipline sometimes still encounters skepticism based on the notion that memory is an unreliable source. Certainly, memory can be selective or self-serving, yet when the memories of individuals are viewed comparatively, both against the recollections of other individuals and alongside accepted documentary evidence, oral histories can serve to paint

¹⁸ Ritchie, 14.

¹⁹ Ritchie, 133.

a broader—and ultimately more accurate—picture of historical events. Abraham Lincoln’s official biographers, who distrusted the memories of many of the president’s colleagues, provide an interesting demonstration of the principle. Despite their exclusion of many accounts of Lincoln they considered “unsavory,” later historians eventually unearthed supplementary resources that corroborated “the stories that Lincoln’s protective secretaries chose to suppress.”²⁰ Even in worst-case scenarios, when oral sources assert flawed viewpoints in contradiction of clearly documentable fact, their voices provide useful information. They “may not tell you much about what Stalin was doing, but they are terribly useful in telling you about people’s minds.”²¹

The academic tendency is to substantiate with objective evidence, by which proponents mean “documents that remain the same over time even if interpretations of them shift.” Yet

despite the critique of memory.... oral history interviews can be counted as reliable or unreliable as other research sources. After all, no single piece of data of any sort should be trusted completely, and all sources need to be tested against other evidence. ...Scholars have accepted correspondence, diaries, and autobiographies as legitimate documentation, although their authors may be biased or incorrect. ...Oral history interviews are often conducted years after the event, when memories have grown imprecise, but they have the advantage of being conducted by a trained interviewer who can raise questions and challenge dubious answers.²²

To counteract the evidence gathered in oral histories from any such criticism, a strong interviewer is therefore charged to “seek out available material to substantiate both written and

²⁰ Michael Burlingame, ed. *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), xv – xviii.

²¹ Alexander Stille, “Prospecting for Truth in the Ore of Memory: Oral History is Gaining New Respect Through Insights into its Distortions,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2001.

²² Ritchie, 26 – 27.

oral evidence.²³ Indeed, a good deal of the work in oral history is left up to the historian, to “sort and sift,” to question and juxtapose reports with other sources. The American Historical Association has created guidelines outlining the professional responsibilities of interviewers, and it is largely accepted that when the recommendations are followed, evidence gained via interview can prove historically useful.

Oral History and the Arts

The general arguments in support of oral history summarized thus far apply to scholarship within many fields, including, of course the study of contemporary artistic subjects. But beyond those general arguments, the nature of music, theater, and performance makes the field particularly ripe for oral history work. Jeff Friedman’s work offers important hints to how oral history can prove especially useful in artistic disciplines. As a performer, his pieces—like those of the playwrights Eve Ensler (*The Vagina Monologues*), Moisés Kaufman (*The Laramie Project*), and composer Steve Reich (*Different Trains*)—are drawn from oral histories he has taken with contemporary figures. His creations are movement based, danced oral histories-turned-performance art, based on interviews taken as part of the San Francisco Bay Area LEGACY project, which archives life stories of many local dancers who would eventually succumb in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. For the creation of performance pieces by artists such as Friedman, oral histories are most obviously useful as inspirational fodder.

Arts research is also particularly fertile terrain for oral history, due to both the nature of the subjects and of creative work. Oral histories of artists can be remarkably revealing due to the

²³ Ritchie, 123.

subjects' highly practiced skills with expressive tasks (both linguistic and physical) that are fundamental to storytelling.²⁴ Although there could certainly be individual exceptions, I generally concur with Friedman's argument that "the dance-trained produce oral narratives of breath-taking sophistication" due to the tendency to incorporate gestures that arise from embodied knowledge. I would also add those trained in the highly kinesthetic fields of music and theater to this group. Drawing support from Lakoff and Johnson, Friedman explains that

concepts of language can be expanded to include movement and gesture. ... Precognitive experiences which involve embodied consciousness (near/far, up/down) provide the foundation for metaphorical cognitive schemas. These metaphors then channel communicative verbal language as expressions of embodied knowledge. My work has emerged from the assumption that holders of specialized embodied knowledge, such as dance community members, provide a research sample which supports expanded research in this area.²⁵

Friedman continues on to give further support borrowed from historian Alessandro Portelli. In Friedman's words, "the discourses of postmodernism suggest that production of history is a construction" that must be considered a situated "interpretation of what happened"

²⁴ Friedman, "Muscle Memory: Performing Embodied Knowledge," in *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection*, (New York: Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2002), 173.

²⁵ Friedman, 169 – 170.

rather than “what happened,” itself.²⁶ In short, the interpretations that emerge as evidence from both body language and words—including what Portelli terms the “lack of congruence” between a subject’s statements and what Rudolph Laban would call “shadow movements”—can reveal truths beyond the spoken assertions of the subject.²⁷ In such cases, the body of a practitioner becomes an interpreter of events, as well-- sometimes even expressing a different interpretation than the performer would consciously verbalize.

I argue that for theater and opera, it seems particularly appropriate and useful to pursue oral history interviews, as the performers and designers involved in these practical artistic disciplines are specialists already accustomed to linking linguistics and *habitus* in the highly physical combination of vocalized text, singing, and movement that comprises their daily creative work. Opera and theater professionals are highly aware of the physicality of their own particular work in the theater. Be they singer/actors or other creative personnel, performers or non-performers, music and theater professionals all perform highly trained, skilled tasks in the

²⁶ It is certainly not a new notion that a history is a *construction* of past events, and not just “what happened.” Leo Treitler, for example, discussed this idea several decades ago in “The Present as History.” In that article, he considers “what it is to understand something” to be “the intellectual act of ordering under general concepts... Historians have interpretive concepts that function in a similar way to organize events in patterns... but also that “placing events under general concepts is saying that the events may be understood in terms of the concept... but *not* that they *are* that concept.” See Leo Treitler, “The Present as History,” *Perspectives of New Music* 7 (2), Spring – Summer 1969, 12. Despite the numerous earlier articulations of this concept, I refer to Friedman’s version of arguments in this passage, as they are particularly related to performing oral history with performing artists as subjects. Friedman’s primary evidence for the constructed nature of knowledge is visible in the interviewee’s body, which reveals ingrained memories in subconscious gestures—a phenomenon that undoubtedly arises due to the deep-seated power of embodied knowledge.

²⁷ Friedman, 174, referring to *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 1-26. “Shadow movements” are secondary, often unintentional gestures and motions that indicate an emotional response.

theater and rehearsal hall during design, building, staging, and performance. Their memories of the event are inextricably linked to the physical work of making theater, which by definition makes meaning through the bodily interplay of movement, language, and other tasks. As subjects recall (consciously or subconsciously) their own “muscle memory” in their storytelling, interviews are bound to reveal in both words and gesture the verbalized and non-verbalized realities of their own experiences.²⁸ As such, interviews with creative subjects are often rich sources of verbal expression and physical gesticulation, and can produce especially vivid narratives. Such a wealth of material multiplies the possibilities for discerning meaning from their accounts.²⁹ Furthermore, the inclusion of information garnered from the accounts of practitioners seems fitting, even essential, for the arts. For performance disciplines like art, theater, dance, or music, whose creators necessarily pursue their craft through a physical practice, it is certainly important to take embodied knowledge into account alongside more intellectual explorations that most typically constitute analysis of performances.

In my activities as an oral history interviewer and also in my daily experiences as an immersed, on-site participant, the ethnographic research I undertook at the Oper Frankfurt has led me to include knowledge in this study more specifically situated in individual perspectives than the sources utilized by most opera scholars. A solid case can be made for the usefulness of such methods for evidence gathering, since these approaches allow a researcher to give voice to a

²⁸ Transcriptions of my interviews can be found at the end of this dissertation as Appendices A-D. When subjects gesticulated in interview, the gesture has been described and inserted in parentheses. One such example can be found in Appendix B, Alan Barnes Interview 1, page 369.

²⁹ This will be particularly useful in interviews also recorded on video. Incidentally, where subjects agreed, the oral history interviews undertaken as part of this dissertation were recorded (and have been archived) on both video and audio, and transcriptions account for gestures that seem to reveal added complexity within the subject’s account.

greater multiplicity of perspectives on an operatic production. The amount of knowledge provided by such research methods is increased exponentially as a wider range of vantage points are exposed, and for a researcher, such increased detail about a production is extraordinarily useful. The diversity of investigative tactics provided me a rich collection of diverse information about each production, a plethora of detail for analytical scrutiny. The advantages of such research warrant their usage within opera studies, especially when coupled with the issue that most production analyses address a limited perspective restricted to that of the spectator.

Nonetheless, the approach has brought complexities. Particularly with respect to the interviews, I was conscious of an ongoing need to simultaneously attempt two parallel tasks: first, to give voice and credence to the perspectives of interviewees, but second, to intentionally question their biases and motivations in order to avoid the uncritical acceptance of their assertions. As I processed interviews and began to work with the information they revealed, many hours also had to be dedicated to fact-checking matters of public record and to designing questions for subsequent interviews that would make a subject's personal priorities and individualized perspectives clear. Despite my strong desire to include the perspectives of creators in this study of their work, I have nonetheless tried to avoid purely embracing their perspectives at face value. Rather, I have attempted to include the subjects' opinions alongside my own analyses, in which I have tried to retain a healthy degree of scholarly skepticism.

Scholarly Influences

The high degree of focus I give to the context and preparation of the stagings discussed in this dissertation reveals an important goal that I prioritize as part of this project: to expand the

object of scholarly analysis. One of my aims is to examine opera productions through a broader lens; I define a staging not only as the artistic elements of the interpretation observable in a performance, but also the manner of preparation and the concerns of collaborators. My work treats the production process and the events within it as objects of scholarly scrutiny—not solely the stagings in their performed state on some particular day. Such analysis is essentially new for opera studies, but I believe that despite the aforementioned complexities, it will certainly prove useful for the field, as it reveals more deeply the context and motivations, and therefore may also prompt broader conclusions that link a production to its social and historical context, and the broader artistic movements of which it is a part.

Although such an expansion of the analytical object has not (to my knowledge) been attempted with respect to opera thus far, such an expansion of the scholarly object is not entirely unprecedented. In fact, it bears striking similarities to other strains of academic work. One immediate example is the branch of musicology engaged in “sketch studies,” which undertakes a similar task with respect to musical compositions. As Joseph Kerman clarified during the debates over such scholarship during the 1980s, “work on composers’ sketches and drafts is directed to an understanding of creation, creativity, or compositional process.”³⁰ No longer a controversial, this subset of musicological scholarship primarily examines compositional revisions of musical works by composers like Beethoven already deeply situated within the

³⁰ Joseph Kerman, “Sketch Studies,” *19th-Century Music* 6, no. 2 (1982): 178.

musical canon.³¹ Such work shares obvious similarities with mine. Firstly, in both my study and sketch studies, “emphasis is shifted” away from a sole emphasis on the studied research materials, shifting also “onto its methodology.”³² In so doing, the analytical object is expanded: not only is a particular composition (or production) examined, in its final state, but the process of its creation is also addressed, and transformations of the piece through adjustments and revision are acknowledged in the analysis. Secondly, my work shares with sketch studies a desire to broaden the scope and definition of the subject to be analyzed. Joseph Kerman has defended the presence and utility of sketch studies within musicology, and he has made a succinct argument for an expanded definition of analysis that also validates my approach: “if analysis is defined as narrowly as (Douglas) Johnson, the Schenkerians, and so many other analysts define it, neither sketches nor musicology nor anything else outside the bare notes on the page have any relevance to it.”³³ Sketch studies broaden the definition of the studied musical work by including sketches, not just the piece in its final state.³⁴ Likewise, my study here broadens the definition of an opera

³¹ For two examples, see Douglas Johnson, Alan Tyson, & Robert Winter, *The Beethoven Sketchbooks: History, Reconstruction, Inventory, No. 4* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), or Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: Studies in the Creative Process* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

³² Kerman, 178.

³³ *Ibid.*, 162. The context of this quote is somewhat different from Joseph Kerman’s polemic, “How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 2 (1980): 311-331. Nonetheless, in both articles, Kerman is similarly concerned with rethinking the utility of analysis as practiced, and what might better constitute it.

³⁴ Of course, sketch studies also differs from my work, in that it defines the piece as “the score.” Despite a similar valuation given to the creative process in both my work and sketch studies, this remains a fundamental difference between my work and that musicological subfield.

production to include not only its final performed incarnation, but also the process of creating the staging during the production period.³⁵

Scholars like Clemens Risi and David Levin, whose work intersects with opera studies, performances studies, and theater, have laid the scholarly groundwork most essential to my project.³⁶ Levin's 2007 monograph, *Unsettling Opera*, initiated a major shift within the field by taking individual stagings of operas long-entrenched in the operatic canon as his objects of study.³⁷ His contributions, which are in large part based on his own experiences as a dramaturg, have been field-changing within opera studies; Levin has convincingly challenged the typical musicological preoccupation with the operatic *Werktreue* as the sole object of analytical attention. He concretely reveals what he calls the "unsettled" nature of opera through analyses of

³⁵ Certainly, there is also a major difference between sketch studies and my approach: our respective attitudes towards the work. While sketch studies still takes the work as its central focus—but expands its margins—my dissertation takes what Levin has called the "performance text" of a production as my analytical object. Nonetheless, the parallel should be clear: My work also expands the definition of the analyzed piece, only in my case, the "piece" is a production, and I define it broadly in a way that also includes the preparations, revisions, and "sketched" versions of the staging that existed during the weeks leading up to the productions premiere, the point by which it had reached its (more or less) final state.

³⁶ A decade before Levin's *Unsettling Opera* was published, the critic Thomas Sutcliffe had already published a book devoted entirely to discussion of opera productions. His important book provided a survey of some of the most important radical stagings since 1970s, and was one of several texts that expanded the perspectives taken by opera studies within the 1990s. Nonetheless, despite Sutcliffe's detailed descriptions of many innovative productions, the book failed to advance theories for understanding and analyzing opera performances. By contrast, Levin's later monograph would provide similarly detailed descriptions of productions, but also provide a lens through which such productions can be analyzed—as "performance texts." See Thomas Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.)

³⁷ David Levin, *Unsettling Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.) Note also that the last chapter, which discusses a production of Alexander Zemlinsky's *Der König Kandaules*, provides an analysis of a non-canonized opera. The chapter, however, provides the same sort of insights as those examining productions of canonized operas.

a handful of recent, highly critical stagings, and in so doing, he demonstrates the importance of studying productions.³⁸ Above all, Levin advocates that analytical attention be given to what he terms “performance texts,” by which he means an opera production. Moreover, his introduction seems to argue precisely for the work I attempt in this dissertation with his assertion that “criticism and theory find an outlet in real life... in the pragmatics of work in an opera house.”³⁹

Levin has not been alone in this task. Similar contributions have also come from the German theater scholar Clemens Risi, whose work has also appeared in English scholarly publications of the last two decades; he regularly turns an analytical eye to performance matters.⁴⁰ A 2011 article by Risi sums up his similar commitment to alternative lenses through which to study opera performances, and justifies the need to expand such work: “In most cases, the unique, actual performance is not considered a worthy object of analysis.” Like Levin, Risi finds a purely “score-oriented approach” lacking, and he attempts to propose “an approach to theorize the performative dimension of operatic productions.”⁴¹ His idea parallels the performative turn that began within theater in the 1960s, and he echoes points made by Carolyn Abbate.⁴² Risi agrees with Abbate’s assertion that musicology’s history is “as a hermeneutic discipline dealing with musical texts and decoding hidden structures and complexities,” but that

³⁸ My characterization of stagings as “critical” should be understood in an exploratory, analytical sense. I mean that they provide interpretative commentary on the texts.

³⁹ Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, 33.

⁴⁰ Risi, Clemens, “Swinging signs, representation and presence in operatic performances: Remarks on Hans Neuenfels, Jossi Wieler, and a new analytical approach,” in *Arcadia - Internationale Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft*, 36, 2 (2001)

⁴¹ The two passages just quoted both appear in Risi, Clemens, “Opera in Performance—In Search of New Analytical Approaches,” *The Opera Quarterly*, 27(2-3): 283.

⁴² Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004).

“performed music (voices and sounds), and not the written score, ...[drive] every musicologist to engage with music.”⁴³ The two share a similar quest to find what Risi calls “a more appropriate way ...to engage with operatic experiences,” but Risi continues where Abbate stops, attempting to

grasp [the] specifics of every operatic performance, including the need to emphasize the ephemerality of a performance and the subjective quality of each perception.⁴⁴

In this article, Risi attempts to identify an analytical approach based on the phenomenological—one that analyzes performance, itself, and which embraces the subjective perspective, for “there can be no perception, no event, beyond a concrete, bodily relationship between subject and object.”⁴⁵

Although my dissertation approaches yet another type of analysis than that of Risi, I am sympathetic to his ideas, and I am inspired by motivations similar to those that he, Abbate, and Levin all share: a drive to attempt analysis outside the lines of “linear dramaturgy and the convincing representation of dramatic characters.”⁴⁶ Like Risi, I am motivated by a desire to discuss that which falls “outside the common parameters, ...the peculiarit[ies] of an impossible genre,” and the moments that are “often the most attractive and most successful parts of an opera

⁴³ Abbate, 505, 529. Risi, “Opera in Performance,” 283-294.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 284.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 285. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). Recent writings also address voices on stage: Jens Roselt, *Phänomenologie des Theaters* (München: Fink, 2008), and Bernhard Waldenfels, “Stimme am Leitfaden des Leibes,” in *Medien/Stimmen*, ed. Cornelia Epping-Jäger and Erika Linz (Köln: DuMont, 2003), 19 – 35.

⁴⁶ Risi, “Opera in Performance,” 294.

performance.”⁴⁷ Interestingly, a number of scholars today seem to share a similar desire to reconsider the analytical object of opera studies. Perhaps this is because opera speaks to the concerns of so many artistic and scholarly disciplines. As a multifaceted field ripe for study from many different perspectives, to decide on the most relevant angle from which to study opera is a particularly thorny task, and it is similarly difficult to select one aspect of this complex craft to take as the scholarly object.

The question of what to analyze has been handled in various ways over the last two centuries. Dating back as far as E.T.A. Hoffmann, early analytical perspectives presented examinations of what Lydia Goehr calls the *Werktreue*; that concept takes the understanding of compositional intent as the highest goal, and the preoccupation would dominate analytical discussions of music for over 150 years.⁴⁸ Since the 1980s, scholars from myriad disciplines have also examined operas as “texts,” or looked at the work from various critical perspectives.⁴⁹ But it is only recently that discussion has begun to move away from the critical and textual studies of the mid-1980s and 1990s. Scholars like Levin and Risi are prominent among these voices; they advocate the study of productions, for the purpose of understanding the complexities

⁴⁷ Ibid., 294.

⁴⁸ Lydia Goehr, “Being True to the Work,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1989): 55-67

⁴⁹ Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, “Introduction: On Analyzing Opera,” in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1-24. See also Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Image, Music, Text*, transl. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977). Examples of varying critical approaches from the 1990s include Edward Said, “The Empire at Work: Verdi’s *Aida*,” in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), or Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.)

of operatic texts, as layered constellations consisting not only of poetic texts and a musical score, but also production elements including lighting, costumes, sets, and other design elements.

But the trend towards analysis of productions and performances raises the practical question of *how*. Does such work eventually deteriorate into the paradoxically problematic task of analyzing “live” recordings? And if not, how else might a production be analyzed?⁵⁰ The arguments for (a simple sort of) phenomenological analysis of performances offered by Risi and Abbate speak precisely to that question. Each argues for turning analytical attention to the act of perceiving opera (as a spectator) and therefore acknowledge that such analysis is based on the subjectivity of the audience. Furthermore, both authors insist that this perspective, this active engagement of the audience with the production in performance, is a core element of opera and *Musiktheater*.⁵¹ I follow this argument in my own thinking, but I extend it one step further: I insist that to acknowledge the fundamental importance of the audience’s perceptual subjectivity quickly also prompts the acknowledgement of the subjectivity of figures usually more considered “creative” players. The matter may be most poignantly observed where the dramaturg is concerned, since, as Klaus Zehelein has argued, that figure is a production’s “first spectator.”⁵²

⁵⁰ For discussion of the demand for “live” opera recordings on video, see Roger Parker, “Giuseppe Verdi’s *Don Carlo(s)*: ‘Live’ on DVD,” *The Opera Quarterly*, 26(4) 603-614.

⁵¹ Risi, “Opera in Performance,” 290. Importantly, while Risi, Abbate, and others work to include elements that acknowledge the subjectivity of the audience, it must also be acknowledged that it is essentially impossible to address the topic thoroughly, since there are so many potential perspectives to be addressed. Nonetheless, I am sympathetic to the desire to address some such perspectives in analysis, despite the difficulties; to entirely ignore their presence seems to avoid discussion of an extraordinarily present aspect of performed pieces.

⁵² Klaus Zehelein, “Dramaturgie und Intendanz: Aus Gesprächen mit Juliane Votteler,” in *Musiktheaterheute: Klaus Zehelein, Dramaturg und Intendant*, ed. Juliane Votteler (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt/Rotbuch Verlag, 2000), 34 – 36. Of course, a number of other figures also play a subjective role within the creation of a production. Consider also the figure of the

I agree with Risi's notion that subjectivity needs to be seen as crucial to understanding of a production (and therefore also included in its analysis); indeed, it is precisely for this reason that I re-center the analytical object within the chapters of this dissertation. Rather than take Risi's approach, which explores opera productions primarily from his own perspective as an audience member, I deliberately incorporate the situated knowledge of creators and performers directly into my analyses.

In the field of anthropology, Georgina Born has produced scholarship much more overtly similar to what I undertake in this dissertation.⁵³ Her 1995 ethnography of IRCAM, *Rationalizing Culture*, has effectively discussed an important cultural institution, the *Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*, as well as avant-garde electro-acoustical art music produced within it. Guided by a scholarly and theoretically grounded approach, Born has demonstrated how IRCAM is guided by inter-organizational and personal politics, daily operations, and the larger artistic and philosophical goals espoused by the establishment's creative personae. Her own scholarly aims are "simultaneously to give insight into IRCAM, and to provide a historical analysis of musical modernism and postmodernism." My study, like hers, profiles a leading contemporary musical institution, the Oper Frankfurt, as I examine house operations and analyze the context of events taking place during the production of each staging. Our studies also share another important commonality: both she and I use institutional study as a vehicle to discuss a particular branch of contemporary music-making. In my case, I discuss key

video director—an increasingly influential role, given the increasingly common nature of publishing production videos. See more in Christopher Morris, "Digital Diva: Opera On Video." *The Opera Quarterly* 26, no.1 (2010): 96 – 116.

⁵³ Georgina Born, *Rationalizing culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

developments within opera production of the last three decades, with special attention given to stagings often labeled *Regietheater* or *Regieoper*. In both of these ways, my dissertation is closely modelled on Born's book, particularly in the second half of this dissertation as I discuss productions I experienced directly while working at the house. But throughout the full dissertation, I attempt to discuss context and process as well as artistic products as I concretely show how each staging has been shaped by the concerns of its creators, the manner of its preparation, and the logistics and business matters coordinated by the company's artistic direction. Like the electronic music addressed by Born, the opera productions I present in the next four chapters bear indelible traces of the people and events that brought them to stage.

As Born's work shows, my study also shares links with the nearby field of anthropology, as well as to ethnomusicology. By contrast to musicology, these fields are more often occupied with discussions of musical cultures and their creative products. The 2010 dissertation of Paul Chaikin offers a useful example of ethnographic scholarship about contemporary opera in Berlin; he discusses the three major opera companies (the Deutsche Oper, The Komische Oper, and the Staatsoper Unter den Linden) informed by his own experiences of the opera community there in 2005-2006. Chaikin demonstrates how the extra-musical context of companies on both the East and West sides of the city ironically maintains the "antiquated and relatively static tradition" of opera under the guise of presenting politically charged stagings, often polemically termed *Regietheater*. Chaikin indicates that such productions provide challenge history and tradition, rather than maintaining it. To juxtapose the radical and the traditional, he examines what Benjamin has termed *aura*, or the "halo" of "ether and actual context that encircles every work of art...the marble staircases, the subsidized tickets, the solemn mood in the auditorium," as well

as the events and actions of the community of spectators and creators involved in the performances.⁵⁴ His approach allows him to consider the origins of several highly polemical productions created in early 21st century Berlin as he simultaneously paints a vivid, engrossing picture of those attending and creating opera in that city.

Born and Chaikin provide useful models of how to approach issues that until very recently remained untouched by musicology. They are not entirely alone in this work, however, as opera studies of the last decade has also gradually begun to move beyond the former preoccupation with musical “works” by pursuing analyses of specific productions, and that work has certainly also prepared the way for what I do in this dissertation.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, even that scholarship remains prone to a singularity of perspective, and most studies still overlook the creative perspective and the context of the staging’s production. Furthermore, nearly all exclude discussions of practical logistics and business, a fact that I attempt to remedy. Setting that matter aside, however, it is important to recognize the importance of some of these exceptional contributions, as several such authors have significantly influenced my thinking. One example is Susan Rutherford, whose 2006 monograph on 19th-century prima donnas discusses how specificities of stage practice were shaped by singers’ professional interactions with stage

⁵⁴ Paul Chaikin, *Circling Opera in Berlin* (PhD Diss., Brown University, 2010), 178-179. For a presentation of the “halo” concept in art, see Walter Benjamin, “On Hashish.” Translated by Howard Eiland et al (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 58.

⁵⁵ Such scholarship addresses performative elements, and not just matters inherent in the texts, themselves, as I address in the next paragraphs. While such contributions can in one sense be understood as destabilizing the importance of the work as the primary analytical object, it might also be argued that in essence, focus on productions and performances simply redefines the notion of “the work” more broadly, in a way that includes the performative.

matrons, patrons, impresarios, vocal coaches, and journalists.⁵⁶ A recent monograph by Karen Henson also follows the pattern; she profiles four 19th-century opera singers, including the great Verdi baritone, Victor Maurel, and how their lives and the realities of their careers influenced the creation of opera at the end of the 19th-century.⁵⁷ Mary Ann Smart led this scholarly trend in 1994 with her feminist-inspired article reclaiming the “lost” voice of the soprano Rosine Stoltz; Smart has argued that Donizetti’s collaboration with Stoltz influenced the creation of some of his most famous characters, and she clearly demonstrates how exchanges between operatic professionals can concretely influence musical content.⁵⁸ Each of the studies by Rutherford, Henson, and Smart provides a wealth of information on singers’ interpersonal exchanges, and their work has encouraged me to give attention to how the daily practical interactions of collaborators working in Frankfurt have influenced productions staged there.

Like the authors listed above, David Ranan’s work from the field of public policy has also been an invaluable resource; his text is particularly useful for discussion of the business-oriented elements of backstage work at an opera house.⁵⁹ Although far afield from music scholarship in tone and scope, and therefore significantly different than the other authors who have influenced my approach, his 2003 survey of opera funding in the UK and Germany

⁵⁶ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁵⁷ I was fortunate to interact closely with Henson on a regular basis in a 2007 Columbia University seminar, and her own work greatly shaped my initial conceptualization of this dissertation. See Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁵⁸ Mary Ann Smart, “The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz” *Cambridge Opera Journal*, v6 no.1 (1994), 31-50.

⁵⁹ David Ranan, *“In Search of a Magic Flute:” The Public Funding of Opera—Dilemmas and Decision Making*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003).

provides a wealth of information on the history of arts policy and how those matters affect company operations. Well-researched and clearly presented, Ranan demonstrates a firm grasp of the socio-political realities of making opera in Germany as well the UK in the late twentieth and early 21st centuries as he addresses how matters of cultural politics (and especially public subsidies) have also affected the artistic products created by several opera companies in each country. While Ranan's ultimate aims are narrowly focused on the various options for state-supported arts funding and the consequences of various methods, his study provides clearly-reasoned and factually-supported arguments about how politics influence matters of business, which, in turn, influence art.

For Complex Issues, A New Approach

While the matter of precisely what to analyze in opera is particularly complex, I offer my analytical approach in this dissertation as another possibility. My intent is to provide an addition to the ongoing dialogue on the matter of what the analytical object in opera might be, and whose subjectivities should be included in the discussion. By synthesizing elements from the varied approaches of the scholars mentioned in this chapter, I hope to demonstrate a useful method through which to examine the essential components of an opera production. Additionally, this approach will also allow me to perform two more important tasks. My study will provide a detailed, interpretive portrait of the Oper Frankfurt, one of today's leading operatic institutions, and in so doing, I will reach the ultimate aim of this dissertation: to unpack the current notion of *Regietheater* as I identify dominant features of the experimental productions being created in opera houses today.

As already mentioned briefly in the introduction, one particularly important theoretical undercurrent in today's opera industry is also visible as a dominant theme in this dissertation: a certain fixation on the role of the stage director can be observed. Furthermore, a tendency exists within the press, the creative side of the industry, and even by some scholars to cast that individual as the visionary and final authority on the production. The trend seems to have arisen in tandem with the development of stagings usually referred to as *Regietheater*, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Six. Yet even as early as Chapter Two, it will become clear that work produced at Oper Frankfurt during the Gielen Era also exhibits a growing reverence for the stage director as the driving figure behind the re-envisioned stagings produced for the company's audiences.

Although that notion is certainly not unproblematic, I do generally maintain a pattern of nomenclature in my work that mirrors the trend: like most scholars, I utilize the common present-day approach to the issue, which identifies productions by opera title and the stage director.⁶⁰ Admittedly, this practice ascribes to the director the same sort of authority for the new

⁶⁰ I make an exception to this naming pattern in my discussions in Chapter Five. That chapter addresses a production of Salvatore Sciarrino's opera *Luci mie traditrici*, staged by Christian Pade. The reason for this departure is the somewhat different nature of that chapter—the issue of the work itself does play a role in this particular staging, and as a very recent composition, the work itself will likely be unfamiliar to many readers, and therefore demands introduction. Furthermore, in this case, the production has been cast as an authoritative reading of the opera by the composer, himself, who worked closely with Pade and the rest of the creative team. For this reason, in this unusual situation, the work and the reading are less conceptually distinct from one another than in the other productions examined in my dissertation.

“performance text” that has traditionally been reserved for the composers.⁶¹ Although I will show that such ascription can be misleading about the nature of musico-theatrical collaboration, I have nonetheless decided to maintain the dominant naming pattern, in order to reflect the increasing importance attributed to the stage director within 20th- and 21st-century opera and the related emphasis placed on the reconceptualizations of canonized pieces.⁶² As the term *Regietheater* implies, the assumption of directorial authority can be considered a defining feature of many contemporary productions, and the concept has taken root (for better or worse) in the various discourses of the contemporary industry.⁶³ Despite the problematics inherent in the notion of attributing a production’s authorship to a single individual, it is clear that the dominant present-day production trend is toward new, stage-director led re-envisionings of works in the operatic canon, particularly in central Europe (although such productions are still met by a degree of resistance in the United States and Italy.)

⁶¹ Opera productions exhibit a multiplicity of authors, who include composers, conductors, singers, directors, and designers, the role of the director has grown increasingly valued in recent decades. I certainly do not wish to be dismissive of other creative roles, yet recent discourse habitually credits the stage director with the dominant vision of a new production, and in accordance with the contemporary discourse, I maintain this pattern.

⁶² I maintain the pattern partially for the sake of linguistic simplicity and structure when referring to productions, as it mirrors the modern contemporary pattern. However, I am not untroubled by the fact that such attribution is at least partially inaccurate, as many decisions made in preparing productions—both artistic and logistical—are made by individuals other than stage directors.

⁶³ My choice here is in line with Rutherford. I value her ideas highly, as they ascribe power and authorship to singers. But changing historical notions of performance “authorship” reveal that assigning centrality to singers is more appropriate choice for studies of 19th-century America or Italy than for analyses of late 20th- and 21st-century productions. For more discussion about the changing role of the opera singer, see Susan Leonardi and Rebecca Pope, *The Diva’s Mouth: Body, Voice, Prima Donna Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 116-145 & 205-227.

My focus on the heightened role of the director in productions of the last three decades should in no way imply that the trend towards innovative productions had not already been active for years in German opera prior to the Gielen Era. On the contrary, new directorial readings of pieces had certainly been staged in both East and West Germany for years, albeit fairly intermittently, and often with great controversy.⁶⁴ Indeed, *Regietheater* has clear and traceable roots in earlier German spoken drama, and particularly in productions from the 1920s at Berlin's Kroll Theater, which featured productions experimenting with turn-of-the-century ideas of theatrical innovators Max Reinhard, Adolphe Appia, Gordon Craig, and Constantin Stanislavski.⁶⁵ It is arguably also related to German musical and theatrical innovations of the Weimar Republic, including the Epic Theater of Bertolt Brecht, and to a lesser extent, that of his contemporary, Kurt Weill.⁶⁶ The trend can also be observed in German opera of the mid-20th century. Wieland Wagner's austere stagings at Bayreuth just after the Second World War can also be considered *Regietheater*; his productions emphasized symbolist psychology and broke

⁶⁴ Although I offer a brief overview here of several of the major precursors to the theatrical developments in 1980s Frankfurt, more thorough historical information will be offered about the local Frankfurt context in Chapter Two; on German theater history (especially in Berlin) in Chapter Three; and on the historical origins of critically-minded experimentation within German culture in Chapter Six, which addresses the Modernist cultural turn in the early 20th century as well as the formation of the modern German identity during the Enlightenment.

⁶⁵ Philip Gossett, *Divas & Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 443- 486. See also David Levin, "Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading," 47 – 71; and Roger Savage, "The Staging of Opera," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, ed Roger Parker, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 235- 285.

⁶⁶ Gerd Rienäcker, "Zu einigen Erfahrungsfeldern von Ruth Berghaus," *Musiktheater im Experiment: Fünfundzwanzig Aufsätze* (Lukas-Verlag, 2004), 245-260.

with the established naturalist Wagnerian traditions by then associated with the Third Reich.⁶⁷

Walter Felsenstein's work at the East German Komische Oper from 1956 to 1975 also exhibited an emphasis on the directorial *Konzept*, as did later work by Patrice Chéreau: consider his Marxist-inflected setting of an "Industrial Revolution" *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1976.⁶⁸

Yet where opera and music theatre are concerned, the *Regietheater* approach seems to have taken hold in Frankfurt on an institutionalized scale, a fact that will become apparent in the next two chapters. It is for this reason that I have chosen to examine Oper Frankfurt as an influential, central example of the trends in the modern industry. Viewed together, the remaining chapters of this dissertation will indicate that the successes of 1980s Frankfurt encouraged key features of the company's productions to spread internationally. In the subsequent decades, productions exhibiting similar elements would become visible in leading houses across the globe. Importantly, the current preoccupation with the role of the stage director can be observed in many such stagings. While a few earlier operatic examples also paved the way for that

⁶⁷ See Steven Cerf, "Wagner's *Ring* and German culture: Performances and Interpretations On and Off Stage," *Inside the Ring: Essays on Wagner's Opera Cycle*, ed. John Louis DiGaetani (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2006), 133-149.

⁶⁸ Walter Felsenstein, "Walter Felsenstein über Musiktheater," *Material zum Theater* 35 (Berlin: Verband der Theaterschaffenden der DDR Berlin, 1974). See also Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Tétralogies, Wagner, Boulez, Chéreau: Essai sur l'infidélité* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1983); *Histoire d'un "Ring", Der Ring des Nibelungen, Bayreuth 1976 – 1980*, ed. Sylvie de Nussac and François Regnault (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1980). As evidenced by Chéreau, the phenomenon is not only German; French and Belgian directors have also played a role, including Patrice Chéreau and Gerard Mortier. Some American and English directors have also been involved, including David and Christopher Alden, Robert Wilson, and conductor/impresario/stage director Sarah Caldwell. Yet the phenomenon arose foremost in Germany. See also Almut Ullrich, *Die 'Literaturoper' von 1970-1990: Texte und Tendenzen, Veröffentlichungen zur Musikforschung*, no. 11 (Germany: Noetzel Wilhelmshaven, 1991), and Thomas Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

development, the increased importance of the director and a preoccupation with new, critical interpretations of canonized works became deeply ingrained in the fabric of the Frankfurt company. Opera production throughout Germany has undeniably continued to exhibit these features since that time, and it has also expanded in the 21st century to the wider operatic landscape, a fact that I will discuss further in the concluding chapter of this dissertation with respect to examples such as the San Francisco Opera, the New York City Opera, and the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden.⁶⁹

With the methodological, theoretical, and historical underpinnings identified in this chapter as a starting place, the remainder of this dissertation will undertake examination of the thriving modern musico-theatrical movement at the Oper Frankfurt, which began during the “Gielen Era” of the 1980s. Primarily, this profile of the house will be accomplished through analytical discussions of several notable “performance texts” staged by the company, a task which I begin in earnest in the following chapter..

⁶⁹ Although NYCO closed due to financial insolvency in 2013, this important American company re-launched in 2015 and has begun to reassume its former position as one of the leading US houses to mount critically re-envisioned operatic productions. See Gossett, 443- 486. See also Rachel Nussbaum, *The Kroll Opera and the Politics of Cultural Reform in the Weimar Republic*, (PhD Diss, Cornell University 2005). See David Levin, “Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading,” 47 – 71; and Roger Savage, “The Staging of Opera,” 235- 285.

Chapter Two: *Kultur für Alle! From Burgertum to the Avant-Garde, 1979- 1987*

We did not want to make avant-garde (opera) for the sake of the avant-garde, but because it was dramaturgically pressing.

-Michael Gielen⁷⁰

This dissertation takes the period from 1979 – 1990 at the Oper Frankfurt as its starting point, a time of political upheaval, reform and cultural change within the city of Frankfurt am Main. In these years, commonly referred to as the “Gielen Era” within local artistic circles, a nexus of artistic energy coalesced within the city. Furthermore, as new ideas in the operatic realm intersected with the political climate of the day, the combination proved both explosive and transformative. Examination of the creative approach undertaken at the opera house during that decade will quickly reveal the impact of this pivotal era.

One of the most influential houses in Germany in the years before reunification, the Oper Frankfurt produced a series of noteworthy productions during the 1980s, many of which were quite provocative. The work of the company’s directors in those years, who included Achim Freyer, Harry Kupfer, Hans Neuenfels, Ruth Berghaus, Peter Sellars, and Robert Wilson, has arguably continued to influence productions both in Frankfurt and abroad in the thirty years since. Oper Frankfurt stagings of this era included primarily re-conceptualized interpretations of

⁷⁰“Wir wollten nicht Avantgarde machen, weil es Avantgarde ist, sondern wenn es dramaturgisch zwingend ist.” (Translation mine.) Paul Bartholomäi, *Das Frankfurter Museumsorchester: Zwei Jahrhunderte Musik für Frankfurt*. (Frankfurt am Main: Musikverlag C.F. Peters, 2002), 104.

canonized works, but also the premieres of a few new operas, including John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2*, and a number of other twentieth century works. This combination of avant-garde interpretation and contemporary-themed programming further established Frankfurt as a leading site at the forefront of the contemporary field. In the course of this chapter, it will become clear that the new artistic perspectives and theatrical methods integrated into the creative process during this important time period signaled a sea change within the opera industry, one that will be traceable during the following decades in stagings produced both at the Oper Frankfurt and also beyond that company. While the subsequent extensions of the developments appearing in this period will be examined in the later chapters of this dissertation, this chapter will provide a basis for understanding the most fundamental matters of longstanding impact propelled by individuals working at Oper Frankfurt during the Gielen Era, figures whose approaches would eventually alter the tenor of work produced at the house and beyond in later years. In order to elicit these points, this dissertation begins with analysis of work brought to stage during this pivotal era, and identifying key figures involved in that process.

This chapter is primarily concerned with one production from this avant-garde period at Oper Frankfurt in the early 1980s, Hans Neuenfels's 1981 *Aida* (Verdi), with additional references to Ruth Berghaus's 1983 *Le Troyens* (Berlioz) and Alfred Kirchner's 1979 *Janufa* (Janáček).⁷¹ Discussion of these pieces will include not only some aspects of the work's textual

⁷¹ I have chosen these particular productions for a number of reasons. *Aida* is important as it allows for discussion about the treatment of Italian opera, as opposed to German, and also because Neuenfels subsequently became quite prominent beyond Frankfurt. *Les Troyens* and *Janufa* also indicate the collaborative nature of production work in this period and demonstrate the benefits of *Mitsprache*, a business approach applied at the house during the period, as it was applied under different directors. Furthermore, *Les Troyens*, like the *Ring* cycle to be discussed in Chapter Three, was staged by Ruth Berghaus. Her recurring presence at Oper Frankfurt during

interpretation, but also matters pertaining to the specific productions: my arguments will also consider how backstage matters and the context of the staging's preparation influenced its final shape. As already discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, implicit in this approach is that pieces will be analyzed both for artistic elements observable in performance, but also through a lens that considers the preparation of each staging and the concerns of creative collaborators during the production period. Approached in this manner, two somewhat conflicting themes will come into the foreground, threads that will continue to be traced throughout this dissertation: first, the increasing importance of the stage director as the key figure to advance individualized, contemporary stagings of canonized works, or *Regietheater* productions, and second, a creative approach dominated by a highly-conscious commitment to ensemble collaboration, in order to produce deep, multilayered readings of operatic texts that avoid surface-level, generic presentations.

Frankfurt am Main, *Burgertum*, and the *Museumsgesellschaft*

The Frankfurt setting is impossible to divorce from discussions of these productions; the particularities of Frankfurt am Main's musical history, and moreover, the complex socio-political situation created by the city's cultural politics the 1980s, played a large role in the development of the new tone advanced by the Oper Frankfurt of the Gielen Era. The vibrant and well-documented history of the company reveals its entrenchment in the social life of the region for

the Gielen Era is another reason for the choice, as is her background: her early years with Brecht link her directly to the experimental theater of prior decades. Furthermore, her later Frankfurt collaborations with choreographer William Forsythe further mark her as a figure of interest—her pieces demonstrate the avant-garde artistic tone of the Gielen Era. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive" *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (October 2005): 557–567.

over two centuries, and in addition, this publically supported theater is a leader of regional cultural life. The company is not only financed by the city and considered a public institution, but it also has great cultural influence over Rhein-Main's citizens as one of the most visible and esteemed operatic institutions in both the region and the whole of Germany.⁷² As such, work inside this theater is never isolated—it reflects the larger context both of the region, and of the larger international opera community.

The Oper Frankfurt both is and was one of two primary cultural institutions in Frankfurt, and the musical half of the city's main two theatrical stages managed by the umbrella company known as the Städtische Bühnen. It shares many resources with the *Schauspiel*, the city's main spoken theatre. The two institutions occupy adjoining halves of the main theater building at Frankfurt's Willy-Brandt-Platz near the Main river bank in the center of Frankfurt, just opposite the city's famed row of museums in what were formerly the grand historical mansions of the Sachsenhausen district, and a short walk from important cultural sites such as the former Goethe residence and the Roßmarkt, a plaza that as early as the 1780s was used for presenting public theater and music performances to the city's citizenry.⁷³ Together the two present-day companies lead the performance branch of the *Frankfurter Museumsgesellschaft* [Frankfurt Museum Society], the word "museum" referencing the literal meaning "of the muses." This society, which also includes the city's extensive network of museums such as the Städl, was created in the

⁷² F.M. Stockdale & M.R. Dreyer, *The Opera Guide*. (London: Collins & Brown, 1990), 340. For more on this topic, see Appendix A, Malte Krasting, Interview #2 with Cordelia Chenault, June 24, 2010, p. 316-317. Ticket sales only account for about 12-13% of the entire budget, to a great extent the company is publicly funded.

⁷³ Paul Bartholomäi, *Das Frankfurter Museumsorchester*. (Frankfurt am Main: Musikverlag C.F. Peters, 2002), 7-11.

classical spirit of ancient Greece has aimed to create a thriving artistic life represented by the nine Greek muses to Frankfurt society since its inception.⁷⁴ As a cultural network both run by a diverse board from the Frankfurt citizenry, the institution has been a *bürgerlich* one for over three centuries, guided by the mission of providing quality cultural enrichment of the city's lively, sizeable, and religiously diverse bourgeoisie.⁷⁵ The group's structural organization and goals contrast significantly with musical institutions dating from similar periods in other major German cities, where theater and opera was historically funded and controlled by members of aristocratic courts; the region's lack of political domination by a wealthy landowner and the typically associated patronage system distinguishes the history of the cultural industry in Frankfurt from that of many other major cities. The bourgeois-run tenor of the cultural industry in the city was (and continues to be) quite fitting for Frankfurt, which has since the 1700s been a *Messestadt*, a city whose economy revolved around trade and economic development, and today is arguably the leading financial center of Europe. As a monied city historically controlled not by a landed local court, but rather by an eclectic mix of trades- and businesspeople, it seems only fitting that such an institution would take on the goal of providing rich cultural life to the region's citizens.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ http://www.rhein-main-wiki.de/index.php?title=Frankfurter_Museumsgesellschaft. Note particularly the reference to the word "quality" [*Qualität*] in the first line.

⁷⁵ Since the 1700s, Frankfurt's citizenry had been exceptionally diverse, featuring a mix of Catholics, Lutherans, atheists, and Jews living together even far before the mid-20th-century influx of Turkish immigrants. In a city that has been both a diverse and economically prosperous environment for centuries, the thriving local cultural life grew independently, neither reliant on wealthy patrons nor the strictures of any one religious body.

⁷⁶ For more on the city of Frankfurt's monied history, see *Frankfurt am Main.: Die Geschichte der Stadt in neun Beiträgen; Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission der Stadt Frankfurt am Main*, vol. 17. (Frankfurt: Thorbecke Jan Verlag, 1991).

The network of the *Museumsgesellschaft* gradually began to take shape within the 1780s, reaching its current organizational structure by 1808. Today's Oper and Schauspiel stem from a similar time, direct descendants of the city's first public theater, Das Komödienhaus, built in 1782 for the presentation of comedy, tragedy, and opera to the public. The opera's orchestra, known officially as Das Frankfurter Museumsorchester, is an institution in its own right, one that concertizes independently in addition to performing within the framework of opera productions. The group became a part of the fledgling Museum Society in 1792 as the region's leading orchestra, at which point the group permanently relocated to the city from across the river in neighboring Mainz to assume residency in Frankfurt.⁷⁷ The orchestra is still considered its own entity today, a fact that seems to reinforce the historical prioritization of musical concerns over the dramatic and textual issues in operas presented at the city's opera house until the late 1970s. And the present-day orchestra still maintains an extraordinarily high reputation: as current marketing is quick to purport, the Frankfurter Museumsorchester has just been voted the "Orchestra of the Year" by the esteemed journal *Opernwelt* for the third consecutive year.⁷⁸ Indeed, the presentation of high-quality music has been both a verbalized aim and a source of pride for the institution and those driving concert life in Frankfurt since the opera's establishment and even before; the historically high level of musicianship is evidenced by the musicians who have most famously led concert life within the city, traceable as far back as Telemann, before the founding of the *Museumsgesellschaft*, continuing through Mozart, and the course continues even through more recent figures such as Paul Hindemith and conductor Georg Solti, up to the present

⁷⁷ Bartholomäi, 14.

⁷⁸ <http://www.oper-frankfurt.de/de/page1008.cfm>

day conductor, Sebastian Weigle.⁷⁹ Dedicated to the notion of “quality” and consistently supported by Frankfurt’s bourgeoisie, the *Museumsgesellschaft* prior to the late 1970s was primarily traditionalist, which within the opera house meant that canonized works were staged and presented as “museum pieces.”⁸⁰ Yet the overarching concern seems to have been in service to promoting perceived musical excellence, rather than due to a closed-minded stance on musical development. In fact, the history of the organization has also demonstrated fairly progressive attitudes at times, as can be seen in the Louis Spohr’s encouragement of music by the 19th-century newcomer, Beethoven, during his years in Frankfurt: the Museum Society of that period presented each of Beethoven’s symphonies between two and four dozen times apiece from 1817 to 1886.⁸¹ Yet the Oper Frankfurt began a slow departure from its overwhelmingly conservative bent in 1970 with the election of a new cultural councilor [*Kulturdezernant*]: Hilmar Hoffman.

Hoffmann and Gielen Arrive

The two productions examined in this chapter were performed in the years of Michael Gielen’s residency as general music director and intendant of the Frankfurt Opera, an era in which cultural policies that had been slowly pioneered and prepared by the social democrat

⁷⁹ Bartholomäi, 13-14, 22-23, 62-63, 96-97.

⁸⁰ Despite some attempts by Donanyi to present theatrical elements matching the high level of musicianship and to provide the balance of progressive theater and music requested by the new Kulturdezernant Hoffmann, “Er vermisste im Vorstand ein adäquates Gesprächspartner” [he lacked an adequate conversation partner in the direction] for such matters, and the theatrical side of operas during the years of his musical leadership continued to focus on “great voices” but continue to give little attention to matters of deep theatrical interpretation in the scenic elements. See Bartholomäi, 95-97.

⁸¹ Bartholomäi, 22-25.

Hoffmann and the former conductor/intendant, Christoph von Dohnányi, finally came to fruition. Although ostensibly a governmental figure within the city of Frankfurt, Hoffmann's career began in the cultural industry as a director and filmmaker in the cities of Essen and Oberhausen, where he became politically involved in the beginning of what would later be referred to as the "1968 movement" [*68er Bewegung*] of social and artistic reforms, also becoming an active proponent of "New German Film" [*Junger deutscher Film*]. His work in these years was saturated by Marxist social thought as well as the ideals espoused by the *Frankfurter Schule* and the affiliated *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*, which was formed after the return of Adorno and Horkheimer to Frankfurt in the 1950s.⁸² With such idealistic underpinnings, Hoffmann made the controversial choice to bring Michael Gielen to the Frankfurt Opera in 1977 based on the conductor's excellent reputation with the Belgian National Orchestra as well as his specialization in the presentation of highly complex contemporary works. There was some controversy surrounding the hire, which Hoffmann quelled by foregrounding the new intendant's esteemed stature as music professor, appealing again to the high value attributed to "quality" in the Frankfurt cultural leadership. Yet the conductor's earlier work in Brussels had been precisely the opposite of the conservative stagings to which Frankfurt audiences were accustomed. As the would-be new conductor characterized his own work:

...I am not the right instrument for the middle-way, the average taste or the usual delight in the arts... I do not begrudge anyone their relaxation in the evening: but not necessarily in the theater that I manage; the greater enjoyment is to become engaged oneself and to follow and feel the puzzle that emanates from the

⁸² "*Kunst als Passion: Hilmar Hoffmann, Präsident des Goethe-Instituts und Kulturdezernent*: mit Ursula Deutschendorf, *Erlebte Geschichte* series WDR 5, Westdeutscher Rundfunk Public Radio. (Cologne, Germany, Sept 4, 2005).

stage...⁸³

Such declarations of Gielen's artistic philosophies would foreshadow the tenor of the company's creative work during his tenure in Frankfurt. As expected, Gielen's first few years were controversial—and if his perfectionistic orchestral demands frustrated some longstanding instrumentalists, his simultaneous plans to rethink the traditional presentations of canonized works and to program a higher number of contemporary operas utterly enraged much of Oper Frankfurt's traditional-minded audience.

In 1979, in an effort to defend the changing institution and the musico-theatrical goals of audience education and provocation that both he and Gielen shared, Hoffmann published the infamous book *Kultur für Alle: Perspektiven und Modelle [Culture for All: Perspectives and Models]*, which provided what would later be seen as one of the most convincing defenses ever penned calling to make opera anew, to change the art form that he argued had degraded over the years into an elite, irrelevant institution.⁸⁴ The publication and the public discussion it prompted seem to have encouraged the shift in Frankfurt audiences which occurred concurrently; a growing new public of younger citizens, artists, and intellectuals began to attend the opera that same year, and the publication played an important role in creating an environment of public support for the theatrical innovation encouraged by conductor/intendant Michael Gielen,

⁸³ “Ich schaffe mir gern selber Zwänge,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April, 28, 1990.

⁸⁴ For a retrospective discussion of the import of Hilmar's book, see: “*Kultur für alle*,” *Hilmar Hoffmann zum 85. Geburtstag*, in *Kulturpolitische Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für Kulturpolitik der Kulturpolitischen Gesellschaft*. Heft 130, III/2010 (Bonn: 2010).

dramaturg Klaus Zehelein, and the young director-turned-administrator Pamela Rosenberg.⁸⁵

Though their provocative pieces continued to incite controversy amongst audiences and their unusual methods brought about mixed successes in the early years (from the standpoint of ticket sales and audience retention), conservative attacks retreated after a few years, the and the environment became particularly ripe for the music-theatrical work advanced by the leading figures in the institution.⁸⁶ A cult-like following quickly developed for the Oper Frankfurt, despite—or perhaps because of—its radical politics.

Both politically and philosophically, Hoffmann’s policies were profoundly aligned with the work of the opera’s leadership in this period, and the two themes that will be foregrounded in this examination of the 1981 *Aida* can clearly be considered extensions of his verbalized goals: 1) the staging of traditional works in fresh and intellectually-challenging ways as conceptualized by innovative contemporary directors, and 2) the goal of integrating the cooperative principles of *Mitbestimmung* (later revised to *Mitsprache*) into the daily business and decision-making process of the opera.⁸⁷ The links between Hoffmann’s policy declarations and the artistic contributions of the period foregrounded in this chapter will become clear in the course of the following analysis.

⁸⁵ For more about the audience shift, which moved from an initial phase of “riotous first nights” and a “conservative element armed with whistles and football rackets to disrupt the applause,” before becoming “a new audiences... of enthusiastic devotees,” see Sutcliffe, 381.

⁸⁶For a lengthy discussion of changes in season organization at Oper Frankfurt as it moved from a *repertoire* house to a *semi-stagione* venue—a hotly-contested administrative issue at this time—see Ranan, 169 & 183-187.

⁸⁷ *Mitbestimmung* and *Mitsprache* will be addressed later in this chapter. The terms may be translated as “the principle of deciding collectively” and “the principle of collective discussion.” Both refer to the right of all artists working on a project to give input (at differing levels) into the creative process. *Mitbestimmung* is stronger than *Mitsprache*, as it involves actual voting rights. *Mitsprache* conveys the right to speak during decision-making conversations.

The Infamous *Aida*

The new production of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* that premiered on January 31, 1981 immediately provoked great controversy amongst both audiences and critics. The creative team heading up the work was comprised of a handful of the figures most typically involved at the opera house during this period: Michael Gielen assumed the role of conductor and musical director and Klaus Zehelein acted as dramaturg, while stage director Hans Neuenfels led the development of the new concept, supported by Nina Ritter's costume designs and Erich Wonder's abstract, versatile set.⁸⁸ Within the industry as well as in scholarly circles, the piece has come to be taken as one of the quintessential examples of Brechtian-style audience estrangement to have been set on an operatic stage.

The piece itself contains the essential elements of Verdi's work as traditionally presented, omitting nothing from either the original text or the score.⁸⁹ Yet many visual and theatrical elements of this staging also reach far beyond typical presentations of the work as they bring in additional layers that reflect the opera's composition and performance history, as well. Further still, the production also features aspects of particular poignancy to its late-twentieth century German audience. Nonetheless, the plot of *Aida* did adhere to the nine scenes and the narrative

⁸⁸ Based on this production and others, the (formerly West-) German stage director Hans Neuenfels may be considered one of the directors most prominently associated with *Regietheater* productions. At the time of the this dissertation's publication, Neuenfels continues to be active as a stage director, and his most recent stagings continue to draw similar controversy to the 1981 *Aida* discussed in this chapter.

⁸⁹ The following discussion of the Neuenfels *Aida* is based on my viewings of the video recording of the premiere, which is retained by the Oper Frankfurt but not publicly available. The recording has not been released for public viewing, but at the time of this writing, a copy was available for review in-house by permission of the administration: *Aida*, Videoaufzeichnung der Premiere, 14.5.2011. Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt Videoarchiv; DVD.

details depicted in the Verdian original:

The libretto itself sets Act I in ancient Egypt as the great soldier Radamès dreams of leading forces against the Ethiopians in an upcoming battle. He dreams of his secret beloved, Aida, the Ethiopian slave serving the Egyptian princess Amneris, who herself is also deeply in love with the great warrior. Aida, who also happens to be the Ethiopian princess, feels torn between her own love for Radamès and her simultaneous loyalty to her native land. Radamès is officially named commander. Act II begins after Egypt's defeat of Ethiopia, as the Egyptian princess cunningly elicits the truth about Aida's feelings of love for Radamès, then departs to witness the warrior's triumphal return. During the ensuing processional, Radamès returns with many Ethiopian slaves, among them Aida's father, King Amonasro, who manages to hide his royal identity and plead convincingly for the Ethiopian captives to be freed. The deal requires, however, that both he and Aida remain prisoner. The act ends as the Egyptian king announces Radamès's reward for the victory: he will receive Amneris as his bride.

Act III begins on the eve of the wedding, with Amneris and the high priest Ramfis at prayer. In the meanwhile, Aida awaits a secret meeting with Radamès, and dreams of her homeland before receiving a surprise visit from her father, who demands that his daughter uncover the route that Radamès will take on the next invasion of Ethiopia. He hides to spy on the couple as Radamès enters, and the young lovers dream of their future together before Aida elicits the army's route. Amonasro reveals himself, to the horror of Radamès, who realizes what he has revealed. As Aida and Amonasro attempt to calm him, Ramfis and Amneris exit the temple and discover the situation, and Radamès surrenders to the Egyptian priests as Aida and her father escape. The start of act IV centers on Radamès, who is about to stand trial for his treason and

believes Aida to be dead. Amneris offers to save his life if he will renounces his love for her rival, but he refuses. The military commander stands silent as the priests condemn him to death: he will be buried alive. Amneris pleads in vain for him to be spared, then curses the priests. Within the enclosed tomb destined to be his final resting place, Radamès discovers Aida, who has hidden herself, determined to share his fate. Finally, as Amneris prays for Radamès in the tomb above, the lovers say farewell to the world together.

With the presentation of this story, the 1981 staging of *Aida* led by Hans Neuenfels adhered to the essential storyline and music of Verdi's score and Antonio Ghislanzoni's libretto. But as already mentioned, the straightforward narrative summarized above constitutes a mere third of the piece reaching the audience—the *Konzeption* of this particular staging presents a near-constant coexistence of three different time frames to tell this tragic story of love and war. As articulated in an official press statement by Oper Frankfurt's marketing staff in January 1981, the work used props, costumes, and sets that constantly shift time; the setting bounces between a gaudy and exoticized ancient Egypt, 19th-century Europe, and 20th-century Germany:

From the first moment, the concept behind the Frankfurter staging presumes a relationship between three layers of time: the Egypt of the pharaohs is imagined through the perspective of the second half of the 19th century, and the piece is realized in the year 1981.⁹⁰

As such, not only does the piece present the most transparent story layer set in pharoanic Egypt, but it also exposes blunt and arguably uncomfortable truths about the work's 19th-century

⁹⁰ “‘Das Ägyptische ist die Sehnsucht!’: Gespräch mit Hans Neuenfels,” Interview Dietolf Grewe, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, Januar/Februar 1981 (Frankfurt: Direktion der Oper Frankfurt, 1981), 1. [Die Konzeption der Frankfurter Inszenierung geht von der Einsicht in die Relation von drei Zeitebenen aus: Das Ägypten der Pharaonen wird aus der Perspektive der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts zu imaginiert, und das Stück ist im Jahre 1981 zu realisieren.]

performance history. With these layers, the creative team was able to present the humanity and conflicts of characters set within this fantastic story located in the ancient city of Memphis, but also to foreground the 19th-century European fascination with archaeology and its fixation on distant cultures, as well as to provoke visceral reactions to those elements via visual references of high emotional significance to the piece's late twentieth century audience.

Nearly every scene in the opera features either a 19th- or 20th-century set (a twentieth-century office, a 19th-century opera house itself, a 20th-century boudoir) while simultaneously utilizing props and characters costumed from entirely different periods. At the opening of Act II, for example, is set in Amneris's 19th-century bed chamber, while the princess herself is clothed in a gown from the mid-20th century. Posed Egyptian chorus members appear as servants, Aida appears in the garb of simple 19th- or perhaps even 20th-century servant girl, and an interesting additional chorus member appears within the scene in fine menswear from the mid-19th century with an old-fashioned camera to take photographs of the scene. This odd collection of anachronistic visual references may seem jarring, but it also lends a playful and tongue-in-cheek tone. Together these references seem to suggest the nature of *Aida* to be more than a simple narrative; rather, it appears to be a highly constructed opera made for the eyes of Western audiences, far removed from the ancient Egyptian setting.

Nonetheless, Neuenfels's work did provide highly emotional depictions of the escalating tensions between Radamès, Aida, Amneris, and Amonasro that propel the narrative. A conversational interview with Klaus Zehelein and Hans Neuenfels published about the piece in January 1981 indicates the power behind these aspects of the opera: "At the beginning of the work period, we established that ... the music possesses an enormous psychological quality,"

offered Zehelein, and Neuenfels concurred, “it is this psychological dimension that [a director] must, and can, find in this music. [This aspect] is written in a most clear way within this piece, and it has a huge allure.”⁹¹ In the same anachronistic scene just mentioned, however, the servants and photographer eventually disappear, leaving Aida and Amneris alone onstage just prior to their emotionally-fraught clash, in which a particularly spiteful and childish Amneris teases out Aida’s confession of love for Radamès by means of the lie that he has fallen in battle. In this case, the audience suffers no distractions from this psychologically powerful and arguably universally moment of personal conflict so artfully depicted by music and text; the relatively modern dress and context, along with the well-crafted scenework and *Personenregie*, allow a timeless quality to emerge in the scene between the romantic rivals as their conflict unfolds unhindered by thoughts of history, aesthetics, or politics.⁹²

But it was not only in such situations, when anachronism and stage tricks fell away, that the emotionally charged nature of Verdi’s storyline emerged. To the contrary, it was often precisely the controversial fluctuations between time settings in the stage design that worked wonders for a contemporary audience’s ability to grasp the heightened emotion surrounding the characters and their plight. The final scene of the opera provides a quintessential example: After the end of Act IV, scene i, Radamès has been literally mummified in cloth bindings, which foreshadows his upcoming punishment. Yet the beginning of the next scene finds Radamès

⁹¹ ““Das Ägyptische is die Sehnsucht!’...,” 3. [Beim Beginn der Arbeit an der Oper haben wir festgestellt, daß ... [die] Musik eine enorme psychologische Qualität bescheinigt.] [...Das ist die psychologische Dimension, die man in der Musik finden muß und finden kann. Im Stück ist das auf die klarste Weise beschrieben und hat einen großen Reiz.]

⁹² *Personenregie* is a term used by opera scholars, critics, and those working in the creative industry to refer, loosely, to work done in order to make the characters and their relationships or actions believable.

locked within his twentieth-century office (the tomb), costumed once again in a contemporary suit and with a humbly but modernly dressed Aida. This shift in setting draws attention away from the fact that the soldier is being buried alive, shifting attention to the love duet between Aida and himself. Yet a powerful theatrical effect soon emerges during the scene as it gradually becomes clear that a smoky gas is filling the room from above, stage right—a slowly rising panic begins to ensue for the audience with the recognition that the young couple is being gassed. With this one unmistakable visual effect, in a reference unmistakable to the (still) guilt-laden German audience who still struggled to reconcile the atrocious genocide committed under the National Socialist regime during World War II, Radamès's harsh and unjust condemnation strikes deeply within the audience psyche. By directly invoking the extraordinarily sensitive subject of the German collective guilt, the horrific deaths of Radamès and Aida engaged with a matter deeply sensitive in contemporary Germany. In such moments, it was clear how deeply Neuenfels, Zehelein, Wonder, Gielen, and the rest of the creators had excavated Verdi's work, finding particularly powerful ways to draw out emotionally resonant portrayals of the characters' respective struggles between love and patriotism: conflicts so intense as to inevitably progress to the tragic conclusion, in which the lives of Aida and Radamès are literally extinguished under the weight of these conflicts.

Similarly, the interplay of time periods also served to enhance understanding about the most noteworthy aspects of particular characters. For example, there are marked differences in the music—and correspondingly, in the characteristics—of the Ethiopian princess, Aida, and the Egyptian princess, Amneris. Consider, for example, the contrast between the characters: while Aida's melodies are traditionally Italianate throughout the opera, the music of Amneris, features

a particularly “foreign” sound due to the prevalent use of the augmented 2nd interval as well as the Phrygian mode, as can be heard at the beginning of the consecration scene. Such musical exoticism is also apparent in “O Terra, Addio,” in which the melody is built on a dissonant leap of a major 7th.⁹³ In the Neuenfels staging, the differences are heightened by the costumes: Amneris appears in this scene in a gaudy, golden 19th- century style imagining of Egyptian wedding garb, while Aida continues to wear her 19th- century maid’s frock, which heightens the contrasts between the music and the character’s conception.

The character contrasts implicit in these costume choices was arguably conscious, supported by written literature published by the opera house well in advance of the premiere: nearly two months before the opening, the December/January 1980 *Musiktheater Heinweise* presented two short excerpts of articles about the opera designed to whet public appetite for the tenor of the new staging. The first excerpt demonstrates precisely the struggles and differences between the two princesses, a reprint of an extensive, well-known extract of Catherine Clément’s chapter on *Aida* from the monograph *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*.⁹⁴ In that discussion, Clément argues precisely for this contrast between the two: she argues for an understanding of Aida as a version of queen Nefertiti, who can be affiliated with the Western, Christian realm due to her marriage to the monotheistic Akhenaton, even in her ultimate condemnation to a godly banishment and death. Amneris, on the other hand, serves as a symbol of the exotic due to her

⁹³ A plethora of literature exists on the exotic music of Amneris and other Egyptians, and how it is juxtaposed against that of occidental music. For example, see Paul Robinson’s comments about Amneris and Ramfis, as contrasted by the music of Aida, in Paul Robinson, *Opera, Sex, and other Vital Matters*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002),130-131.

⁹⁴ Catherine Clement, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 115-117.

obvious parallels to the wildly popular polytheistic queen Hatshepsut, who reigned successfully with the support and purported blessing of the high priests and the countless Egyptian gods. By publishing such a direct printed reference to the tensions and contrasts between these two figures, the opera's direction simultaneously expresses its conscious foregrounding of the musical and symbolic contrasts between these two women. The choice of this article foregrounds the contrasts implicit in the score, which were arguably also operative within the 19th-century European (read also: Christian) minds of the work's original creators, performers, and audience.

Reception and Reaction

Although the features of this staging illustrated in my prior explanation of the Neuenfels reading are all based on understandings of the original score and text, the Neuenfels staging lay far from most of the earlier presentations of the work. Those have tended to foreground the splendor of ancient Egypt in gilded depictions, a quintessential exemplar of 19th-century Grand Opera, with its emphasis on upon exquisite singing, exotic sets, and grandiose spectacle heightened by the large chorus and *corps de ballet*. These spectacular elements have at times been exaggerated to the extent of detracting from the intricate and finely-crafted interplay between music and text. As Neuenfels himself responded to the question of why so few talented directors seem interested in taking on *Aida* as a project:

...it seems to me to have to do with the fact that this opera is misconstrued on the basis of a pseudo-natural décor, that is, the Egyptian. People apparently believe that the plot is only there as a vehicle for the music, and that the story is buried

underneath its oriental or exotic exterior.⁹⁵

Despite the production's atypical and relatively deep approach to character, critical voices also expressed emphatic support for the way in which the production foregrounded some of the opera's most splendid music:

And then comes the remarkable third act, Verdi's strongest. No more pomp, no more representational theater, the tragedy intensifies threateningly. The music becomes true and passionate, the characters are suddenly made of flesh of blood, they become human. Here Neuenfels bows before Verdi, attempts no more gags, and rinses the piece clean...⁹⁶

The matter was also raised with respect to the musical interpretation:

...the lively tempi make not only the course of events more seamless and intense, but they also reveal the greatness of the opera composer, Verdi, whose music reveals its dramatic function, elevated to speech; it speaks directly of the characters and their situations, even betrays them.⁹⁷

Yet despite such praise, the two additional time layers in the production were at the forefront of the criticism leveled at Neuenfels, Gielen, and Zehelein by the press and the public, the sources of great scandal and controversy that caused a frenzy of discourse both inside the theater and in

⁹⁵ [Mir scheint das damit zu tun zu haben, daß die Oper mit einem pseudo-naturalistischen Dekor versehen ist, nämlich dem ägyptischen. Die Leute glauben offenbar, daß die Handlung nur Anlaß für ein Musik ist und daß die Story der Oper durch die orientalische oder exotische Form zugedeckt wird.] Quoted in "Das Ägyptische ist die Sehnsucht!...", 2.

⁹⁶ Reinhard Beuth, *Die Welt*, cited in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, Feb/März 1981 (Frankfurt: Direktion der Oper Frankfurt, 1981), 10. [Und dann kommt der merkwürdige dritte Akt, Verdis stärkster. Kein Pomp mehr, keine Repräsentationsoper, drohend erhebt sich die Tragödie. Die Musik wird wahr und leidenschaftlich, die Figuren sind plötzlich aus Fleisch und Blute, warden Menschen. Und da kuscht Neuenfels plötzlich vor Verdi, wagt keinen Gag mehr, spult das Stück ab...]

⁹⁷ Gerhard R. Koch, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, quoted in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, 12. [...die zügigeren Tempi machen ja nicht nur den Ablauf flüssiger und spannender, sondern sie enthüllen auch die Größe gerade des Opern-Komponisten Verdi, dessen Musik ihre dramatische Funktion offenbart, zu sprechen hebt, etwas über die Personen und Situationen aussagt, sie sogar verrät.]

the heated public discourse that followed the premiere. As described by one report:

Angry protests and backlash (“Go to Verona!”) threatened the performance in some spots... A storm of “boos” answered [Neuenfels] and his dramaturg Zehelein—even Gielen as a co-conspirator.⁹⁸

A few central features were addressed frequently in the critical discourse, both as sources of praise and also as moments subjected to bitter critique. The copious and controversial press about the use of the chorus is one example. Using a chorus of singers and dancers for unconventional purposes is a harbinger of Neuenfels’s work, both in *Aida* and in other infamous pieces the director has staged throughout his career, and perhaps the most infamous such moment from this Verdi staging was the opening of Act II, scene ii, the “Triumph March.” Rather than staging the chorus traditionally as members of the parade and the Egyptian public, the lights came up on a scene in which the Frankfurt *Aida* audience stared directly in the eyes of a fictitious 19th-century audience, who in turn watch a secondary stage below, upon which a typical 19th-century style *Aida* is recreated by dancers who puppet the actions of the main characters. The secondary audience and principle characters are further supplemented by a secondary “chorus” staged as blackface Ethiopian slaves, clothed as both savages and Nazi captives. Such unconventional use of the chorus to produce this unexpected play-within-a-play creates a Brechtian-style moment of estrangement; the audience becomes intensely aware of its

⁹⁸ Critic’s column in *Allgemeine Zeitung Mainz*, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, 11. [Wütende Proteste und Gegenreaktionen (“Fahrt doch nach Verona”) gefährdeten die Aufführungen stellenweise... Ein Buh-Sturm antwortete ihm und seinem Dramaturgen Zehelein—sowie Gielen als Mitverantwortlichem...”]

own role as onlookers upon the horrific, exoticized scene.⁹⁹

In combination with other elements, including the interplay of the multiple levels of time already discussed, and especially the (multiple) references to the tender subject of Germany's National Socialist past, the techniques and themes set forth by the Neuenfels, Zehelein, Gielen, and Wonder provoked an important cultural moment in Frankfurt.

While such new thematic additions and controversial directorial techniques caused a flurry of excitement among some viewers delighted by the deeper level of engagement and insight Neuenfels's team brought to the music and text, they also left many other audience members and critics aghast at the new reading of the piece, especially in light of the customary elements that were cast aside in the new staging: the gilded, circus-like splendor traditionally used to depict ancient Egypt.¹⁰⁰

From an analytical standpoint, it is important to note that although these interpretive matters hinge upon how the staging was perceived and understood by audience members and critics, most of these same thematic issues can also be linked to the conscious efforts of the creative team and the singers who envisioned those concepts and gradually realized them during

⁹⁹ Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich, in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, quoted in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, 11. "Neuenfels mobiliziert gerade in diesem Bild wieder den 'Bewegungschor' ... verlängert den Sängerkhor ins Szenische... aus mancherlei Gründen..." [Neuenfels mobilizes the moveable chorus again in this scene, extending the choir of singers into a scenic choir... for many reasons.]

¹⁰⁰ Beuth, Reinhard, *Die Welt*, as quoted in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, 10. "Was scheren ihn die Leute, die wirklich *Aida* sehen wollen? Für sie macht er Theater nicht. Für sie macht Frankfurt keine Oper." [What does he care about the people, who really want to see *Aida*? He doesn't make theater for them. Frankfurt doesn't make any operas for them.]

rehearsals, and the creative environment in which that work was done.¹⁰¹ As such, the perspectives of creators and other nuances of the context in which the piece was created need to be examined alongside the audience standpoint in order to provide an analysis that encompasses a full view of the piece. This in-depth analysis produces a more complete picture of the staging than the (relatively one-sided) approach of an analysis performed solely from the perspective of an audience member watching the piece live within the darkened theater.

As such, in addition to the deconstruction of the themes most apparent to an audience during performance, it is revelatory to examine the process behind the piece and aspects of the context that seem to have borne influence on how the staging was created. Equally important to an understanding of the issues embedded in the final staged piece is how the specific context of the production enabled the gradual crystallization of those themes into the shape that eventually reached the audience.

Given the date of this analysis—over thirty years have passed since the preparation of the production—this sort of investigation is partially hindered by evidentiary struggles.

Unfortunately, the piece's *Inszenierungsmappe*, which translates roughly to “production folio”, has long since been removed from the Oper Frankfurt's internal records.¹⁰² This file typically

¹⁰¹ I make this observation not to argue for the superiority of elements implemented intentionally by the creative team, but rather, for the simple reason that many important interpretive aspects of a staging are designed quite consciously. Of course, any piece certainly also contains a healthy number of interpretive features that could also be argued as unintentional, as understandings that arise in the minds of observers not in any way involved in the creation of the piece. I do not wish to leave out such perspectives, or consider them inferior. Rather, I believe that considering a multiplicity of perspectives on the piece simply allows for a fuller picture, and by extension, a more thorough analysis.

¹⁰² The piece is out of production; the current archive of *Inszenierungsmappen* extends back only to 1991.

contains notes and all retained records from various meetings, rehearsals, etc. involved in the preparation of the piece. Yet even at this late date, a few published items can still be found that reference important matters in production, and therefore the contextual issues of bearing on the final shape of the staging. Interviews and recorded and television radio programs, for example, still offer some foundation for understanding why the piece took its ultimate shape.¹⁰³

Perhaps the most interesting element to be discerned from investigating the backstage and preparatory aspects of this staging is the growing ascription of an authorial role to the stage director. An examination of the context surrounding the 1981 *Aida* makes clear that both critical reception and the in-house publications articulate a recurrent theme: Neuenfels alone is credited with the new reading of the text. The critique continually centers on the figure of the director, giving him responsibility for the production. “A fundamental hatred for music seems to bring Neuenfels to make every kind of emotion laughable” began a critic’s review from Mainz, and others followed similarly.¹⁰⁴

Egypt, for Neuenfels, [can only be associated with] the type of longing that includes an anti-civilizing element... In addition to [these examples], Neuenfels

¹⁰³ While it is certainly disappointing the preparatory documents contained in the *Inszenierungsmappe* are no longer available for either of the pieces in this chapter (*Aida* and *Les Troyens*), analyses that incorporate discussion of production notes will be offered later in this dissertation with respect to other productions. Production folders and notes still exist for the 21st century pieces discussed later in Chapters Three and Four, and a complete set of directors’ notes from the Berghaus *Ring* (Chapter 2) have also been retained in the archives of the Akademie der Kunst in Berlin. As such, evidence discovered in those documents will be offered to support analyses offered in Chapters Two—Four of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁴ An unnamed critic’s column from *Allgemeine Zeitung Mainz*, quoted in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, Februar/März 1981, 11. “Ein abgrundtiefer Haß gegen die Musik scheint Neuenfels dazu zu bringen ,jede Art von Emotion lächerlich zumachen,”

sets the superficiality of [the] Triumph March nearly lasciviously...¹⁰⁵

Even more neutral, factual reviews followed the same lead, attributing responsibility for the new reading entirely to Neuenfels.

Similarly to in his preceding opera readings, Hans Neuenfels set not only the plot, the story line, into stage pictures, but also conjures up codes that shed light on the stage events... However, Neuenfels would not be Neuenfels if his personal obsessions didn't also receive their place in his dreamlike, angry scenes.¹⁰⁶

Still another example goes so far as to pit Gielen's work as conductor against the theatrical side of the piece, implying a lack of unity and perhaps even disagreement between these two leading figures from the creative team:

Michael Gielen had it harder than ever, to bring the risky evening to an end, in cold blood and with a high degree of tension. He tended to slip in underneath the disruptive action...¹⁰⁷

Yet the singular ascription of credit to Neuenfels was not solely the work of the press.

Statements from the Frankfurt Opera, too, repeatedly attribute the vision for the piece to the

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Jöckle, *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, quoted in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, Februar/März 1981, 13. "Ägypten bedeutet für Neuenfels nur noch so eine Art Sehnsucht, die auch einen antizivilisatorischen Aspekt besitzt... Neuenfels setzt sich dem "Trivialen" dieses Triumphmarsches nahezu wollüstig aus..."

¹⁰⁶ Rainer Wagner, *Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung*, quoted in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, Februar/März 1981, 14. "Ähnlich wie in seinen vorangegangenen Opern-einstudierungen bebildert Hans Neuenfels nicht einfach nur den Plot, die Handlung, sondern beschwört Chiffren, die über das Bühnengeschehen hinaus Aufschluss geben... Neuenfels wäre allerdings nicht Neuenfels, wenn nicht auch seine privaten Obsessionen, seine Traum- und Wutbilder ihren Platz bekämen.

¹⁰⁷ Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, Februar/März 1981, 11. "Michael hatte es wohl schwerer den je, den risikoreichen Abend kaltblütig und dennoch mit höchster innerer Anspannung zum glücklichen Ende zu bringen. Er tendierte dazu, die Störaktionen... zu unterlaufen."

director alone, and stress his revered position. For example, the opening article of the January/February 1981 *Musitheater Hinweise*, the house's free bimonthly publication distributed throughout the city and primary source of issuing commentary on its own work, featured a six-page interview by the journalist Dietolf Grewe with both the director and the dramaturg. The line of questioning followed Neuenfels's decision to direct the piece, and pervasively characterizes the piece as if it were the work of Neuenfels, alone:

D.G.: You play the piece in part in very small spaces, which is entirely unusual for *Aida*. Apart from that, you have, as you often do, subdivided the original scenes yet again...¹⁰⁸

Significant here, as throughout the entire interview, are the “du/ dir” forms of the singular pronouns used for the word “you” in the German language, rather than the plural “ihr” form. The implication of this singular form would have been quickly noticeable to any German speaker as an unusual choice for such a conversation, especially because the interview was not solely conducted with Neuenfels. Neither the language of the questioning nor the published title of the interview indicates that Klaus Zehelen was also an active participant in the conversation, although Neuenfels was one of two senior members of the creative team to speak about the piece with Dietolf Grewe that day. Grewe continues the pattern further, using the possessive pronoun “dein” (the singular form of “your”) in multiple places the interview, both with reference to *Aida* and also to the *Macbeth* that Neuenfels had staged in Frankfurt shortly beforehand, continuing the trend. Interestingly, none of the three participants stray from such directly singular and possessive language about the piece throughout; Neuenfels also frequently uses the “ich” form in

¹⁰⁸ ““Das Ägyptische ist die Sehnsucht!’...”, 2. “D.G.: Du Spielst das Stück ja in zum Teil sehr kleinen Räumen, was bei *Aida* völlig unüblich ist. Außerdem hast Du, wie häufig bei Dir, die vorgegebenen Szenen noch einmal unterteilt...”

his replies, saying “I” rather than “we.” Even this in-house publication, then, continues the obvious trend in the critical discourse that repeatedly presents the stage director as the lone creative figure responsible for the new reading of the piece; any associated theatrical advancements (or perhaps perceived missteps) were attributed solely to Neuenfels, cast as the young star to have provided the artistic vision.

These observations prompt an interesting question: what might have prompted this sudden burgeoning of directorial celebrity and the nontraditional stagings that accompanied them, and specifically in Frankfurt? The matter undoubtedly has roots in both Frankfurt politics and the plethora of political (and relatedly, artistic) changes afoot in both East and West Germany (GDR and FRG, respectively) during this decade—and in particular, it seems at least partially related to the preoccupation with “quality” already shown to dominate Frankfurt cultural life. Furthermore, a major role seems to have been played by the policies of Hilmar Hoffmann, who had so eloquently called for a fresh approach to be applied to the art form, and who installed like-minded figures such as Gielen at the opera, to make that work a reality. As Gielen brought his own collection of recruits to the company, including but not limited to Pamela Rosenberg, the creative energies certainly were swayed toward young artistic figures, including directors, who brought with them viewpoints and approaches of marked contrast to the means used to create theatre in the decades prior. However, any attempt to attribute the burgeoning of artistically risqué, director-driven theater purely to Hoffmann’s presence in Frankfurt would certainly provide only an oversimplified answer at this point, based solely on the analysis of one production. As such, I will return to this question again in Chapter Three, after examining a series of productions by another director extraordinarily influential at the Oper Frankfurt in

during the 1980s: Ruth Berghaus.

***Regietheater* or Collaboration?**

Looking beyond Hans Neuenfels's *Aida* to pieces set at Oper Frankfurt by other directors of the Gielen Era makes it abundantly clear that the primarily negative characterizations of shocking contemporary productions so often called *Regietheater* simply do not apply to work in this period. This point is espoused prominently in a 2012 series of oral history interviews I was able to conduct with a former member of the Oper Frankfurt direction (and Gielen's close associate at that time), Pamela Rosenberg. She discusses Alfred Kirchner's 1979 staging of Janáček's *Januŕa* as well as Ruth Berghaus's 1983 production of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* in addition to elaborating on production details in Neuenfels's *Aida*. Rosenberg states:

When people talk about *Regietheater*... the directors that have become too strong, or in the [United] States, when they talk about "Eurotrash", there are definitely productions where you can see it! A director has had some idea, and he sort of thrusts it upon the piece... but there [Frankfurt]... the best theater was arising from (one of) the many genuine readings of the piece ... coming from [the director and the dramaturg's] understanding of what was there... And it's a process in rehearsals of bring that to life. ...In the process of rehearsals, [the singers] became completely convinced of it.¹⁰⁹

Although Rosenberg concedes that many Oper Frankfurt pieces credited to directors such as Neuenfels were "shocking" to the public, the above quote disaffirms the notion that the provocative readings so frequently offered during the Gielen Era were unwarranted or invalid interpretations ramrodded onstage by a dogmatic stage director, as is so often the claim about

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix C. Pamela Rosenberg, Interview #2 by Cordelia Chenault. Digital Recording B. July 12, 2012. Transcript p.458-459.

similar work slandered under the term *Regietheater*.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, her statement emphasizes a recurrent theme arising in this interview series as she stresses an aspect of particular significance in the productions staged at Oper Frankfurt during the Gielen Era: an unusual level of “trust” and “commitment to the collaborative process” that existed across the gamut of individuals involved in productions of the period, from leaders of the creative teams to guest soloists, from ensemble singers to the chorus and the orchestra— even including the operational staff.¹¹¹

According to Rosenberg, the frequent “give and take” between singers and directors— quite the opposite of dogmatic direction, in fact—and the act of coming to an idea together was often responsible for the building of trust between the working members of the cast and those leading the creative team. She recounts a powerful moment of conflict during the process of staging *Janufa*, in which mezzo-soprano Daniza Mastilovic bristled at a characterization suggested by director Alfred Kirchner. Mastilovic disagreed with Kirchner’s request that her character Kostelnička should be much more quiet about her entry onstage directly after having killed the baby; the singer strongly felt that she would be much more physically disturbed. A heated discussion ensued, but the two eventually found common ground and were eventually able to reach a compromise; she would enter quietly, but with tense body language, her just-soiled hands thrust into her pockets, in what later became a forceful onstage demonstration onstage of her disturbed emotional state.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Johanna Dombois, Richard Klein, "Encore: Das Lied der unreinen Gattung. Zum Regietheater in der Oper", in Johanna Dombois, Richard Klein, *Richard Wagner und seine Medien. Für eine kritische Praxis des Musiktheaters*. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2012), 3-46.

¹¹¹ Appendix C. Rosenberg, Interview #2, 454-455.

¹¹² Appendix C, Rosenberg Interview #2, 452.

Yet it was certainly more than the chance coupling of strong relationships between directors and singers that built trust among the company. Indeed, as Rosenberg indicates, administrators also structured the rehearsal periods themselves with care, precisely in order to encourage the sort of intense artistic collaboration they sought. This was done in intentional avoidance of the traditional, straightforward stagings so standard at the time within houses using the repertoire system:

But the way the *Reihenfolge* [order] of rehearsals was very carefully constructed [by the *Betriebsbüro* and Mathias Weigmann, director of operations]... we were very aware of those decisions affecting the kind of production we were going to get. ... in Frankfurt at the time, it was much more constructed... but we were all completely passionate about the mission.It was so much different from, if you went to Munich, or Vienna, where the singers would meet each other on stage, essentially, and just be thrown in... these schleuder-productions (spin-cycle productions)...¹¹³

In Hilmar Hoffmann's first term, as implemented by Christoph von Dohnányi from 1970 – 1977, operas produced in the company's repertoire system had been far too "kulinariſh", too "culinary" (implying "sumptuous" or "pleasurable") to use Hoffmann's own terminology (borrowed from Bertolt Brecht)—quite far from the sort of "teaching theater" he would have preferred to see.¹¹⁴ As such, Hoffmann and the newcomer Gielen, with the support of the rest of the opera's direction, aimed from 1977 on to present productions featuring a higher level of theatrical artistry and deeper readings of the staged works than had been offered before. First, rehearsal periods were extended to a full six weeks to allow for more intense work time, and

¹¹³ Appendix C, Rosenberg Interview #2, 442, 416.

¹¹⁴ Ranan, 185. Ranan is quoting Hoffmann, who was referring to a quote from Bertold Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*. (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), 33.

secondarily, *Mitsprache* was implemented.¹¹⁵

The German word *Mitsprache* has no direct equivalent in English, but can be understood as an employee's right to voice an opinion on matters of business, thus contributing to matters more typically reserved for the organizational leadership. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *Kulturdezernant* Hilmar Hoffmann had at first wanted to implement *Mitbestimmung*, a stronger version of the same principle in which company members (both the artistic and non-artistic staff) are given equal voting rights on major directional decisions; the stronger version of this business approach had already been implemented within the city offices, and Hoffmann found it particularly fitting for businesses of a creative nature, such as opera and theater. After some time, however, the *Mitsprache* form was deemed more practicable for the opera (due to the large numbers of house employees), and implemented. As Ranan reports, "channels were established to enable the staff to inform the artistic advisory council of their views," and the format was regularly used until Gielen's departure and Gary Bertini's arrival.¹¹⁶ In this way the riskier concepts involved in the work could be contested from within the ranks of the opera company, and opportunities were provided for compromise.

The spirit of *Mitsprache* also permeated the creative process, led by Gielen, who was accustomed to provocative work and possessed a deep understanding of the need for collaborative support from within the multitudes of orchestra players, soloists, choristers, and technicians working on a piece. So in addition to the official *Mitsprache* channels, passion and trust in the artistic process was also intentionally cultivated within the staff, chorus, and orchestra

¹¹⁵ For more on the addition of *Mitsprache*, see Ranan, 183. For more on the benefits of the 6-week production period, refer to Rosenberg's comments on *Janufa*, July 12, 2012.

¹¹⁶ Ranan, 184.

by the opera direction and the various creative teams whenever necessary, providing a unifying effect and commitment to the artistic risks being taken. Rosenberg recounts a pivotal moment during Neuenfels's *Aida*:

...in the scene when...the Ethiopians are brought in, to be civilized in front of this opera audience...the chorus got very upset and were going to strike—we are an opera, we don't do this sort of thing... (it was) because of the chicken legs, pregnant women were on stage throwing chicken legs.... they didn't want to be involved in anything that was this debauched.

...that was great, that that happened, for the company, the best thing that ever happened to the company, because we called off that day's rehearsals, and we started talking about this art form, why do we do it? It was so existential!...
... I think it was on two separate days that we had these long discussions, and the chorus had turned around. And from then on, they were really supportive.¹¹⁷

After these full two days of discussions with the full cast and crew, which were solely dedicated to the discussion of artistic matters and new ideas, trust had been fully established, improving work-ethic and providing a staunch commitment to the ideas advanced in the production. As Rosenberg further indicates, despite the fact that pieces featuring a non-traditional *Konzept* or an alternative staging are somewhat simpler to prepare within a house utilizing a *stagione* system due to the full-house commitment to a single production at a time, the repertoire system in place at Oper Frankfurt also provided benefits due to the large collection of permanent ensemble and chorus members available to give repeat performances of the piece in later seasons, thus maintaining much of the artistic integrity of the initial performance run.

Die Trojaner

When combined with the benefits of a system offering permanent ensemble and chorus

¹¹⁷ Appendix C, Rosenberg, Interview #2, 451-452

positions, the pivotal full-cast discussions of artistic purpose held during *Aida* carried the momentum of this new (and highly structured) creative process forward into other later pieces. And as the Gielen Era progressed, according to Rosenberg, the more committed and polished the productions became. Yet it was not only with respect to the ensemble that the collaborative process flourished. The production of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* staged by Ruth Berghaus in 1983 offers another example of how ideas flowed seamlessly within the inner circle of the creative team.¹¹⁸ Premiered on December 18, 1983, this piece was led by many of the same members involved in the creation of the 1981 *Aida*: Michael Gielen appeared again in his habitual role as conductor, while Ruth Berghaus travelled from the GDR to serve as stage director, Hans Dieter Schaal and Max von Vequel offered the stage design and the related technical direction, Nina Ritter assumed the role of the costume designer, while Klaus Zehelein also served as dramaturg. Despite the relatively clear division of the creative team members' functions associated with their titles, however, it is difficult to assign creative responsibility for the myriad of novel interpretive ideas in this *Les Troyens* to any particular member of the team.

Among the more unusual features of this production is the set design, which assumed centrality in reactions to the staging: giant, angular set pieces in nearly every scene dwarfed the characters—or elevated them up so high on the scaffolds that Rosenberg, looking on, became “practically seasick.” The story unfolds, moving from the tragedy striking the Trojans during their last moments in the city before fleeing the Greeks and Cassandra's ominous warnings for Italy, and continuing on through their voyage to the mammoth city of Carthage, and the narrative

¹¹⁸ Berghaus's background will be discussed extensively in Chapter Three. Most importantly, Berghaus came to be known as one of the most innovative directors to approach opera in the latter half of the 20th-century, and her work is largely influenced by background in dance and her years of close work with Bertold Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble.

continues on through the devastation caused by for the colossal city and its queen after Énée (Aeneas) finally decides to abandon Didon (Dido) and lead his people on to Italy. Particularly in the second setting of Carthage, scenic elements loomed large—yet they were also a highly collaborative endeavor. Hans Dieter Schaal “had never designed a set in his life” before this piece, and the stage design “was very much a collaborative effort” with the technical director, Max von Vequel, especially in terms of managing the gargantuan elements sketched by Schaal, including the largest theatrical turntable in Europe at the time. Von Vequel’s guidance, however, eventually led the technicians to finish the massive set pieces—although just hours before the first performances. According to Rosenberg:

Schaal happened to be in the office during early internal talks about the piece. He was a conceptual architect, and the idea was Zehelein’s to approach him, but he was obviously going to need real guidance through it. It was very fraught.¹¹⁹

Other poignant moments of this reading were also shared endeavors: in Didon’s death scene, for example, Énée’s forlorn lover appears isolated center stage, stranded in a rowboat, an idea that first materialized after comments to Ruth Berghaus by Nina Ritter, who was normally responsible for costumes. Ritter was apparently also the source of the idea for Didon’s actual death, in which she crawls under a gigantic gauze cocoon to disappear. In fact, despite Zehelein’s role as dramaturg, Rosenberg calls Ritter (based at least in part on her articulated ideas about this scene) “one of the great dramaturgical thinkers,” and also was quick to assert, “Klaus [Zehelein] always claimed that he learned real dramaturgical thinking from Nina.”¹²⁰ This staging is littered with such instances of ideas flowing freely between members of the creative team, such that any

¹¹⁹ There were very real fears that the piece would not, in fact, be ready in time for the premiere, which prompted startling moments of fear about the potential political and financial repercussions, were that to happen. See Appendix C, Rosenberg Interview #2, p, 437.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.445.

attempt to trace the origin of particular conceptual aspects can either be viewed as impossible, or—perhaps more aptly—moot.

Rosenberg asserts that *Les Troyens* should be taken as an exceedingly clear exemplar of the unusual manner in which new pieces were conceptualized and prepared during the Gielen Era. If that claim is true, this piece seems to offer even further evidence that some of the most profound stagings of the Gielen Era took shape as a result of the company's rabid commitment to artistic collaboration, rather than due to a lone visionary director propelling his ideas—despite the abundance of discourse from the period to the contrary.

The discussion of the 1983 *Les Troyens* and the 1981 *Aida* offered in the preceding pages has revealed that the 1980s brought new approaches and fresh perspectives to the production of opera at the Oper Frankfurt. The artistic leadership emphasized the growing importance of theater as both a collective and highly artistic process, while also offering an environment that encouraged highly artistic alternative readings propelled by a highly revered director. These two elements proved a dynamic combination, which resulted in the establishment of a radical style of *Musiktheater* presented upon the Oper Frankfurt stage.

From a purely artistic perspective, then, the work of this period seems to have ingrained a new approach to making opera, a production style that would spread rapidly throughout Germany, Europe, and beyond over the course of the next three decades, continuing to showcase work by free-thinking directors and designers. Indeed, despite the simultaneous emphasis on the collective authorship so observable in pieces such as *Le Troyens* and *Janufa*, work produced at Oper Frankfurt during the Gielen Era also reveals a real growing reverence for stage directors such as Hans Neuenfels, who are repeatedly credited as the driving force behind new and

typically radically re-envisioned stagings. I suggest that the frequency of such drastic reconceptualizations of the canonized operas staged in 1980s Frankfurt, coupled with the discourse that so often credited the stage director with those artistic changes, worked to eventually ingrain both the notion of directorial authority and also the artistic trend towards avant-garde readings of traditional works that has by now become commonplace in contemporary opera houses. Where opera and music theatre are concerned, despite a simultaneous dependency on the power of collaborative, collective musico-theatrical work, the radical theatrical approach most commonly known as *Regietheater* does seem to have taken hold in the Frankfurt of the Gielen Era.¹²¹ The next several chapters of this dissertation will provide further examples to support this idea, which will be argued more thoroughly at the close of this dissertation.

This chapter has begun to demonstrate how Oper Frankfurt, one of the most influential houses in Germany prior to unification, embarked upon a new artistic era in the 1980s. The productions discussed in this chapter were important examples in a revolutionary series of stagings produced through radical means that would revolutionize the staging and production of opera in the years to follow. By examining the context shaping the 1981 *Aida* and issues surrounding that piece, along with the 1979 *Janufa* and the 1983 *Le Troyens*, some of the most significant aspects of approach and priorities shaping the radical artistic productions in Frankfurt during this period have been exposed. The next chapter will continue that work by examining

¹²¹ The phenomenon is not only German; some French and Belgian directors have also played a role, including Patrice Chéreau and Gerard Mortier. A few American and English directors have also been involved, including David and Christopher Alden, Robert Wilson, and Sarah Caldwell. Yet the phenomenon arose predominantly in Germany. See also Almut Ullrich, *Die 'Literaturoper' von 1970-1990: Texte und Tendenzen, Veröffentlichungen zur Musikforschung*, no. 11 (Germany: Noetzel Wilhelmshaven, 1991).

another set of acclaimed productions pioneered by the director arguably considered one of the most important of the period: Ruth Berghaus. The forthcoming analyses of her version of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1985 – 1987) will reveal still further insights on this integral and pivotal period in the history of creative work in Frankfurt.

Chapter Three: Theatricality, Directorial Authority, and Collaboration— The Berghaus *Ring*

The Frankfurt Theaters were, at that time, absolutely able to compete... Frankfurt was, in fact, the ideal place for closely observing what was developing and going on in theater.
-Erika Fischer-Lichte, 2005.¹²²

The prior chapter has demonstrated how the Oper Frankfurt embarked upon a new artistic era in the 1980s. During these “Gielen Era” years, the company undertook a radical approach to opera production as it offered audiences a series of avant-garde readings of canonized operas that would transform the art of staging opera in the years to follow. As already addressed at length in Chapter Two, the mission propelled by the artistic leadership of the company suffused the *Musiktheater* produced on Frankfurt stages from 1979 to 1987 with an experimental, at times even provocative, tone. While conductor Michael Gielen was at the helm of the organization, the work was not his alone. On the contrary, the new path was advanced by several individuals within the inner circle of the opera house, a group that included the chief dramaturg, Klaus Zehelein; his assistant, the former director Pamela Rosenberg; as well as Hilmar Hoffmann, Frankfurt’s sympathetically-minded cultural chancellor, who had already begun to pave the way for their work in matters related to public policy and finance from within the city council.

¹²² Erika Fischer-Lichte, “The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive,” 564.

The artistic approaches of individual stage directors contributed significantly to the ideas advanced by Gielen and the Oper Frankfurt leadership during this period, as already discussed with respect to Hans Neuenfels, the young stage director of the 1981 *Aida*, whose incendiary reputation had already been established within the left-leaning spoken theater of the *Schauspiel Frankfurt* before his turn to opera direction.¹²³ Although these figures were primarily guest artists contracted from production to production, some developed ongoing relationships with the fixed members of the Gielen administration and were offered repeated contracts, enabling a sustained artistic impact on the tone of Oper Frankfurt productions. In addition to Neuenfels, another stage director to significantly influence the tone of productions at the house during the 1980s was Ruth Berghaus.¹²⁴ She worked at the Oper Frankfurt consistently throughout the Gielen Era, and the scale of her contributions intensified with each directorial appearance. Her series of noteworthy stagings at the house began with *Die Zauberflöte* in 1980, and she contributed a new production to each subsequent season of the Gielen administration. In addition to the reading of Mozart and the 1983 staging of Berlioz's *Le Troyens* mentioned briefly in Chapter Two, the body of work directed by Berghaus in Frankfurt included versions of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Janáček's *The Makropulos Affair*, and culminated in the full

¹²³Neuenfels's controversial reputation and status as theatrical revolutionary was first established in the spoken theater, including pieces like his 1975 staging of Euripides's *Medea*, staged in Frankfurt.

¹²⁴ In addition to being a frequent and important director in Gielen Era Frankfurt, Ruth Berghaus can be counted among one of the most influential directors of the century, both in East German and throughout Europe. See further details about the significant influence of her work in Elaine Kelly, "Staging Late Socialism: Ruth Berghaus and the German Opera Tradition, in *Composing the Canon in the German Democratic Republic: Narratives of Nineteenth-Century Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 173 – 180.

cycle of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* from 1985 – 1987. Her influence on the company in this period cannot be overestimated, and must not be overlooked.

This chapter addresses Berghaus's *Ring* productions. The 1985 *Das Rheingold*, the 1986 *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*, and the 1987 *Götterdämmerung* feature her particular version of what is sometimes termed the "Post-Brechtian" theatrical style at its most mature, a meticulous and idiosyncratic approach finely honed through years of work in dance, spoken theater, and eventually opera.¹²⁵ Her interpretations of Wagner's tetralogy provide comic yet reflective readings of his texts, which rank amongst the works most firmly entrenched in the current operatic canon. The four stagings are useful as quintessential illustrations of Gielen Era opera productions in Frankfurt, but their importance has also been established beyond the history of the company's repertoire; they are also frequently cast within the contemporary academic discourse as important examples of opera production in the 1980s. Furthermore, the Berghaus stagings are repeatedly ranked amongst the most influential interpretations of the tetralogy, named alongside directorial giants like Patrice Chéreau.¹²⁶ Useful for providing a stylistic understanding of the

¹²⁵ Unfortunately, published video recordings of the Berghaus *Ring* productions are not available, nor are they available in the official Oper Frankfurt archives housed at Goethe Universität. I did have the fortune to be able to view the premiere videos of all four operas at length in Frankfurt at the opera house, as the company has retained unofficial videos of the premieres for internal use. My observations in the analysis that follows in this chapter are based on my viewings of those DVDs.

¹²⁶ Gerd Rienäcker and Kordula Knaus both serve as good examples; both have characterized the *Ring* productions of Berghaus as amongst the century's most influential, alongside those of Herz and Chéreau. Knaus contrasts Berghaus with Herz in her 2003 article on the growth of *Regietheater*, juxtaposing and contrasting the two directors' works. Rienäcker casually groups the three on several occasions. See Kordula Knaus, "Musikwissenschaftliche Forschungsansätze in fremdem Terrain: Musiktheater als 'Regietheater'," in *Frankfurter Zeitung für Musikwissenschaft* 6 (2003): 189-207, and Gerd Rienäcker, *Richard Wagner: Nachdenken über sein "Gewebe"*, (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2001), 189.

Gielen Era stagings as well as an illustration of international stylistic trends in the theater of the 1980s, these productions serve as important objects of study in service to the goals of this dissertation.

The Frankfurt *Ring* tetralogy was launched with the premiere of *Das Rheingold* on December 7, 1985, and the three remaining installments of the series followed in regular increments over the course of two years. *Die Walküre* also opened within the first season, on May 1, 1986, while *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* were each premiered within the second, on November 9, 1986 and March 8, 1987, respectively. The positions on the creative team were occupied by the same core figures for each opera: musical direction was led by Michael Gielen, stage direction by Ruth Berghaus, set and costume design by Axel Manthey, and dramaturgy by Klaus Zehelein. The significance of these stagings has been regularly thematized, most often for reasons recently articulated by Jürgen Kühnel: Berghaus’s version of the cycle is particularly interesting for its demonstration of how pieces can “take shape due to the tightly-knit collaborative work of direction, dramaturgy, scenography, and—last but not least—musical direction.”¹²⁷ Kühnel’s words foreground the notion that the artistic successes of this *Ring* cycle arose from a highly collaborative creative process. The argument echoes points made by Pamela Rosenberg during the interview featured in Chapter One of this dissertation, and the two advance a view often advanced by scholars of opera and theater: that these productions from Frankfurt in the 1980s are exemplary, at least in part due to their collaborative nature.

¹²⁷ Jürgen Kühnel, “‘Mit neuen Augen Anschauen.’ Anmerkungen zum Thema Oper und Regietheater,” in *Zeit-Wart Gegen-Geist: Beiträge über Phänomene der Kultur unserer Zeit; Festschrift Sigrid Wiesmann 2001*, ed. Hannes Grosseck & T. Reischl (Vienna: Reischl & Grosseck, 2001), 295 “Entstehen sie in enger Zusammenarbeit zwischen Regie, Dramaturgie, Szenographie und—nicht zuletzt—musikalischer Leitung.“

Despite the common portrayal of the creative work on the *Ring* as collaborative, the notion begs investigation, particularly against the backdrop of Berghaus's reputation. The East German director has also been named the "Grande Dame" of Regietheater, historicized as a dynamic visionary insistent on a methodical—even inflexible—artistic approach.¹²⁸ Due to the fact that these dogmatic characterizations of Berghaus are also recurrent in the discourse, scholarly discussions of the *Ring* seem to vacillate between two antithetical perspectives on authorship. Focus is either placed on Berghaus as a radical artistic visionary, or on the egalitarian theatrical process, but never both. Such a paradox begs investigation, especially given the matter's importance to the contemporary understandings of so-called *Regietheater*; as already mentioned in Chapter Two, the term is most typically used to refer to anachronistic productions of canonized texts presumed to be compelled by willful directors.¹²⁹ For that reason, my investigation of these productions will assess the extent to which the *Ring* stagings directed by Ruth Berghaus were produced in a collaborative fashion. The interplay between the two oppositional claims lies at the heart of this chapter. Fortunately, my analytical approach throughout this dissertation, which considers events of the production process alongside examination of the performed stagings, should prove especially useful for such investigation.

Setting questions of collaboration aside momentarily, it is clear that Ruth Berghaus's enormous personal influence on these *Ring* stagings is indisputable. As the only member of the creative team working as a "guest" in the house, her presence brought perspectives to the staging

¹²⁸ Corinne Holtz, *Ruth Berghaus: ein Porträt* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), back cover.

¹²⁹ Johanna Dombois, Richard Klein, "Encore: Das Lied der unreinen Gattung. Zum Regietheater in der Oper", in Johanna Dombois, Richard Klein, *Richard Wagner und seine Medien. Für eine kritische Praxis des Musiktheaters*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2012), 3-46.

process that the Frankfurt team would otherwise have lacked. Coupled with that fact is the reality that many of the artistically noteworthy features the stagings can be traced directly to Berghaus on an evidentiary basis.¹³⁰ The following discussion of Ruth Berghaus's artistic and political background will situate these pieces within her own oeuvre as well as within the larger context of opera and theater history, as it simultaneously provides a thorough introduction to the stagings.

Ruth Berghaus: From Dance to Theater to Opera

Ruth Berghaus is an important figure within a theatrical lineage that traces back through the annals of 20th-century opera and theater history. From the start of her artistic career, her work was nothing if not radical. Although she would not stage her first opera until 1960, even her earliest creative ventures within the adjacent fields of dance and spoken theater model the characteristic style that would later prompt her reputation as a top-notch stage director, a position in which she was firmly established by the mid-1960s, both critically acclaimed and highly controversial. Born in Dresden in 1926, Berghaus began her career as a dancer, but turned to choreography shortly thereafter. After the conclusion of her dance studies in Dresden with Gret Palucca in 1953, she began several artistic endeavors, including an attempt to build a dance-theater troupe within Berlin's Akademie der Künste, an internship at the Berliner Ensemble, and choreography projects at both the Theater der Freundschaft children's theater and the Komische Oper.¹³¹ These undertakings placed Berghaus well on her way into the upper echelon of the East

¹³⁰As Corinne Holtz indicates, Ruth Berghaus' notebooks provide a wealth of conceptual information about each production, including sketches of characters as well as rehearsal annotations, which include blocking and design images. See more in Holtz, 208.

¹³¹ Holtz, 64.

German artistic establishment and launched her working relationship with Bertolt Brecht, whom she would consider her primary source of artistic inspiration.¹³² She worked steadily as choreographer with the Berliner Ensemble through 1971, when she was officially named manager of the company, but she also furthered Brechtian pieces and style outside the ensemble: Among Berghaus's first opera stagings were the 1965 premiere of *Puntila* at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, a new operatic version of Brecht's 1948 play, *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*, composed by Paul Dessau.

Indeed, Berghaus's foray into opera came in tandem with her personal relationship with Dessau, whom she married in 1954. Her first solo directing assignment was a 1960 staging of his *Verurteilung von Lukullus* in Mainz, upon the heels of their joint staging of the same opera earlier that year at the Staatsoper.¹³³ Her marriage to the much older Dessau, a firmly entrenched member of the German musical community, further cemented her within the Berlin's innermost artistic circle, the select creative artists working with the support of the GDR's cultural administration.¹³⁴ Her privileged status within that respected group brought with it another advantage: she was granted permission to work outside of East Germany. Leaving the country was seldom allowed to ordinary citizens, and only by application. By contrast, however, extended travel visas were approved for elite artists starting in the late 1970s, which allowed

¹³² Kelly, 174.

¹³³ Sigrid Neef, *Das Theater der Ruth Berghaus* (Berlin: Henschel, 1989), 25 – 27.

¹³⁴ As Johanna Yunker has also noted, Berghaus's career expanded into opera at approximately the same time as her marriage to Dessau, although she was already an established working artist within dance and theater. Johanna Yunker, "Socialism and feminism in East German opera: the cases of director Ruth Berghaus and composer Ruth Zechlin" (PhD Diss, Stanford University, 2012), 7.

them to “stand with one leg on each side of the wall” as they also brought prestige to the East German cultural industry.¹³⁵

Berghaus’s first excursions were to the UK, but Frankfurt would soon become a second home for the director during the 1980s after Dessau’s death. Although the privilege was controversial in the east, the excursions were appealing for Berghaus: the absence of GDR censors and surveillance allowed more artistic freedom. Furthermore, western audiences were highly supportive of experimentation; the trend within western theater of the time was “to undermine the unified experience of interpretative theater...left-wing sympathies in West Germany rendered it an accommodating venue for East German political art.”¹³⁶ Under such a paradigm, Berghaus’s style of work was particularly in demand, as it featured a mix of “satire, irony, and just the tiniest bit of deeper meaning” that ultimately left interpretation up to the spectator.¹³⁷

Ruth Berghaus’s recurring presence at the Oper Frankfurt provided an important stylistic link between the radical lineage of early 20th-century experimental theater and the increasingly risqué *Musiktheater* that appeared on the company’s stages. She brought techniques informed by extensive theatrical work with Brecht and other members of the mid-century avant-garde into the Frankfurt collaborations. As will be discussed as part of the examination of Brechtian style later

¹³⁵ Heiner Müller, “The Walls of History,” *Semiotext(e)* 4, no.2 (1982): 50.

¹³⁶ See Kelly, 192, for detailed discussion about the political benefits for the GDR of granting travel privileges to elite artists. She claims that Berghaus was one of three example directors mentioned in arguments to limit such travel in 1979; apparently some SED members felt that East German theaters suffered when the country’s artists pursued international work.

¹³⁷ Gerhard Koch, “Pop kommt nach Ost-Berlin: Ruth Berghaus’s *Rheingold*-Inszenierung an der Deutschen Staatsoper,” *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 27, 1979.

in this chapter, certain aspects of the Berghaus *Ring* can be understood in terms of Brechtian (and Post-Brechtian) theatrical developments. The stagings therefore occupy an important place within that particular lineage of 20th-century opera and theater history.¹³⁸ But aside from their Brechtian heritage, the productions also offered a thoroughly new approach to staging Wagner's tetralogy, one that locates the pieces firmly among the century's monuments of radical *Musiktheater*. Berghaus's staging of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* quickly assumed a significant position as one of the 20th century's most noteworthy incarnations of Wagner's seminal cycle.

The *Ring* in Gestures and Symbols

As is often true of Berghaus's work, the *Ring* offered audiences a version of the operas more stylistically akin to modern dance than to most opera productions of the day. As Thomas Sutcliffe has rightfully asserted, "modern dance is a long way from...pictorial and narrative conventions," but "the relationship between given language and representation [is] never problematical."¹³⁹ Within contemporary dance of the mid-twentieth century, it has become stylistically common for movement to expose layers of meaning and subtext, often in a disjointed matter with little relationship to—or sometimes blatantly contradictory of—traditional narrative. As composer John Cage commented in the 1950s, based on his collaborations with 20th-century dance giant Merce Cunningham, contemporary dance

no longer relies on linear elements (...) nor does it rely on a movement towards and away from climax. As in abstract painting, it is assumed that an element (a

¹³⁸ Rienäcker, 254-257.

¹³⁹ Sutcliffe, 128.

movement, a sound, a change of light) is in and of itself expressive; what it communicates is in large part determined by the observer himself.¹⁴⁰

While dance was not featured in the *Ring* productions, dancelike movement played an essential role, especially in the form of repetitive, contemporary gestures that seemed to lack any direct link to the 19th-century Wagnerian narrative. Amidst the naturalist styles of drama historically used to stage Wagner, this anachronistic and highly symbolic reliance on movement-based signification something entirely new, borrowed from modern dance.

This gestural approach is evident throughout the cycle's entirety. *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* were all heavily laced with symbolic choreography, and as the plot of each opera unfolded, critical moments were underscored by gesture, distinct and sometimes jarringly anachronistic. The precision of their execution demanded attention to the movement itself and also provoked a humorous detachment from the storyline. At the opening of *Das Rheingold*, the three Rhine Maidens appear suspended above the stage in a striking triangular formation. As they meet the dwarf, Alberich, and tell of the Rheingold that they protect, their arm gestures swim and twist in patterns tightly bound to the music. They playfully mimic the orchestra's pizzicato with flinging hand motions, and the gesture is comical enough to momentarily distract the audience from the movement's dramaturgical impetus, the Rhine Maidens' mockery of Alberich, who has been attempting to seduce them.

¹⁴⁰ *CageTalk: Dialogues with and about John Cage*, ed. Peter Dickinson, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 55. Quotation originally published in John Cage, "A Movement, a Sound, a Change of Light," in *Merce Cunningham & Dance Company* (New York: The Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, 1963,) 1.

Figure A. *The Rhine Maidens' hand gestures and illuminated red skirts.*



Similar gestural punctuation and symbolism continues throughout the first opera. When confronted with the problem of how to pay Fasolt and Fafner for the completion of their new palace in Scene Two, the gods attempt to protect Freia, the goddess of youth, beauty, and love, from being seized by the giants as recompense. Freia's gesticulations melodramatically demonstrate the emotional tension: As she enters, chased by Fasolt and Fafner, her arms raise together repetitively, urgently pleading, and when finally taken hostage, she exits with one hand to head, her other flung aside cartoonishly. Picturesque physical signals continue to figure prominently in Scene Four, after Wotan steals

Alberich's magic ring and exchanges it for Freia's return. Donner clears the air with a storm as she rejoins the group, during which the other gods express their yearning for Valhalla in a series of reaching, side-stretching gestures. Here too, the movements are comically precise, to the extent that they disrupt the audience's immersion in the drama, a technique quite familiar to viewers by this point.

Gesture and movement also highlight important moments of the storytelling in *Die Walküre*. An important example appears at the opening of Act II, as Brünnhilde and Wotan play in what Elaine Kelly has described as Brünnhilde's "playroom," where the young woman pretends to ride her father like a horse.¹⁴¹ In a childlike game, the Valkyrie playfully mimics the god's gestures as he tells her about his troubles. Yet the actions in the scene also foreshadow her later emotional "break" from her father; she refuses to imitate him when he tells of stealing the Ring. Those suddenly oppositional movements indicate that she will not serve him forever, a fact that becomes reality in Act II, scene iii as she supports Siegmund against Hunding in blatant defiance of Wotan's orders. Interestingly, the horse-riding gesture resurfaces again when Brünnhilde's Valkyrie sisters transport felled soldiers to Valhalla to assemble an army for Wotan in Act III. Acting in obedience to their father, they inject the familiar, playful movement into the scene by straddling the horse-like corpses in precisely the same pose as Brünnhilde had playfully ridden Wotan. But unlike their sister, who will later be stripped of her powers and encaged by flames as punishment for her transgression, the Valkyries repeat the movement ceaselessly through the end of the scene; they never betray their father, but continue to do his bidding.

The heavy presence of movement-based signification meant that Wagnerian themes were presented more as a sequence of signs than through dramatic narrative. Although no real variations were made from the music or libretti, the details of the story were to an extent beside the point in this retelling of the operatic tales. The productions revealed a certain "complexity... in the overall interpretation, freed from being lamely chronological."¹⁴² The intricacies were not

¹⁴¹ Kelly, 195.

¹⁴² Sutcliffe, 151.

only revealed through movement, but also via design elements: Unusual costume, prop, and set pieces also contributed significantly to this symbolic and dramaturgically-grounded new version of Wagner's tetralogy.

Indeed, the effects of some gestures in *Die Walküre* were magnified through the incorporation of distinctive costume or prop elements. In Act I, Sieglinde wears two different costumes: She first appears in an alluring red velvet dress as she encounters the mysterious visitor, but when she enters a second time to declare her love for her newly discovered brother, she wears a white nightdress. The distinctive red velvet costume reappears in Act II, scene ii as Siegmund drags the sleepwalking Sieglinde across the stage. Her arms extend in opposite directions as she trails the red dress from one hand, a symbol of her torn allegiance. The striking red color and velvety texture of the fabric, which hangs listlessly from her hand, compound the effect of her wide-stretched arms, pulled in opposite directions; the image highlights her emotional turmoil as her brother-lover prepares to battle her husband.

Such costumes proved extremely useful elements for the delivery of symbolism. The gods' clothing is particularly noteworthy: They were clothed in the manner of ancient Greeks, wearing white, toga-style drapes and helmets, which were sliced in half with the result that when turned in profile, the headpiece could seem either whole or nonexistent. The gods also wore *Cothurni*, sandals elevated on tall block-like soles, which literally raised them up on pedestals as it also recalled Greek tragedy.¹⁴³ These awkward high-heeled shoes, both a playful and a clear symbol of the gods' power, were removed as they became feeble during Freia's absence. The shoes take on important visual symbolism in Act II, scene i, as Fricka reminds Wotan of his duty

¹⁴³ Cothurni were originally worn by tragic actors in antiquity.

to protect marriage. As his wife drapes his shoes around his neck, bound together by the long shoestrings, Wotan bends underneath their weight, and the struggle between his heart and the heavy pressure of his obligations made poignant by his posture.

Prop items symbolic of femininity also highlighted the predicaments of female characters, both in the god-world of the first three operas and in the human realm of *Götterdämmerung*. Fricka belabors the application of her lipstick as she ponders how to regain her husband's affections in *Das Rheingold*, and she uses her silver purse flirtatiously in *Die Walküre* as a coy reminder of his obligations toward marriage. The increasing patriarchy of the new society, which intensifies in *Götterdämmerung*, is made visible in the costuming of the Gibichung women, who are clothed indistinguishably from one another, posed like mannequins in copper headdresses, coiffed, and painted with glossy makeup. Guttrune even carries a plastic doll, whose rigid gestures she occasionally mimics. Even Erda's costuming emphasizes the diminishing power of women within the new world order, as it also simultaneously emphasizes her sensuality.¹⁴⁴ The disenfranchised goddess, who embodies ancient feminine wisdom, is clothed in an electric blue evening gown. Caged in a deep well in the center of the proscenium floor, Erda presents a wistful incarnation of modern beauty as she drapes her body longingly across a model of a large globe. While Wotan is tempted to descend into the submerged prison while asking her advice (*Siegfried*, Act I, scene iii.) he ventures only a toe into the cell before he returns to his senses and retreats to the upper level.

¹⁴⁴ AdK, Berlin, Sigrid-Neef-Archiv, No. 251. *Rheingold*, "Zu den Figuren," in Gesprächsprotokoll 29.3.85, Frankfurt am Main, "Axel Manthey: ...Wichtig ist auch die Erotik bei Erda." [For Erda, sensuality is also important.] Translation mine.

The costumes worked in tandem with Manthey's stage design to deliver a highly symbolic interpretation. The major set pieces (as well as several huge signs created by the stage designer) were not only comical, they graduated to the level of absurdity. Valhalla took the form of a wide cylindrical object placed center stage, often projected with stars, and it appeared more akin to a vast spaceship in the darkness than a castle-fortress. Yet it seemed to correspond with the large telescope that was directed at the audience at several points in *Götterdämmerung*, as well as with the huge golden ball that symbolized the Rheingold while also resembling a planet. Together those set items seemed to place the gods within the vast darkness of space, wandering lost as their society slowly degraded and a new world order grew around them. Yet other signs were clearly outside of that schema, however, incongruent and bizarre. The suspended Rhine Maidens had red, oblong planes of light inserted into the bottoms of toy-like dresses, which flashed when Alberich attempted to steal the gold. (See Figure A.) Similarly, a huge ruler hung along the left side of the stage at the beginning of *Das Rheingold*, Scene Four, perhaps meant to symbolize the highly calculated nature of each wrong-turn along the way towards the gods' demise. Such absurdity continued as huge walking puppets dwarfed the stage and accompanied the singers playing Fafner and Fasolt, each costumed in grey suit and trilby, who seemed more like shrewd businessmen than builders.¹⁴⁵ The Gibichung hall continued the tone. Although the set representing the castle was minimalist in design, it was strewn with modernist furnishings such as Gropius-styled sofas, and a giant hand that dwarfed the back wall. Indeed, such bizarre visual design-features are highly reminiscent of Absurdist theater.

¹⁴⁵ Puppetry has appeared frequently in late-20th-century theater, especially in work of Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and Peter Schumann. See further discussion in James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre: from Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, (New York: Psychology Press, 1989), 114 – 130.

Figure B:
Valhalla



Absurdism and Fragmentation

As intimated in the prior section, the bizarre collection of mismatched signs in costumes, props, and set design is directly reminiscent of Absurdist Theater.¹⁴⁶ In a style similar to *Waiting for Godot*, the quintessential play of that style by Samuel Beckett, Berghaus and Manthey rely on the text, itself, as the source of meaning, but the substance of that meaning is demonstrated in images drawn from myriad contexts without any attempt to link those images to the realities of any particular domain, such as 19th-century society or the present day.¹⁴⁷ The images do not reference one specific world, but rather, they provide sense within the world inhabited by the

¹⁴⁶ Barry Millington has also discussed the Absurdist elements of Berghaus's *Ring*; see Barry Millington, *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 166-167.

¹⁴⁷ Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett The Last Modernist* (London: Flamingo, 1997), p. 391. See also J. Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 607-611.

characters of this particular production. In this way, the *Ring* created by Berghaus and the design team contains analogies that playfully incorporate a wide set of images and symbols, and which exhibits many similarities to Beckett's *Godot*. Indeed, Beckett's perspective on his own work sheds light on this new reading on the gods' gradual demise: "It is a game, everything is a game... It is a game in order to survive."¹⁴⁸ Together with eclectic costumes, humorous props, and a highly gestural interpretation, the Absurdist references in the set contributed to a densely layered web of symbols derived from the "exhaustive dramaturgical foundation" on which Berghaus insisted.¹⁴⁹

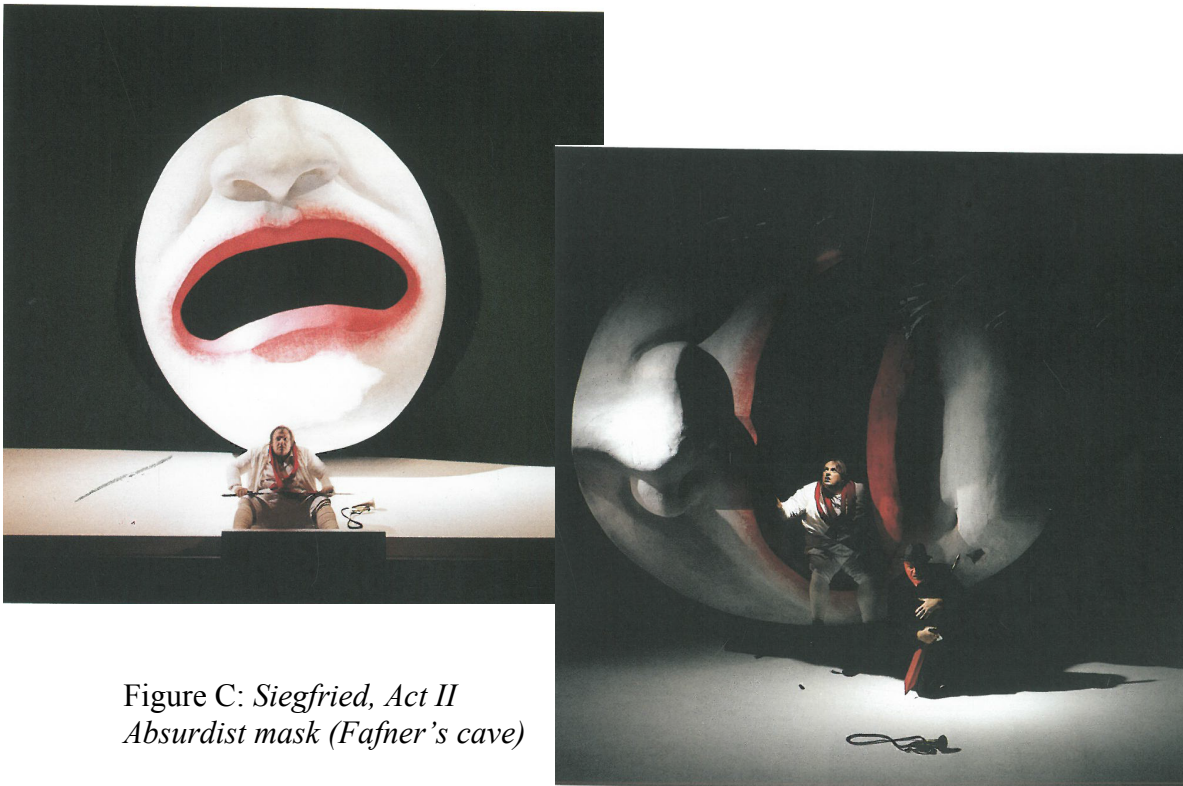


Figure C: *Siegfried, Act II*
Absurdist mask (Fafner's cave)

¹⁴⁸ Samuel Beckett, quoted in Walter Asmus, "Beckett directs *Godot*" in *Theatre Quarterly* 5, no. 19 (1975): 23- 24.

¹⁴⁹ Sutcliffe, 129.

In addition to its reliance on Absurdism, Berghaus's *Ring* is driven by multi-layered references and symbolism, which gives a "fragmented" impression. The coexistence of such surreal, comedic, and anachronistic theatrical elements seem to highlight what Elaine Kelly has called the "multiple narrative planes" present in the operas.¹⁵⁰ In an alternative approach to staging Wagner, the Oper Frankfurt productions use comic imagery to expose the work's subtexts and to comment on its textual challenges. At the same time, such fragmentation leads to the result that no cohesive framework exists to provide connections between the fragmented elements and images. Furthermore, the incongruence and ridiculousness of the varied signs, gestures, costumes, and set elements provided by Berghaus unabashedly jar the continuity of the storyline, and as curious moments jolt the audience into mental engagement with symbols past the level of the narrative, the productions construct meaning similarly to a pointillist painting; the messages embedded in Wagner's texts are conveyed through the multi-layered juxtaposition of points. In Berghaus's work, no attempt is made to connect the symbols and signs, but each stands humorously on its own, leaving a series of unconnected dramaturgical points for the audience to ponder.

Reliant on this pointillist-like fragmentation, the focus of the Berghaus *Ring* shifted the object of focus away from the linear progression of plot. While the written storyline still guides the onstage progression of the plot, the Wagnerian narrative moves out of focus. Instead, excavated meanings presented in signs lie at the heart of these productions. With that, the idea of a definitive reading is beside the point.

Berghaus marked the end of the era in which producers believed that their job was to make sense of the *Ring*. She inaugurated a new one in which many think this is

¹⁵⁰ Kelly, 193.

simply no longer possible, so great is the discrepancy between Wagner's aim of creating a unified work of art and the tetralogy with all its fault lines, that he eventually completed.¹⁵¹

Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* had a huge theatrical impact since the time of its inception. The cycle's immediate admission of the cycle into the standard repertoire since their initial performances in the late 1900s has resulted in a near-constant stream of performances and new productions since the 1880s, to extent that stagings of these operas can be understood as a musico-theatrical lineage of their own, a succession of what David Levin has referred to as "performance texts." Furthermore, the progression of the *Ring*'s performance history has shaped the dominant impressions of the issues implicit in the operas, which have become amongst the most deeply canonized of all texts.¹⁵² Audiences, critics and creative artists, alike, hold deeply ingrained preconceptions about the operas and expectations about their performance, and for the *Ring* operas, the sacrosanct concept of the "Werktreue" is held firmly.¹⁵³ Resultantly, a thorough analysis of Berghaus's *Ring* productions requires not only an analytical understanding of the

¹⁵¹ Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), xviii.

¹⁵² The intense and immediate canonization of Wagner's *Ring* operas can quickly be gained through an overview of the productions since the premiere. A useful overview can be found in Oswald Georg Bauer, *Richard Wagner: The Stage Designs and Productions from the Premieres to the Present* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983.)

¹⁵³ Patrick Carnegy also discusses the massive cultural and social impact of Wagner's operas throughout the 20th century. He points out statistics on the disproportional numbers of productions of Wagnerian works presented on German stages preceding World War II. Furthermore, the number of Wagnerian performances intensified further during the national socialist regime, which has resulted in the works' complicated associations with the xenophobia and conservative racial politics of that era. (See Carnegy, 234-236. For more on the Werktreue, see Lydia Goehr, "Being True to the Work," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1989): 55-67

stagings, but also an awareness of the situation of the productions within the context of the performance history.

The accumulated expectations about Wagner's texts are great, influenced by over a century of accretion. As might be expected of a *Ring* cycle produced by a major international house, Berghaus's stagings were compared to the other celebrated productions of prior decades, which are typically sorted by style and director. Her productions were understood as a far cry from the abstract symbolism of the Wieland Wagner productions at the Bayreuther Festspiele in the been the reigning approach to staging Wagner since the turn of the century. They also marked a thorough departure from the most celebrated stagings of the 1970s, considered "theatrical realism," a style inspired by the *Musiktheater* of the Komische Oper's Walter Felsenstein. The most renowned of those productions included the centenary *Ring* produced at Bayreuth by Patrice Chéreau in 1976, Götz Friedrich's staging from 1972, and Joachim Herz's acclaimed productions from 1973-76.¹⁵⁴ The entirely new style of the Frankfurt productions differed significantly from each of the others; Berghaus had staged the operas in an unaccustomed light that both sparked excitement and provoked harsh criticism.¹⁵⁵ Offering an

¹⁵⁴ For more on Harry Kupfer's productions, see Carnegy, 329 – 331 and 353. For more on Götz Friedrich's, see Carnegy, 348-354, and for the impact of Patrice Chéreau's stagings, see Carnegy, 355-364.

¹⁵⁵ Oper Frankfurt's in-house video recordings of the *Rheingold* premiere capture the loud, negative disruptions (primarily in the form of loud "boo" cries) made during curtain calls, a vocal demonstration of the initial audience resistance to the Frankfurt interpretation of the cycle's first installment. Furthermore, the divided voices of the press—primarily positive in East Germany, but extraordinarily negative in West Germany—are easily found. A recent doctoral dissertation by Alexander Rothe provides a useful reception survey of their various points: Alexander Rothe, *Staging the Past: Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle in Divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015,) 263 - 269.

entirely new alternative for Wagner, Berghaus's work provided "a theatrical experience that encoded the irony, alienation, and fragmentation of late modernity."¹⁵⁶

Post-Brechtian Opera?

The theatrical approach to the Berghaus *Ring* falls clearly within the stylistic heritage of Brechtian drama. As Thomas Sutcliffe has asserted, "Berghaus's starting point in opera was Brecht's conviction that the purpose of performance was to make people think rather than make them feel... to pursue an objective exposition of the ideas." Through an anachronistic and humorous gestural style of movement, incongruent design elements, and the fragmented presentation of symbols, Berghaus's work follows Bertolt Brecht's notion of Epic Theater more closely than it offered a unified presentation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* for which Wagner had so passionately argued, the approach so typically used by her most celebrated predecessors.¹⁵⁷ With these techniques, her *Ring* follows the key tenet of Epic Theater: that the audience should not be brought to identify with characters, but rather to be critically aware of the constructed nature of the acts taking place on stage.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Kelly, 193.

¹⁵⁷ Carnegie, 366. Carnegie calls Brecht's Epic Theater "the abnegation of Wagner's goal of a seamless *Gesamtkunstwerk*."

¹⁵⁸ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. British edition. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 221. Although this approach is most often referred to as *Epic Theater*, which was actually a theatrical movement of the early-mid-20th century pursued by small handful of people, Brecht included, it has come to be highly associated with Brecht, himself. Later in his career Brecht renamed this approach *dialectical theater* in order to better describe the "dialectizing of events" produced as a function of such work. However, this latter term is utilized less by non-Brechtians and outside of Theater Studies; "Epic Theater" remains the dominant term for this approach.

Yet Berghaus's *Ring* stagings do not simply parrot Brechtian style. On the contrary, it can easily be argued that these idiosyncratic productions are more aptly situated within a later approach characterized as "post-Brechtian." Propelled by Brecht's ideas, pieces of that school move "beyond the Brechtian without relinquishing its tenets."¹⁵⁹ Post-Brechtian work began to appear both within and outside of the Berliner Ensemble beginning in the 1970s, driven by a company of directors that included Berghaus as well as Christoph Marthaler, Robert Wilson, and Heiner Müller. The term is often used, but rarely defined. In David Barnett's recent analysis of Berghaus's 1971 staging of *In the Jungle* at the Berliner Ensemble, however, the theater scholar successfully extracts a series of premises and strategies crucial to post-Brechtian work, which provides useful for recognition of the elusive, layered style. Essential among his tenets is the preservation of Brechtian dialectical stagecraft, which emphasizes "showing" through the so-called *Gestus*, *Haltung*, and *Arrangement* to produce a *Verfremdungseffekt*, an alienation effect that makes the audience conscious of its distanced role as spectators. *Gestus* can be understood as "socially encoded expression," gestures or movements that reveal meaningful insights into the larger scheme of the play.¹⁶⁰ These acts work in combination with *Haltung*, a less independent form of embodiment. This second factor is the physical manifestation of an attitude towards someone else, a posture that indicates a relationship with another character onstage. Dependent on the particular connection between the figure and the others present, a character's *Haltung* changes from scene to scene based on who is there. *Arrangement* completes the trio of dialectical

¹⁵⁹ David Barnett, "Toward a Definition of Post-Brechtian Performance," *Modern Drama* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 336.

¹⁶⁰ Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (Abington: Routledge, 2009), 53.

theater components required according to the Brechtian (or post-Brechtian) schema.¹⁶¹ Defined as the “meaningful articulation of all the physicalized relationships being demonstrated onstage at any given time,” this term refers to the onstage placement of characters as they demonstrate their *Gestus* and *Haltung*. The carefully constructed dialectic of these three elements allows the plot to emerge.¹⁶²

All three elements of Brechtian dialectics are connected to the *Fabel*, the historical system that provides the explanatory logic that motivates the three dialectical elements.¹⁶³ This point marks the key difference between Brechtian and post-Brechtian theater: in post-Brechtian theater, the motivations for *Gestus*, *Haltung*, and *Arrangement* remain uncertain. Such pieces lack a clear *Fabel* that would dictate their forms and provide them meaning. While the three dialectical elements can be consciously observed, their social impetus remains unexplained.

¹⁶¹The Brechtian use of the term “dialectic” corresponds to the Marxist usage, not the Hegelian. For Brecht, theatrical dialectics exposed the *material* world, which the human mind synthesizes into meaning, as the state of the world structures human thought. This Marxist version of dialectical method, sometimes called “dialectical materialism,” sets the material world as the substance to be examination, as it is the prompt that structures and enables human thought. Marx believed his concept to be the direct opposite of Hegelian dialectics, which considered the real world to be “the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea’.” For further explanation, see Karl Marx, “Afterword (Second German Ed, 1873),” in *Capital*, vol.1, Bk 1, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 2015),14.

¹⁶² See Bertolt Brecht "A Short Organum for the Theatre (1949)" in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett. (London: Methuen, 1964),179–205. Here Brecht explains the impulses and justifications for his method, which he would later in his career prefer to call *dialectical theater* instead of *Epic theater*. The earlier term had originally been coined by Erwin Piscator at the Berlin Volksbühne and was adopted by Brecht, but despite the fact that he originally embraced its strictures (so thoroughly that the method is sometimes credited to him), Brecht later found it too formal to be useful and preferred to focus on the dialectics alone, which allowed more flexibility and functionality.

¹⁶³ This term does not equate to the English “fable,” although the two are related. Instead, *Fabel* should be understood as the social apparatus prompting the meanings of the *Gestus*, *Haltung*, and *Arrangement*.

Much can still be shown through the application of *Gestus*, *Haltung*, und *Arrangement*, but in post-Brechtian theater, their “clarity is tied [only] to the logic of the scene and not to an overt connection with society.”¹⁶⁴ No single system structures the demonstration of those elements, and neither *Gestus* nor *Haltung* is expected to clarify anything other than itself. As Barnett argues of *In the Jungle*, “[dynamics] were specific to the production, itself: meaning arose from comparing actions within the production, not by comparing them with instances from real life.”¹⁶⁵ Similar arguments can be made about the *Ring*, although the stagings were created outside of the Berliner Ensemble, the texts have historically been staged in a more “naturalistic” fashion.¹⁶⁶ Consider the powerful example of “internal” (as opposed to external) signification by the gesture of eye-covering, which becomes extraordinarily important throughout the entire tetralogy. Like Wagner’s leitmotifs, significant gestures like this one acquire secondary meanings with the cycle’s progression. Beginning in *Das Rheingold*, Wotan often covers his eye, indicating a lack of foresight or vision. Siegmund and Sieglinde repeat the gesture in *Die Walküre* during their spoken references to their father in Act I, and both the Woodland Bird and Brünnhilde use the sign in *Siegfried*. Brünnhilde will continue its performance in *Götterdämmerung*, and with each instance, the meaning transforms. The bird’s gesture signals Mime’s deceit: despite being the child-hero’s adoptive father, the dwarf’s duplicitous nature is

¹⁶⁴ Barnett, 342.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁶⁶ Naturalistic theater refers to work in the school of Constantin Stanislavsky, which immerses the audience completely in the world of the play. Brecht disagreed with Stanislavsky’s approach. This approach is the direct opposite of epic theater, which strives to distance the audience from the piece, to educate and provoke thought in the spectator by showing the artificiality of the onstage world. See John Willet, *The Theater of Bertolt Brecht*, (London: Methuen, 1967), 207.

revealed by the frantic signals of the bird and the sign prompts Siegfried to slay Mime before he can do any harm.

From Brünnhilde, however, the gesture demonstrates Wotan's lack of perspective.¹⁶⁷ The gesture first symbolizes her own search for a path outside of her father's blinded view. The point is clear as she uncovers her eyes at the start of *Siegfried's* Act III, scene iii. As her hands drop, Brünnhilde sees Siegfried, who rescues her from the imprisoning fire. Likewise, the application of the gesture in *Götterdämmerung* recalls its appearances in *Walküre* and *Siegfried*, and although the implication of the gesture changes, each occurrence carries the memory of its prior meanings. Yet it degrades into empty action in *Götterdämmerung*, overused and meaningless, as Brünnhilde anxiously repeats the signal in order to capture the attention of Siegfried, who fails to recognize her. As Guttrune and the courtiers mimic her puzzling movements, the sign loses its meaning. Nonetheless, the eye-covering gesture remains the most symbolic movement of the cycle; it highlights the "tunnel vision" of gods, dwarves, and humans, alike, and its repetition conveys the idea that the blind pursuit of self-interests have caused social downfall.¹⁶⁸ The metaphor of "one eyed sight" is left as the closing image of the cycle: with Valhalla destroyed and the Rhine overflowing, Guttrune peers at the audience through a center-stage telescope. As she slowly sweeps its field of vision across the theater, the curtains close.

¹⁶⁷ Berghaus explains this interpretation herself in interview. See "Gespräch zur Ring-Konzeption an der Universität Mainz am 26.Juni 1987," in Sigrid Neef, *Das Theater der Ruth Berghaus* (Berlin: Henschel-verlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1989), 162-163.

¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, the character of Loge is costumed in glasses in a symbolic extension of the sight metaphor, and indeed, he is the only character who seems unaffected by the various machinations of power at work throughout the story.

One last factor is crucial to post-Brechtian performance: it avoids the replication of realistic detail. An ocean is not depicted as an ocean, nor a city as a city; instead, post-Brechtian productions feature sets, objects, or motions that are abstract and metaphorical, suggestive, but lacking literal detail. With such an approach, the director avoids “interpret(ing) the play or the source material in any definitive way, because such a move would suggest a reduction of the material’s richness,” as John Willet has argued.¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, Willet’s characterization echoes Berghaus’s own words regarding the *Ring*: neither did she intend to provide a definite reading of the piece, nor did she want to malign Wagner’s text by failing to address its layers or complexities.¹⁷⁰ Yet her approach can be considered post-Brechtian (and it is also similar to the Western correlative, “postdramatic theater”), as it refuses to provide definitive answers for Wagner’s inconsistencies.¹⁷¹ Relatedly, as it avoids the establishment of a single, unified setting, and relies heavily on cycle-specific manifestations of *Gestus*, it avoids the presentation of signs

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 349.

¹⁷⁰ Berghaus publicly discussed her approach: “I would consider it vandalism of Wagner if one was to settle for only one of these named processes,” in “Gespräch zur Ring-Konzeption,” in Neef, 158.

¹⁷¹ As Barnett clarifies (p.350), refusals to offer meaning are also associated with “postdramatic theater,” a theatrical movement found in West Germany, England, and the U.S. at the same time that post-Brechtian theater developed in the GDR. As Kelly has claimed, “Berghaus’s Absurdist post-Brechtian approach chimed with the unsentimental Adornian aesthetics of Michael Gielen’s team at Oper Frankfurt.” (See Elaine Kelly, “Art as Utopia: Parsifal and the East German Left,” in *The Opera Quarterly* 30, No. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2014): 246-266.) While post-Brechtian- and postdramatic theater both deliberately avoid denotative signification and prefer the simple presentation of onstage events, the post-Brechtian encourages the audience to draw a “correct conclusion.” Barnett quotes Berghaus to say that a performance “must help the theater-goer to find the correct conclusion.” For more on postdramatic theater, see Hans-Thiel Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theater* (London: Routledge, 2006)

and gestures in a manner that would that carry explicit meanings in the world outside of the production.

The unresolved, multi-layered aesthetic characteristic of post-Brechtian style is therefore apparent within this *Ring*; the overview already offered demonstrates the lack of a distinct *Fabel* as motivation for the onstage action. As it borrows *Gestus* from multiple contexts, it provides neither a sense of immersion in Wagner's 19th-century backdrop, nor in any other setting; the eclectic references to place and time include a spaceship-reminiscent palace occupied by gods clothed in the style of the ancient Greeks, punctuated with neon signs, a staged-size ruler, larger than life puppets, and costumes from disparate epochs. This mixture of unlinked signs provokes a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* as the circus-like variety of elements comes and goes without warning or apparent cause. Yet stage elements and movements also recur and develop, which humorously provokes contemplation. This applies not only to matters of *Gestus*, but also to *Haltung*: consider how the meaning of the eye-covering gesture varies depending on the relationship between the characters acting and receiving the sign. The meaning and purpose of the movement vary significantly based on the attitudes and motivations of the scenic players, and the frequent changes in the application of the gesture seem to directly provoke the audience to question the reasoning for the variation.

By staging Wagner according to such radical means, and using movement and other theatrical elements in a style reminiscent of both Absurdist and post-Brechtian theater, Berghaus provided another genuinely viable alternative to staging approaches taken by theatrical giants like Chéreau and Felsenstein. Cast alongside such exclusive directorial ranks, and having produced new theatrical readings of such an extraordinarily distinctive stylistic nature, it is easy

to see how Ruth Berghaus has been historicized as a *Regietheater* director. As mentioned in the Chapter One discussions of director Hans Neuenfels, such characterizations are at least partially predicated on the notion that in so-called *Regietheater* productions, a lone, visionary director advances a new perspective on the opera or theater piece produced. Given Berghaus's reputation, and against the backdrop of the ongoing debates over *Regietheater* in opera during the last few decades, the question of the extent to which the 1985-87 Oper Frankfurt *Ring* can be counted as a work of *Regietheater* seems a particularly intriguing one.

In order to pursue this matter, however, it will be important to establish the extent to which key aspects of the interpretation, in fact, arose from Berghaus. Furthermore, discussion of the issue begs consideration of the extent to which an opposite claim might also be true; this alternative is particularly important to investigate since the Berghaus *Ring* productions have repeatedly been characterized as quintessential exemplars of the collaborative musical-theatrical methods undertaken by the Gielen Era Oper Frankfurt. Examination of the creative process, during which Berghaus and the other members of the creative team conceptualized and prepared the productions, can allow for the evaluation of both claims. Moreover, an examination of the creative process behind the *Ring* productions will allow for a better contextualization of those stagings with respect to these pervasive and recurrent themes within the discourse on contemporary opera production.

Collaboration, Control, and Production Phases

To assess the extent to which the preparations for the Berghaus *Ring* may have indeed been collaborative, or whether they reflect a more top-down creative process that would seem to

concur with the concept of *Regietheater*, it is useful to separate the production work for each opera into two segments. The period prior to the start of staging can be considered the first phase, while the actual rehearsal period—the time when the full team of designers, cast, and crew accomplished the work of blocking scenes, developing character movements and mannerisms, and coaching diction and vocal delivery—can be considered the second. Together these two periods comprise the time known in the theater as “production,” and both phases of work included activities essential for bringing the new interpretations of Wagner’s operas to life onstage.

These two phases were markedly distinct from one another within the Berghaus *Ring* productions. According to both published and unpublished interviews with involved personnel, the nature of the work in these periods differed fundamentally, as did interactions between the members of the creative team.¹⁷² Furthermore, far fewer members were involved in the conceptual phase: This extended period of individualized preparation and semi-regular meetings

¹⁷²Production folios (*Inzenierungsmappen*) on the Berghaus *Ring* are archived at the Akademie der Kunst, which contain minutes of the official concept-talks and rehearsal notes, which is helpful for research on the second production phase, but unfortunately, the official Oper Frankfurt production files on the first production phase no longer exist: some were lost in the fire to occur in November 1987, and the few remaining records after that point have long since been purged, apart from the internal production videos and a few published documents from the time period remain in the official Oper Frankfurt archives at Goethe Universität. Despite the lack of official records, a number of verbal accounts exist that provide information on the process: Both Corinne Holtz and Irene Bazinger have published recent volumes on Berghaus that include helpful first-hand accounts. Additionally, my interviews with David Levin, who worked on the cycle as an assistant to Berghaus and Zehelein, corroborate many of the assertions in the Bazinger and Holtz interviews. Together these accounts paint a vivid and remarkably uniform picture of the production process for the Berghaus *Ring*, and it is possible to gain a credible impression of that process, despite the lack of officially retained records. The published collections can be found in Corinne Holtz, *Ruth Berghaus: ein Porträt*, (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2005), and Irene Bazinger, *Berghaus: Geschichten aus der Produktion*, (Berlin: Rotbuch, 2010). The Levin interviews can be found transcribed in Appendix D.

involved only the lead creative players, who included Ruth Berghaus, Michael Gielen, and Axel Manthey, as well as the company's head dramaturg, Klaus Zehelein, and the US philosopher Samuel Weber, who also offered additional dramaturgical support.¹⁷³ The two company-provided assistant directors, Sabine Loew and Hans-Joachim Fouquet, were also periodically involved. Finally, Berghaus's private assistant, Martin Schüler, also regularly escorted Berghaus from Berlin.¹⁷⁴ As Corinne Holtz's biography of Berghaus has also claimed, "in addition to her score study, Ruth Berghaus also organized preparatory concept talks, as are usual in theater work, but particularly passionately."¹⁷⁵ Each of these team members was asked to offer both verbal and written comments about the piece to be staged from the perspective of their aspect of the musico-theatrical craft in the official gatherings at the opera house, "and the results of these

¹⁷³ The American philosopher Samuel Weber, primarily known for work on Adorno, Lacan, and the critical theory affiliated with the Frankfurt School, has also written extensively on "theatricality." In addition to his scholarly work, he worked during the 1980s as a dramaturg in several German houses, including Frankfurt.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Schüler escorted Berghaus to Frankfurt from the very start of the *Ring* planning and accompanied her on each subsequent visit; his presence is recorded in the archived minutes of discussion meetings as well as the subsequent rehearsal documentation. For example, his presence is documented in the minutes of the first planning meeting for *Rheingold* in the production files retained on the *Ring* by the Akademie der Künste. SAdK Berlin, Inszenierungsdokumentationen D835, D853, (duplicate record in Sigrid-Neef-Archiv, Nr. 251), *Rheingold* Gesprächsprotokoll, unpublished notes, 1.

¹⁷⁵ The purpose of the concept talk, or *Konzeptionsgespräch*, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. In brief, the event offers the first chance for the creative team to articulate the major conceptual decisions about the production to the full group of collaborators, including singers, technicians, and administrators. It marks the formal beginning of the rehearsal process.

many-hour long meetings would also be retained in conversation minutes” for later referral, “the tiresome documentation accomplished by the dramaturgs and assistant directors.”¹⁷⁶

During this early stage of planning, frequent additional conversations about the *Konzeption* also took place less formally, most often between Berghaus, Gielen, and Zehelein. In addition to the official planning meetings organized at the Frankfurt opera house, the team also developed ideas over a long series of more casual exchanges, which included a number of vacation-like retreats.¹⁷⁷ Several such events were set up for the team’s idea-sharing two years in advance of rehearsals, and upon occasion, philosophically- and artistically-minded friends were also invited to participate in the discussions.¹⁷⁸ As Gielen has recounted:

¹⁷⁶ Holtz, 209. Refer to the notes of the meeting transcriptions in SAdK Inszenierungsdokumentationen D835 (*Rheingold* 1985). According to Holtz, such conceptual meetings are commonplace in theater, but the process under Berghaus was unusually extensive. “Vorbereitende konzeptionelle Gespräche, wie es in der Theaterarbeit üblich ist, hat auch Ruth Berghaus neben dem Partiturstudium betrieben, und zwar besonders leidenschaftlich; ...und die Resultate der jeweils mehrstündigen Arbeitssitzungen werden außerdem in einem Gesprächsprotokoll festgehalten. Diese mühselige dokumentarische Arbeit leisten die Dramaturgen und Regieassistenten.” Translation mine.

¹⁷⁷ Ruth Berghaus offered space and time for these relaxed excursions away from Frankfurt at her home in Zeuthen. The meetings seem not only to have supported the development of conceptual elements, but also the personal relationships between members of the creative team. Archived personal photographs document the vacation-like working atmosphere; they illustrate the deep conversations in the backyard between Zehelein, Gielen, Manthey, and Berghaus, as well as leisure activities, such as a ping pong game between the stage director and the conductor: ADK, Berlin Michael-Gielen-Archiv, Nr. 403, personal photos (3).

¹⁷⁸ Michael Gielen describes the length of this period as two years, a fact that is also reflected in the collection of meeting minutes retained in the production folios retained at the Akademie der Kunst. Inszenierungsdokumentationen D835, D853, D854, D855. For Michael Gielen reference to the time span, see: Michael Gielen, “Alles ergab sich aus der Musik. Ein Gespräch: Inszenierungen an der Oper Frankfurt am Main (1980 bis 1987),” in Irene Bazinger, *Regie: Ruth Berghaus, Geschichten aus der Produktion*, (Berlin, Rotbuch, 2010), 31.

We sat in the garden, we talked and argued the whole summer. (Berghaus) still listened tirelessly there, sometimes even contributed, but mostly she said nothing. She absorbed everything and transformed it internally, so that it became hers.¹⁷⁹

Gielen's words illustrate that with these meetings, the lead members of the creative team were occupied with far more than individualized score study and design work in the first production phase. Moreover, this quotation indicates that a pointed sharing and collective exploration of ideas marked this introductory work. Indeed, if Gielen's account is to be believed, the ideas formed during these excursions seem not to have been generated by Berghaus, alone, but by the group, instead.

Even less formal than the casual group retreats was the ongoing string of personal correspondence between team members, and in particular, between Berghaus and Gielen. The conductor and director had recognized an artistic kinship in one another with their first Frankfurt collaboration, on Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail* in 1981. Throughout the years of their working partnership, including those of the *Ring*,

...she insisted that the conductor share tempi and musical approaches with her far in advance, and even once to sing his own interpretation of the opera on a recording for her. Michael Gielen sat at the piano, marked the voices... and sent a cassette tape to (her home in) Zeuthen—after she had promised him to lock up the recording in the medicine cabinet. She developed the interpretation of the scene from the interpretation of the music.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Gielen, "Alles ergab sich aus der Musik," 31. "Wir haben in unserem Garten gesessen, den ganzen Sommer wurde geredet und diskutiert. Da hat sie noch emsig zugehört, sogar manchmal mitgeredet, aber meistens sagte sie eigentlich nichts. Sie sog das alles auf und hat das innerlich transformiert, damit es ihre Sache wurde."

¹⁸⁰ Holtz, 207-208. "...(sie) fordert den Dirigenten auf, Tempi und Haltungen weit im Voraus bekannt zu geben, gar einmal die Oper nach seinem Lesart auf Band zu singen. Michael Gielen setzt sich ans Klavier, markiert dazu die Singstimmen... und schickt ihr eine Kasette nach Zeuthen—nachdem sie ihm versprochen hat, die Aufnahme im Giftschränk aufzubewahren. Aus der Lesart der Musik entwickelt sie die Lesart der Szene." Translation mine.

The interactions between these likeminded individuals developed into a deep-seated collaborative partnership. As Corinne Holtz asserts, the exchanges between Gielen and Berghaus were particularly fruitful, as he provided “a partner as interested in analysis as she was. From him, she learned a most essential notion, namely, ‘how the given tempo of a gesture controls a scene.’”¹⁸¹ Berghaus meticulously recorded the physical gestures she understood to be prompted by Gielen’s musical interpretation of Wagner, along with other ideas that followed about lighting design and aspects of character presentation. Records of these can be found in her ever-present production notebooks, a remnant of her years spent taking down movement notation for Bertolt Brecht, which were filled with color-coded sketches, ideas, and verbal reminders.¹⁸² The most important of the concepts sketched in these notebooks were ultimately copied into the director’s piano-vocal score, which would later be used as the primary written reference for the ideas staged by Berghaus and the directing team.

The exchanges between members of the creative team described thus far illustrate an intensely collaborative process during the first production phase—an environment that seems antithetical to the notion of a single-minded creative process driven by a formidable director implicit in discussions of Regietheater. Instead of depicting a director intent on bending a well-loved traditional operatic work to accommodate a fully new interpretation, accounts and records of this phase of work indicate that Berghaus was fundamentally open to the ideas of other collaborators: she invited input, listened, and synthesized ideas into a holistic approach to be

¹⁸¹ Holtz, 207. Quotation of Berghaus in Siegfried Neef, “Ruth Berghaus und Michael Gielen gefragt nach den Möglichkeiten von Oper in dieser Zeit,” in *Sinn und Form* 39, no.4 (1987), 755 - 769

¹⁸² Holtz, 208.

used in the later staging process. And in addition to these descriptions of collaborative idea gathering, it has also been demonstrated that even the director's private preparations—her personal notes and sketches for the later staging period—were motivated primarily by musical factors, by revelations gleaned from Gielen. Although her work primarily addressed movement and gesture, Berghaus's choices were her translation of musical elements into theatrical devices capable of physically and visually articulating them.¹⁸³

The priority given by Berghaus to the score and Gielen's musical interpretation of it certainly illustrates the stage director's attention to incorporating a variety of artistic perspectives. Yet even that point, which would seem to justify the characterization of the first production phase of this *Ring* as collaborative, also reveal Berghaus to be the central figure in this process of conceptual synthesis. While a number of individuals contributed to the framework and generated ideas for the new productions, Berghaus was nonetheless at the heart of the idea-developing process as she performed the critical task of organizing the input from the team into the guiding conceptual design for Frankfurt's new version of the tetralogy; her work was first to synthesize those ideas, and later to transmit them to singers and technical practitioners during later rehearsals. Her supreme role in that task seems neither to have been lost on the administration, nor the perspective singers, a number of whom had not yet been finally contracted yet. Berghaus's reputation as a novel, unusual director—both due to her gender, and her exacting, peculiar reputation—also served as a draw for some singers. As a result, Berghaus's presence on the team enabled the opera house to eventually contract several highly sought-after performers.

¹⁸³ Holtz, 207.

An interview with Catarina Ligendza, who sang the role of “Brünnhilde,” illustrates this attitude:

I decided for Frankfurt because I found it interesting to finally work on the role of Brünnhilde from the perspective of a woman, and I wanted to set myself to that artistic challenge... Naturally, I was also aware that Ruth Berghaus staged her work in unusual, willful, sometimes even strangely weird perspectives... Thanks to Ruth Berghaus,... the *Ring* in Frankfurt am Main became a highpoint of my career.¹⁸⁴

Interestingly, Ligendza’s reflections also reveal the presence of attitudes often associated with *Regietheater* productions; as she describes a director perceived as both willful and revered at the helm of the production, the soprano casts Berghaus as an iconic, idiosyncratic director. In light of this characterization, and with the additional awareness of Berghaus’s central role within the planning of the first production phase, the notion begins to emerge that even the first two years of conceptual planning for the *Ring* can also be seen to exhibit some tendencies that parallel contentions about *Regietheater*.

Once rehearsals began, the second stage of production proceeded in a very different mode of preparation than had the first phase of preparations. During the rehearsal period, activity centered on the practical implementation of the ideas developed in the first production phase. After an initial *Konzeptionsgespräch* to explain the basic design to the full cast, musical and staging rehearsals began. During this second production stage, which was comprised of a (roughly) six-week period prior to each premiere, individual scenes were painstakingly

¹⁸⁴ Catarina Ligendza, quoted in “Aus dem Blickwinkel einer Frau; Richard Wagner: *Die Walküre*, Oper Frankfurt am Main (1986),” in Irene Bazinger, *Regie: Ruth Berghaus, Geschichten aus der Produktion*, (Berlin, Rotbuch, 2010), 40-41. “Ich entschied mich für Frankfurt, weil ich es interessant fand, die Partie der Brünnhilde endlich einmal aus der Sicht einer Frau zu erarbeiten, und ich mich dieser künstlerischen Herausforderung stellen wollte.... Natürlich war mir bekannt, dass Ruth Berghaus in ihren Regiearbeiten neue, ungewohnte und eigenwillige, manchmal auch schräge Blickwinkel präsentierte. ...Dank Ruth Berghaus... wurde der *Ring* in Frankfurt am Main zu einem Höhepunkt meiner Karriere.” Translation mine.

prepared.¹⁸⁵ By comparison with accounts of the conceptual phase already provided, reports and records from the rehearsal period reveal significant differences in Berghaus's approach to her work—a change that figures heavily in the matter of collaboration.

In marked contrast to the highly cerebral work of the first period, Berghaus focused rehearsals on the physical, which changed the tone of the work. In this second production phase, Berghaus exhibited an intense preoccupation with the physical aspects of staging; she took an exacting approach to movement and blocking that rivaled her absorbed cerebral concentration during the first production stage. Irene Bazinger's interviews also provide vivid illustrations of the intense physical demands made by Berghaus during staging. Gielen has recounted a story from a 1986 rehearsal of Act III of *Siegfried*:

Catarina Ligendza lay as Brünnhilde a very long time on Brünnhilde's cliff... She lay fully horizontal, her whole body absolutely straight, her legs straight, that applied all the way up to her head. Then she had to stand up without help or support, just with her musculature. Ruth demonstrated it for her. And Catarina said 'I can't do that.' 'Well then, practice it!' And then (Catarina) practiced the whole summer every day at home in Sweden, until she had developed the right musculature. After that she was able to stand up, like Berghaus, like a fairy. Unbelievable!¹⁸⁶

As productive and enlivening as Berghaus's physically driven intensity seems to have been with singers during the staging period, her concern with action and practice also assumed a biting anti-intellectual character at times, which antagonized some colleagues. Zehelein,

¹⁸⁵ SAdK, Inszenierungsdokumentation D535.

¹⁸⁶ Gielen, "Alles ergab sich aus der Musik," 27-28. "Catarina Ligendza als Brünnhilde (liegt) ziemlich lange ganz gerade auf dem Brünnhilden-Felsen...sie lag völlig waagrecht, der ganze Körper gerade, die Beine gerade, das ging über bis zum Kopf. Dann musste sie ohne eine Hilfe oder Stütze aufstehen, einfach mit ihrer Muskulatur. Die Ruth macht ihr das vor. Und Catarina sagt: 'Das kann ich nicht.' 'Na dann, üb mal!' Und dann hat sie den ganzen Sommer auf ihrem Landsitz in Schweden jeden Tag trainiert, bis sie die entsprechende Muskulatur hatte. Danach konnte sie, wie die Berghaus, wie eine Fee aufstehen. Unglaublich!" Translation mine.

in particular, experienced frustrations with her approach. As he has verbally recalled Berghaus to have said in a moment of rehearsal frustration: “Nobody but philosophers around me, I can’t stand it anymore.”¹⁸⁷ Even Gielen has described a similar impression of this attitude, despite finding the results of her handiwork “totally wonderful”:

...She simply didn’t want to hear any more critique! ...She had developed her own directing plan after the preparatory talks—and *basta!* During the rehearsals everyone had to leave her alone, just let her stage. ... (Zehelein) respected and honored Berghaus as much as I did, but he had to accept that he simply had to hold his tongue and let her do it. He couldn’t intervene any more.¹⁸⁸

The shifts in the work pattern under Berghaus, in which the conceptual phase was highly intellectual despite the focus of rehearsal work on the physical, can certainly be similarly observed between the corresponding phases of nearly any production. Yet the contrast between these periods in the Berghaus productions can be understood to have been pointedly more extreme than with many other directors—precisely because her approach to staging was so driven by gesture and movement, and the first stage also so intensely intellectual, informed by an

¹⁸⁷ Berghaus, as quoted by Zehelein. In Interview with Corinne Holtz, 28 May, 2003. See Holtz, 212. “Lauter Philosophen um mich herum, ich halt’ es nicht mehr aus.” Translation mine.

¹⁸⁸ “Alles ergab sich aus der Musik,” 29- 30 “Sie wollte einfach kein Kritik mehr hören! ...Sie hatte nach den Vorbereitungsgesprächen ihren eigenen Regie-Plan entwickelt – und basta. Während der Proben sollten sie alle in Ruhe lassen, sollten sie nur inszenieren lassen... (Zehelein) hat die Berghaus so verehrt und geliebt wie ich, aber er musste damit zurechtkommen, dass er einfach das Maul halten und sie machen lassen sollte. Er könnte nicht mehr intervenieren.”

extensive number of conceptual exchanges, and unusually long hours of discussion.¹⁸⁹ As intellectual and open as Berghaus had been in the first two years, reflective and receptive to her colleague's perspectives, her approach to staging was active, independent, and decided. She was a physical and plan-oriented director, and at times, quite strict and demanding.¹⁹⁰

Yet as individual—indeed, perhaps even authoritarian—as Berghaus's work style in the rehearsal phase has sometimes been characterized, her highly physical approach to staging also allowed for the growth of intense and personal relationships with singers. As already indicated with respect to Catarina Ligendza, such detailed physical work cultivated trust between the director and the singers. She would cry out, "Do it first, then you'll understand it!" Furthermore, she worked to build individual relationships with all performers, which eventually helped to

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 29. As Gielen recounts, the contrast between the early days of discussion and Berghaus's reaction to such discussions during the staging period were drastically different: "In the first years in Frankfurt, ... we always spoke for a long time about the pieces and the conceptual apparatus. Klaus Zehelein, our Head Dramaturg, definitively wanted to discuss these things, and indeed, after every rehearsal, like he was accustomed to from the collaborations with Hans Neuenfels... Ruth declined those debates at some point and told Zehelein: 'I need to prepare myself for the next rehearsal, I can't discuss it all with you, leave me in peace!'" ["In den ersten Jahren in Frankfurt... haben wir vor den Inszenierungen stets lange über die Stücke und die Konzeptionen gesprochen. Klaus Zehelein, unser Chefdramaturg,... wollte ...unbedingt diskutieren, und zwar nach jeder Probe, wie er das aus der Zusammenarbeit mit Hans Neuenfels gewöhnt war... Ruth verweigerte diese Auseinandersetzungen irgendwann und sagte zu Zehelein: 'Ich muss mich auf die nächste vorbereiten, ich kann mit Dir nicht diskutieren, lass mich in Ruhe!'""] Translation mine.

¹⁹⁰ David Levin, who worked as an intern on the cycle as an assistant director, has expressed a similar perspective. In my 2015 interviews with Levin, he observes that it was difficult to approach Berghaus in rehearsals for the *Ring*, the portion of the production period on which he worked. Martin Schüler seemed to act as a "handler" for Berghaus, protecting her from unnecessary interactions with others, and Berghaus seldom exhibited any willingness to converse with the group—an experience vastly different from Levin's earlier experiences with the director two years prior. See Appendix D, David Levin, Interview #1 & Interview #2 with Cordelia Chenault. Aug 15, 2015, p. 472 & 483.

motivate them personally to take the risks she asked, as Sebastian Baumgarten, one of Berghaus's longtime intern and assistants, has recounted of her relationships with chorus singers:

In all opera productions, Berghaus had the house dramaturg or the assistant give her photographs with the names of all Chorus singers. By the first chorus rehearsal she had memorized them all, in order to be able to give each member of the chorus the feeling that he was personally involved with the production.¹⁹¹

With such techniques, Berghaus seems to have brought out the best in many performers, with powerful onstage results.¹⁹² Antje Kaiser, one of the dramaturgs from Berlin who worked consistently alongside Berghaus beginning in 1986, characterizes the director not as dictatorial, but motivated by what she witnessed to be a highly collaborative approach to theatrical work. Kaiser's account relays her own impression—that a number of colleagues actually didn't understand Berghaus's intentions well— but that "...for those who opened themselves, and whose frequency she met—for them, it was a very collective thing, indeed."¹⁹³

Accounts and records from both phases of production on the 1985-87 *Ring* cycle illustrate a process that seems not to simply align with the most essential presumptions about *Regietheater*. Although Ruth Berghaus's vision dramatically shaped the interpretation of these operas offered in these stagings, she was certainly not the only creative personality responsible

¹⁹¹ Sebastian Baumgarten, "Das Handeln in Widersprüchen," in interview with Irene Bazinger, in Bazinger, 139. "In allen Opernproduktionen ließ sich die Berghaus vom Dramaturgen des Hauses oder dem Assistenten Fotos mit den Namen aller Chorsänger geben. Bis zur ersten Chorprobe lernte sie diese auswendig, um dann in der Probenarbeit jedem Mitglied des Chores das Gefühl vermitteln zu können, dass er persönlich an dieser Produktion... beteiligt sei." Translation mine.

¹⁹² Berghaus, quoted by Gielen, in "Alles ergab sich aus der Musik,"³⁰. "Mach es nur, dann verstehst du es!" Translation mine.

¹⁹³ Antje Kaiser, in Interview with Corinne Holtz, Sept 16, 2003. In Holtz, 212. "...wer sich einließ und wessen Frequenz das traf, für den war das sehr wohl eine kollektive Geschichte." Translation mine.

for their eventual content and shape. Furthermore, multiple accounts corroborate the argument that Berghaus's ideas can be understood to be founded on the ideas of other collaborators—particularly those of Michael Gielen. Moreover, both the conceptual and rehearsal phases of preparations for the tetralogy illustrate work methods that can be considered collaborative in nature, albeit in very different ways. With the presence of so much evidence to support the case for collaboration, characterization of this cycle as *Regietheater*—or of Berghaus as a more authoritarian director—seems to be at least partially inaccurate, oversimplified. Indeed, it is difficult to draw a satisfying conclusion on the matter of whether or not the Berghaus *Ring*, in all of its radical theatricality, should be considered *Regietheater*.

Such a lack of clarity points to the need for further exploration of this thorny term, its usage and implications. In response to that need, the remaining chapters of this dissertation will gradually begin to explore other permutations of what the term “Regietheater” has been taken to mean within the contemporary discourse about opera. After the analyses of two more productions staged at the Oper Frankfurt from the last decade, the concluding chapter of this dissertation will directly take up the difficult implications of that polemical label, and what its recurrent presence in the discourse about “theatrical” productions may imply. As this chapter's discussions of theatricality, directorial authority, and collaboration in the Berghaus *Ring der Nibelungen* have begun to show, the definition of *Regietheater* is anything but clear.

Interlude

Michael Gielen left the Oper Frankfurt in 1987. Amidst concurrent political shifts afoot in Frankfurt, his exit left the company unsettled and lacking a strong director at an untimely moment: the next year's local elections brought significant governmental turnover: Frankfurt would be run by Mayor Volker Hauff starting in 1989, under a coalition government of the SPD and the Green Party that decided to cut 2.5 million DM (Deutschmarks) from the budget of the city's large theaters.¹⁹⁴ An onslaught of changes in cultural politics began in the wake of his departure, and the insecurities of the transition period from 1987 – 1990 would take a toll; the rocky changeover period caused turmoil within the administrative structure of the opera house that would resonate for at least a decade.

Gary Bertini was named as the company's new intendant, but despite his top-notch reputation as a conductor, he was soon critiqued as "lacking management skills and artistic vision."¹⁹⁵ Either due to the poor timing of his arrival or his failure to resist the changes thrust upon the company (or to improvise despite them), he proved unable to successfully navigate crisis after crisis and remained in the position for only three years. Company struggles during this time were complicated by an arson attack on the opera house in November 1987, and its subsequent closure for repairs drove opera performances in a smaller hall within the adjacent

¹⁹⁴ "Sturfels kritisiert Schwab," *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung*, Feb. 13, 1990.

¹⁹⁵ Ranan, 190

Schauspiel building for over three years, until April 1991.¹⁹⁶ Although the rebuilding of the destroyed portions of the building proceeded smoothly, Bertini's administration failed to foresee a number of logistical adjustments necessary for the relocated performances. This unleashed discontent within the company, even within the orchestra, who had originally championed the selection of Bertini as Gielen's replacement.¹⁹⁷

Outside of the company, Bertini was also faced with political troubles. In 1989, the longtime Frankfurt cultural chancellor Hilmar Hoffmann also left his position, which had provided crucial support for Gielen and his compatriots in the prior decade. His departure coincided with other political and financial shifts in city government: That year's election of a new "red-green" ruling coalition (comprised of the social democrats and the green party) brought with it the reorganization of cultural funds as a significant portion of the prior funds allocated for the city's largest, most longstanding cultural agencies were reassigned for the support of smaller,

¹⁹⁶ According to official reports, the fire does not seem to have been artistically motivated. An article in Oper Frankfurt's online history archives explains more about the fire's source: "How did the blaze come about? A man entered the through a window of the Städtische Bühnen building, purportedly to look for food. He found nothing, and out of anger, he set fire to some newspapers and allowed the fire to spread out of the wings and onto the stage. As he realized that his fire-play had developed into a major blaze, he fled. That same night he made contact through the police's emergency call number and confessed to the arson. ["Wie war der Brand entstanden? Ein Mann war durch ein Fenster der Städtischen Bühnen eingestiegen, angeblich um nach Essbarem zu suchen. Er fand nichts, entzündete aus Ärger Zeitungen und ließ das Feuer auf die Kulissen überspringen. Als er feststellte, dass sich sein Zündeln zu einem Großbrand entwickelte, floh er. Noch in der gleichen Nacht meldete er sich über den polizeilichen Notruf und bekannte sich zu der Brandstiftung."] <http://www.oper-frankfurt.de/de/page262.cfm>. (Translation mine.)

¹⁹⁷ For an in-depth discussion of the fire, and Bertini's management problems afterwards, see Paul Bartholomäi, *Das Frankfurter Museumsorchester: Zwei Jahrhunderte Musik für Frankfurt*. (Frankfurt am Main: Musikverlag C.F. Peters, 2002), 108-111

alternative venues.¹⁹⁸ Hoffmann's replacement, Linda Reisch, continued to restructure Frankfurt's cultural administration during the early 1990s, which produced additional financial strains. Both during and after Bertini's brief tenure, the situation for the opera was further complicated by Reisch's antagonistic professional relationship with the mayor and the city's finance director, which resulted in her failing to gain support for a number of proposals on behalf of the city stages.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, the financial complications arising from Reisch's organizational adjustments were exacerbated by the general budgetary strain caused by the country's increased economic burden of the late 1980s and early '90s: The fiscal picture was changed significantly on a national level by the integration of the "new Bundesländer" (the states from the former GDR) into the unified Germany after November 1989, which caused social expenditures to increase just as income from business taxes decreased.

Gary Bertini announced his surprise resignation in 1990, less than a week after a prominent lecture by Linda Reisch, in which the cultural chancellor had called for "setting sights lower" and therefore reducing cultural expenditures by forecasting a lesser cultural role for Frankfurt within the unified Germany. The city would become less of a "cultural metropolis," she argued, against the presence of other large cities in the now larger, reunified country, which justified policy changes to make the production of opera in Frankfurt less costly. In essence, Reisch called for the opera in Frankfurt to become less artistically ambitious in order to allow the city government to meet its financial challenges. Amidst the restrictions of Reisch's proposal, Bertini's sudden departure added another massive hurdle to the house's problems in the early

¹⁹⁸ Ranan, 190-191.

¹⁹⁹ Ranan, 196-197.

'90s.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the interim period between the intendant and his replacement, Sylvain Cambreling, ballooned to three years before the latter's installation in 1993.²⁰¹ Not only was the opera company relegated to performances in the *Schauspiel* and faced with tremendous rebuilding costs, under threats of diminished financial support from the city's antagonistic cultural administration, but now the company would also be challenged by an internal lack of guidance on artistic matters, to boot: Until 1993, the house would be run alone by Martin Steinhoff, designated by Reisch as "Managing Intendant," a position that entailed responsibility for non-artistic concerns only.²⁰²

Strife within the city's cultural administration (between the cultural chancellor and the mayor, in particular) continued to grow as the fundamental organization of the three city stages was raised in 1993-94. The opera, theater, and ballet shared many resources, but were run as three separate entities, each with their own intendant. Hoping to reduce cultural expenditures through the eradication of overlaps, Reisch's administration opened a parliamentary inquiry into the legal validity of the contracts of the theater, ballet and opera intendants, with the intention to expel one of the parties; one being found legally unsound could have allowed for the merger of at least two institutions and the possible transformation of the city stages into a limited liability company, which would have benefitted the city financially.²⁰³ The attempts at merger ultimately

²⁰⁰ Ranan, 195 – 197.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 199-200.

²⁰³ Daland Segler, "In erheblichem Umfang falsch," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 10, 1994.

failed, but questioning the directorial contracts opened the door for the discussion of fundamental changes, which included a matter of major structural importance to the opera.

The issue of season organization had already been a source of disagreement for years. Michael Gielen had first suggested the need to officially visit the matter at the end of his tenure, but the topic was not discussed publicly until 1993. The CDU (the right-center leaning Christian Democratic Union), the SPD (the center-left Social Democratic Party), and the Grünen (the left-leaning Green party), took up the matter in debate as they vied for office. The Green party advocated for closing one of the three main institutions, as well as for the conversion of the opera to a *stagione* system—this system, typically used in Italy, involves “casting each production separately and performing it only for a limited series of performances, whereas a repertory system relies on a permanent ensemble and productions that rotate over an extended period of time.”²⁰⁴ They argued that both the current *repertoire* season format and the maintenance of opera, theater, and ballet during a period of financial reductions was simply not feasible.²⁰⁵ The latter issue would take nearly a decade to reach closure, when the decision was finally made to dissolve the Ballet Frankfurt in 2003.²⁰⁶ But Cambreling was a firm believer that a *stagione*

²⁰⁴ Nicholas Payne, “Trends and Innovations in Opera,” in *The Business of Opera*. Derek B. Scott and Anastasia Belina-Johnson, eds. (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 18.

²⁰⁵ For more on the various season organizational systems for opera, including *stagione*, *semi-stagione*, and *repertoire*, see Ranan 170-171, 204. See also Dagmar Abfalter, *Das Unmessbare messen?: Die Konstruktion von Erfolg im Musiktheater*, (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 2010), 133-134.

²⁰⁶ “Forsythe tanzt auf zwei Bühnen,” *Hessischer Rundfunk*, März 15, 2005.

system was the way to produce quality opera on a limited budget.²⁰⁷ Although the company had already begun to heed Gielen's advice and operate in a *semi-stagione* fashion a few years prior, by 1996, Cambreling had shifted the company to a strict *stagione* season format, and the number of performances dwindled to a mere 98, a reduction of more than half.²⁰⁸

Cambreling's career at the Oper Frankfurt was also brief; he served as Artistic Director only through 1996. He and Steinhoff frequently disagreed on artistic matters, as Cambreling refused to compromise on artistry, and Steinhoff, like Rausch, insisted on reduced expectations to cope with the ongoing budget reductions. The situation between the company's artistic and business managers was not only incendiary, but also failed to significantly improve during the term of Paolo Carignani, Cambreling's successor. Furthermore, General Music Director Carignani has later claimed to be "a pawn in the political game" of yet two new political characters involved in the struggles during this period, Mayor Petra Roth and the new Kulturdezernant, Hans-Bernhard Nordhoff. The latter had taken office in 1998, and despite a rocky beginning, he was politically savvy enough to implement a series of choices that would eventually quell the chaos of the prior decade. Before the dust settled, however, Nordhoff was faced by one last major challenge from Roth, who wanted to influence the choice of a new opera

²⁰⁷ Cambreling was not entirely alone in this estimation. According to Nicholas Payne, "Across Europe, repertoire is in retreat. The Italian *stagione* system... is gaining ground." See Payne, 17-18.

²⁰⁸ A *semi-stagione* season structure involves the premiere of a few new works each season but also offers repeat performances of older productions interspersed throughout the year. The revival productions were premiered in former years, and are less time-consuming (and less costly) to offer in subsequent seasons, as singers often return to reprise their roles and only a few adjustments are necessary. The structure externally seems to mimic the *repertoire* system, but due to the hiring of many guest artists and concentrating artistic efforts on producing only a few new stagings each season, resources are conserved in a similar manner to a house operating under the *stagione* system. The size of the permanent ensemble is also reduced. For more on the strict implementation of the *stagione* system under Cambreling, see Ranan, 206-207.

intendant (Nordhoff had quickly been able to convince Steinhoff to step down.)²⁰⁹ After a few further months of venom between the CDU mayor and the SPD cultural chancellor, a successor was finally chosen on which the two could agree: Bernd Loebe, the artistic director at the *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie* in Brussels. Loebe has successfully led the Oper Frankfurt since officially taking over the position in 2002/03 season, and he has also managed to maintain the support of the dominant political parties.²¹⁰

The organizational chaos in the decade following Michael Gielen's departure resulted in major changes to the tone and quality of subsequent Oper Frankfurt productions, which were significantly eroded until Loebe's ascent to the company helm. Many of the major Frankfurt collaborators pursued careers elsewhere during that chaotic period: Zehelein and Rosenberg first went to Stuttgart as a team, where they would continue work in the Frankfurt style, and Rosenberg would later go on to become intendant of the San Francisco Opera, and then the Berlin Philharmonic. Axel Manthey transitioned into directing and left Frankfurt altogether; he worked in Vienna, Hamburg, and Dusseldorf as well as in Stuttgart, where he continued to collaborate with Zehelein and Rosenberg during the late '80s and early '90s until his untimely death in 1996. Gielen continued to conduct after his Frankfurt years, but he left opera entirely; he served as principal conductor of the Southwest German Radio Symphony Orchestra from 1987 until 2000. Neuenfels would not return to Frankfurt after Gielen's departure, and Berghaus only once in 1993 (*Der Rosenkavalier*), although both stage directors would enjoy international careers that burgeoned for years thereafter: Berghaus would continue to work intensively at

²⁰⁹ Ranan, 220. Interview with Carignani, May 11, 2000.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 216-221.

major opera houses in Berlin, Zurich, Hamburg, and Leipzig until her death in 1996, while Neuenfels has continued to produce highly discussed productions in leading global opera centers, such as Berlin, Salzburg, and Bayreuth, and he remains one of the most controversial, sought-after directors in the field today.

With such figures no longer influencing the direction of work at the Oper Frankfurt, and in chaotic cultural administration plagued by political strife, the situation of the company after the idyllic, transformative years of the Gielen Era bore little resemblance to that of 1979 - 1987. That period had ultimately been an exceptional one, and an important chapter in the larger history of opera and *Musiktheater*. As the past two chapters have shown, the Berghaus *Ring des Nibelungen*, her version of *The Trojans*, and the Neuenfels *Aida* were provocative productions that followed avant-garde artistic trends from the fields of dance and spoken theater as they also offered some of the earliest examples of productions classified as *Regietheater*. These stagings occupy a place in a theatrical lineage that stems from Berlin and Weimar, but they are also among the earliest models of the recent trend towards *Regietheater*. The opera of the Gielen Era Oper Frankfurt therefore provides an important link between the experimental opera and theater of the early 20th-century and present-day approaches to opera production.

The second half of this dissertation will discuss several stagings at the Oper Frankfurt under its present administration. In some respects these productions appear quite different from work produced during the Gielen Era, yet the two sets of pieces share a common history of being produced by the same company, at minimum, and even a few shared collaborators. From a logistical standpoint, organizational aspects of preparing productions are also still similar. Despite the challenges of the 1990s, the Oper Frankfurt of the Bernd Loebe administration has

increasingly become a respected, world-class opera house in the last decade, and in many respects, the house serves as a strong exemplar of the contemporary industry. As the next two chapters turn to work produced by the company since 2010, both noticeable differences and also some surprising commonalities between stagings of the two eras will emerge.

Chapter 4: **Behind the Curtain: Shaping a New *Siegfried***

Act II of Wagner's *Siegfried*: a slight, muscular man in brown clothing glides across the forest floor, a slanted disk lit in a mottled, bluish-green. Feathers extend from his graceful fingers. Crouching on an animal skin, stage right, Siegfried notices the dancing forest bird. They begin a musical game on the center platform: the boy steals a reed from the creature's beak, then blows upon it to imitate the birdsong. The bird beckons the youth closer, coquette, enticing him to stroke his quills. The boy takes up his own horn, but as he copies the bird's melody, the free-spirited leitmotiv transforms to assume a heroic air.

The day after the performance, *Journal Frankfurt* displayed a half-page photo of the bird: a unitard-clad modern dancer leading Siegfried and his bloodied sword up the outer ramp of the gigantic set, his beak-like jaw angled up to show the way (Figure D). "Nemirova lets the voice of the woodland bird dance!" declared Christian Rupp; the critic was among the many viewers enchanted by dancer Alan Barnes's onstage embodiment of the character, whose music was sung by the offstage soprano. The majority of reports about Oper Frankfurt's new staging featured praise for this fresh version of the forest bird, whose image was repeatedly featured by critics to illustrate the "innovative ideas" in this third installment of director Vera Nemirova's new *Ring* cycle.

Figure D: *Waldvogel*



Interestingly, however, the concept presentation seven weeks earlier had included no mention of a dancing bird. Alan Barnes was simply introduced to the cast that day as the second of two assistant directors who would collaborate on the staging. Indeed, a wholly different concept was presented to the *Siegfried* cast and crew that day: soprano Robin Johannsen, wearing a tracksuit, would encounter Siegfried on a woodland jog in her first appearance as the bird. It was not until three weeks later that Johannsen's pregnancy was announced to the creative team. The assistant director stepped onto the stage that day to fill in for the sick singer at the last minute. Yet his spontaneous characterization was enchanting enough to prompt a change of plan: From then on, Barnes would dance the role, with Johannsen singing from the orchestra pit.

This turn of events quintessentially demonstrates a simple claim introduced at the opening of this dissertation: when an opera production is examined solely on the basis of impressions of a staged performance, analytical assertions are hindered by a singularity of

perspective. Furthermore, we exclude a major vantage point from scholarly consideration: the creative context.²¹¹ Like all opera stagings, the 2011 *Siegfried* bears the indelible traces of the people and events that brought it to life. And like the work mounted in the 1980s, a number of the company's present-day productions continue to prompt the conclusion that the process of staging is (at least to some extent) a collectively authored process: personal contributions are made by many members in the web of involved individuals. Not only do composers and directors shape a production, but a multitude of other creators, including performers. The case of Alan Barnes is simply one of many examples that highlight the value in adding production-based analysis as another useful scholarly apparatus. In short, its addition allows for a more comprehensive analytical approach.

Like the analyses provided in former chapters, then, this investigation includes discussion of the "backstage" preparations undertaken during the production period for Oper Frankfurt's 2011 *Siegfried* premiere. I will discuss how the staging was shaped by the concerns of its creators and the manner of its preparation as I analyze the events that brought it from score to stage. This will provide a more circumspect view as it offers increased perspective on the production.

Yet this particular *Siegfried* is also instructive for other reasons. First, the leap forward to the present provides a view of the opera house across a larger time span, but moreover, analysis

²¹¹ Here I place emphasis on two facts: firstly, that analysis of a performance tends to imply claims about the intentionality of interpretive arguments, and secondly, that it can miss many of the seemingly non-artistic factors that shape the piece, regardless of intentionality. Other reasons also exist for why an analysis confined to one scholar's impression of a performance is flawed: as discussed more thoroughly in the introduction to this dissertation, each live performance is (to some extent) its own performative event, and differs from other performances of the same production. For more, refer to Carolyn Abbate's "Music--Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* (2004), 505-536.

of the Nemirova *Ring* cycle will easily reveal some of the functional and ideological changes that have occurred within the company over the last three decades, since direct comparison of the time periods is made simpler by the presentation of two versions of precisely the same operas. Examination of this second *Ring*, which at the time of this dissertation is still being performed within the company's repertoire, will highlight some surprising differences of approach when juxtaposed with the 1985-87 Berghaus *Ring* and the productions of the Gielen Era.

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, my research methodology for this chapter differs drastically from the approach utilized in earlier chapters. This analysis of the creative process that brought the Nemirova *Ring* cycle to stage has been influenced by my unusual position as a dramaturgical collaborator on the creative team. The ability to work alongside the cast, directors, designers, and administrators provided me with an unusual vantage point, and as such, it has given me awareness of issues that would normally remain private. Without this intimate level of access, many of the factors to be discussed in this chapter would have been unknowable. Relatedly, it is essential to note that my perspective on the decisions made and their import is not a neutral one; the observations that I provide in this chapter are inherently biased, informed by my collaborations on the daily tasks and decision-making involved in the production process. Furthermore, my work in this chapter will attempt to

demonstrate that this production bears traces of the people and events that brought it to stage, both creative personnel and members of the artistic administration.²¹²

Wagner's *Siegfried* on a Striking Set

This *Siegfried* is the third episode of the most recent setting of Wagner's full *Ring des Nibelungen* initially played at Oper Frankfurt from 2010–12. The premiere of the piece on October 30, 2011 revealed a straightforward interpretation with stunning aesthetics: it exhibited an array of eye-catching stage pictures and highly physicalized depictions of the character tensions. The new reading foregrounded many of the same themes emphasized in the earliest productions of the cycle prepared under Richard Wagner (and assistant Richard Fricke) in Bayreuth, with only a few thematic additions in the Nemirova cycle. Likewise, the visual narrative also remained true to the libretto.²¹³

The plot of Wagner's opera remained traditional in this production: The Nibelungen blacksmith, Mime, finally tells his orphaned ward, Siegfried, about his origins. Mime learns the of the young man's destiny from a mysterious Wanderer, the disguised God, Wotan, in a knowledge wager. Siegfried re-forges his father's sword, then fells the dragon, Fafner. The boy tastes the dragon's blood, which provides him with the ability to understand the language of a

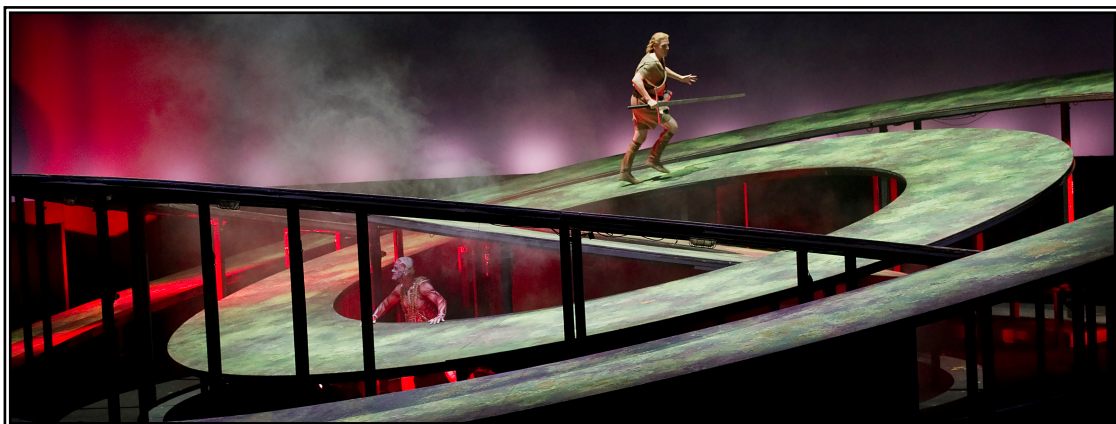
²¹² The acknowledgment of contributions by individuals in many differing roles is essential to this work. For this reason, I intend for the word "creators" to refer to both traditional members of the creative team (directors, designers, and dramaturgs) as well as to performers and some artistic administrators involved in creative matters. My analysis will make clear that it is important to understand staging as a collectively authored process, steered by *many* individuals within the production team.

²¹³ For more on themes brought out in the original Wagnerian stagings at Bayreuth, see George R. Fricke, James Andrew Deaville, and Evan Baker, eds, *Wagner in Rehearsal 1875–1876: The Diaries of Richard Fricke*, No. 7 (New York, 1998).

forest bird. Through that unusual gift, he learns that Mime plans to poison him, and he kills his foster father in self-defense. Guided by the bird, he goes to seek his bride. Meanwhile, the Wanderer holds conversations with Alberich and Erda in an attempt to alter his dire predicament, to no avail. He is equally fruitless in swaying Siegfried's support, and the sword of the ignorant youth shatters Wotan's spear. Finally, Siegfried comes upon Brünnhilde's enchanted rock, where the former Walküre sleeps surrounded by a ring of fire. He summons the courage to cross the enchantment, and awakens her with kisses. Greeting the sun, Brünnhilde warms to her rescuer, and the two fall in love.



Figure E.
Set (Rings)



The most interesting feature of this Siegfried – and, indeed, of the full *Ring* cycle – is the set design (Figure E). The massive construction features four concentric rings, each motorized to separately rotate. Designer Jens Killian’s playing field allows for a seemingly endless array of configurations: when the rings are rotated to varying degrees, the resultant shape resembles the planet Saturn. During the opera, the set morphs into multiple landscapes; the rings seem to imply cliffs, caves, or forest paths. The colossus is still as the curtain rises. A disk consumes the stage, tilted at 35 degrees, ascending back from the orchestra pit.

Despite its enormous flexibility, this set was nothing new by the third opera in the cycle. Furthermore, other design elements also showed mindful construction. The costumes, for example, which were drawn from subtly mixed historical periods, typically reflected the major themes of the narrative, occasionally offering reinforcement of minor interpretive ideas.²¹⁴ As will become clear in later discussion, stage pictures were breathtaking, and a handful of clever tricks led to poignant moments. Yet only the set elements were striking enough to distinguish this *Siegfried* from other settings conceptually; no other feature of the staging was thoroughly enough woven into the fabric of the Nemirova production to be taken as a new directorial concept. Nevertheless, this enchanting version of the opera presented Wagner’s text in overt, colorful, and playful visual language. Deft combinations of movement, characterization, and technical elements foregrounded the driving tensions in music, text, and subtext. At the heart of the interpretation lay the internal struggles of highly human characters.

²¹⁴ The costumes of Fafner and the Woodland Bird were thought-provoking: the dragon’s suit illustrated the ideas “man versus the machine” and “society as machine” as he took the form of skinless human in a painted bodysuit, while the bird’s simple costuming and long expressive feathers provided extraordinarily demonstrative fingers with which to build a relationship with Siegfried, foreshadow danger, and embody the virtue and power of nature against the villain of an evil, monstrous, society.

Character, *Konzept*, and Creation

Portrayal of the relationship between Mime and Siegfried in Act I was particularly compelling, and their contrasting physical animation propelled the drama. Peter Marsh was both sympathetic and grotesque as the neurotic Mime; despite his contorted physical caricatures, he was intensely human. Lance Ryan was awkward and surly, yet innocent and vulnerable. Unsure of his unwieldy body, the frustrated title character flings his own limbs as liberally as the cooking pots. Mime, by contrast, shrinks away from the brutish child, clinging to his anvil when threatened. The physical juxtaposition of Siegfried's explosive temperament against Mime's timidity made visible the emotional familial tensions between the surly teenage hero and his physical antithesis of a foster father. The "fire dance" near the close of Act I was also particularly effective. As Siegfried smelts his sword, the stage darkens. The barefoot dance takes place atop the innermost ring, the platform temporary replaced by glowing red plexiglass. The protagonist's trance-like ritual pulls him down toward the core of the rings to make a primal connection with the earth – an idea reinforced by the descending stepwise motion in the brass.

The Act II battle offered the only additional hint of a directorial concept. When Siegfried enters the dragon's lair, the rings rotate wildly in a science-fiction-inspired attack. The massive construction seems to become the dragon as the hero swings his sword atop the skeletal structure of the monstrous apparatus. Fafner emerges from within, clothed in the bodysuit of a skinless man, transformed into a giant horror of exposed muscle and bone draped in gold chains. Siegfried easily defeats this odd villain, but the nightmarish machine is slower to halt. The scene emphasizes society's capacity to manipulate and destroy as the hero battles the disfigured giant

and the constructed monstrosity. Ignorant of human society, befriended with birds, Siegfried is nature's defender. His status as social outsider is reinforced as he sorts through the hoard: he throws the riches from the cave, puzzled and disinterested in the symbols of wealth and power.

The dancing forest bird plays an ominous protector during this scene and the next as it watches over Siegfried when he first 'hears' the murderous thoughts behind Mime's duplicitous words. Cunning use of supertitles did much to clarify the double-texted scene: the soothing, deceptive words that Mime presumably speaks are displayed on the screen above the stage while he sings his true thoughts. The incongruence between the sung and displayed texts creates a moment of Brechtian estrangement. Like Siegfried, viewers with an eye on the supertitles will likely experience a confusing disjunction of sight and sound, just before the two-faced reality of the situation becomes clear. Resultantly, the viewing experience is puzzled, and the audience is momentarily pulled from the naturalist identification with the plight of the central character—one of the key aspects of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*.²¹⁵ Despite the fact that I had personally created the supertitles and was therefore well aware of the conflicting texts, my own first experience of watching the staged scene played as part of a run-through in a darkened theatre jolted me mentally out of the onstage narrative, away from the singers: even I briefly became preoccupied with the uncomfortable experience of the double-texted trick before returning to the story.

The final scene of Act III also offers examples of what might be considered a weakness of the staging: the piece's heavy reliance on the spectacular stage technology sometimes usurped attention, overpowering the narrative and musical development. Furthermore, though the

²¹⁵ For more detail about the so-called *Verfremdungseffekt*, its purpose, and its effect on the audience, see Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (Abington: Routledge, 2009), 53.

technical effects were mesmerizing, when they fell away, the effect of the stage pictures shifted starkly; stripped of the accustomed power and movement produced by the technical elements, the naked stagework left the scene energetically weak by comparison. The beginning of Act III, scene iii, for example, featured a gargantuan ring of suspended flames that dominated the stage. Yet with its disappearance, the effect of the following duet was pale; after the marvel faded into darkness, the momentum of the scene dwindled. The stunning glow of the ring had enhanced the awe of Susan Bullock's harp-accompanied awakening, and the charm of Lance Ryan's bashful kisses, but the remainder of the scene lacked the visual sparkle that had up to that point been taken for granted. As a result, even the rich and expressively performed music suddenly seemed incomplete without the support of the by-now-accustomed visual sheen. The staged variations in blocking and body language seemed empty, by comparison, and the extremely slow pace of development in non-musical elements left stage-pictures stale. Put simply, with the fire ring extinguished, there was too little action to support the remaining 32 minutes of singing before the curtain finally fell.

The aforementioned observations can all be traced back to how the creative team handled matters that arose during production. Each moment was painstakingly crafted by the designers, cast, and crew. In the seven tightly scheduled weeks of the production period, the group confronted questions of an artistic nature while they simultaneously handled mundane, practical matters. Furthermore, artistic ideas were fit to the available personnel, resources and technology.

Issues addressed in rehearsal profoundly affected the shape of this *Siegfried*. The treatment of stage pieces and technology played an especially important role. The massive set was of major concern in this rehearsal process, and its construction was time consuming. Assembling the

motorized rings was slow to be finished, and their safe operation involved numerous precautions. Each ring was driven by a separate crewmember; the technical team was entrenched in mastering its operation for the first ten mainstage rehearsals. The singers, too, had to learn proper navigation on the rings; even the slightest loss of attention could easily lead to a dangerous fall or being caught between platforms. Staging on the outermost ring, in particular, demanded a great deal of time due to its extraordinary height.

The prioritization of the technical effects undoubtedly contributed to the lackluster effect of the final scene. Four of the six rehearsal days allotted for its staging were spent exclusively on the first quarter of the scene; nearly all the work revolved around handling the fire ring. The burning form posed a slew of unexpected problems. Lance Ryan's costume began to smolder during rehearsal one afternoon, which prompted reconstruction of the scene's costumes out of fire-retardant fabric. Another near-accident occurred when the cabling went slack; the flaming apparatus plummeted several meters over the head of Susan Bullock before the suspension mechanism could be controlled. The next day included an extra four-hour work session: an impromptu rehearsal, purely technical, solely to practice the safe raising and lowering of the blaze. As the hours devoted to the matter dragged on, the time allotted for the scene dwindled, with the end result that later portions of the scene were left only scantily developed—the copious number of hours devoted to the fire ring might have been useful for the elaboration of the following scene.

In addition to the handling of technical concerns, daily rehearsal meetings were occupied with the implementation of the artistic ideas of many different individuals. Within the walls of the off-site rehearsal stage and the two in-house rehearsal rooms, members of the cast and crew

strongly influenced the end product. Each player brought a particular set of experience and knowledge into rehearsal, and as such, the ideas and concerns raised were driven by the respective backgrounds and skills of the collaborators.

Collaborators and the Creative Team

Assistant stage director Alan Barnes is a dancer. He came to Frankfurt in 1989 as a new member of William Forsythe's cutting-edge modern dance company, which at the time was loosely affiliated with the opera. When the Forsythe company declared insolvency, Barnes was reassigned into directing: a technicality of German contract law demanded that he be provided another job with one of the city theaters. He also continued to work as a freelance dancer. In *Siegfried*, his replacement of the pregnant Johannsen was intended as an interim solution, to enable the continuation of the day's rehearsal, but as noted, his movements prompted a flash of inspiration. Adjustments were made to his contract, and Barnes assumed a second role.

A number of other moments were influenced by the personal backgrounds of team members. Siegfried's fire dance, for example, originated in the Bulgarian Nestinariii ritual, an element in which Nemirova's own background plays a clear role: the director emigrated to the former East Germany from Bulgaria as a young girl. The stage director and her mother, who was present for the last four rehearsal weeks, held heated conversations about the fire-dance in their

native tongue during mid-rehearsal breaks during the early days of staging the scene on the main stage, which resulted in significant adjustments afterwards to the blocking and choreography.²¹⁶

Singers Lance Ryan and Peter Marsh brought a wealth of ideas into the very first rehearsal. Prior to the Nemirova staging, Ryan had already sung multiple versions of the Siegfried character, and as such, his well-practiced character was in place from the start. This production offered Marsh his first opportunity to sing the role of Mime, but the character-actor arrived replete with his own clearly defined version of the dwarf's personality. Nemirova's voice was seldom heard during the first week of rehearsal. She articulated a few constraints, but primarily allowed the actors to 'play', to experiment with movement and character. The two singers essentially staged the scene, themselves; the start-stop pattern so typical of early staging was non-existent between the two tenors. The directing team drew inspiration from the pair, and after a few days, intermittently interjected minor enhancements: one clear example was the development of a chalk-drawing lesson about fish and bird-families on the walls of the cave, which accentuated Marsh and Ryan's character contrasts and intensified the dialogue. Even that visually mesmerizing moment arose with heavy input from the singers: without their substantial contribution, that powerful stage picture would have appeared quite different.

It is certainly not unheard of for a scholar to ascribe singers some degree of authority in the creative process. As Mary Ann Smart argued over two decades ago about mezzo-soprano Rosine

²¹⁶ This example also draws attention to the fact that even for insiders within a production, not all of the motivations for various production decisions will be knowable by every contributor. It is important here that although I was present for these rehearsals and witnessed the conversations, I do not speak Bulgarian, so I can not verify undoubtedly what was said, or why the choreography was changed. Although I argue in this chapter for an expanded approach to analyses that incorporates the knowledge of practitioners wherever possible, there will always be factors that prevent a full awareness of the full context in which a production is created.

Stoltz, “the collaboration of singer and composer is not uncommon in the pragmatic world of nineteenth-century opera.” Smart’s conclusion certainly also applies to today’s opera industry.²¹⁷ In the case of Oper Frankfurt’s 2011 *Siegfried*, it may be warranted to attribute co-authorship of the design of the opening scene to both Ryan and Marsh alongside Nemirova, despite the more common understanding of a singer’s role as strictly performative. My argument about these singers—which also applies to dancer Alan Barnes and other members of the team—parallels that of Smart, who asserts the possibility of “Stoltz and Donizetti collaborating” on two passages of music sung by the character “Leonor” in Donizetti’s *La Favorite*. Although her conclusion will remain a conjecture unless some new discovery can be made of a concrete reports to support the assertion, Smart’s musical analysis makes a strong case for the ascription of partial credit for the aria 'O mon Fernand' to Stoltz; she convincingly demonstrates how several distinctive features of the vocal melody directly parallel the singer’s unusual vocal strengths, which have been recounted in published reviews of other performances by the singer. With this important discussion, she argues for singers to be considered “creators”—not only the composers more typically credited with the works. Discussions like Smart’s foreground the multifaceted role that a performer can play within the compositional process, although they also complicate straightforward notions of creative authorship. Nonetheless, such arguments, which also apply beyond the act of musical composition to the act of staging of a new production, provide meaningful support for the idea that theater is collaborative, by nature: neither composition nor direction is the isolated creative task of a lone genius.

²¹⁷ Mary Ann Smart, 50.

The examples of Barnes, Nemirova, Ryan, and Marsh demonstrate how the actions, ideas, and concerns of various artistic collaborators involved in *Siegfried*'s creation heavily influenced the final shape of the production. Yet matters of a less obviously “creative” nature also impacted the eventual form of the performed work. Indeed, matters more obviously related to business and logistics –and in particular, the structure of rehearsals– also affected how creative work could take place. For that reason, it would be mistaken to omit discussion of operational details, although at first glance matters such as the structure of rehearsals may seem relatively mundane. In fact, details such as the organization of rehearsal schedules, the availability of in-house resources, the presence and technical setup of rudimentary set pieces, and the selection of collaborators present during certain rehearsal phases bear heavily on the final shape of the production, because these factors hold the potential to either limit or enable creative work.

Furthermore, business concerns are not as arbitrary as they might seem. To the contrary, organizational details can reveal the priorities of the company's direction. Such concerns, which extend into decisions about season programming, casting, budgeting, and marketing, not only affect the work eventually produced, but they also reflect a company's artistic goals.²¹⁸ Examination of the structure of the rehearsal period and production-related activities can therefore provide greater understanding of institutional priorities. With this in mind, this next section will discuss the organization of the *Siegfried* rehearsal period with respect to two analytical tasks: first, to show how logistical matters during rehearsal shaped the process of

²¹⁸ Motivations and the consequences of an opera production's logistical organization can be complicated to trace within the final product of an opera staging. Nonetheless, such details play an important role in how the piece took shape. I contend that despite the difficulties, scrutiny of operational detail is worth undertaking, as it will allow salient points about the production – particularly with respect to house priorities – to emerge.

creation itself, and second, to reveal how business-oriented matters can reflect priorities of the artistic management.²¹⁹

The Production Period: Priorities and Logistics

The structure of the *Siegfried* production period dictated how long certain scenes could be rehearsed, under what conditions, and by whom. Rehearsals at Oper Frankfurt fall into distinct phases that can most easily be understood as a multi-stage process that cycles through the various rehearsal locations. As a house using the *repertoire* system, a handful of different productions must be prepared at any given moment, each at a different development stage in the process.²²⁰

The first page of the *Siegfried Probenübersicht* (rehearsal schedule overview) illustrates the multi-phase nature of this process (see Figure F). On any given day, the *Bühne*, or Main Stage, is occupied with either a later-phase technical rehearsal or a performance, while two in-house rehearsal stages on the fifth floor of the main building on Willy-Brandt-Platz, *Probekühne 1* and *Probekühne 2*, are used for other productions. The *Rödelheim* rehearsal studio, a generous off-site space in the neighborhood Frankfurt-Rödelheim (25 minutes from the opera house by subway) is used for the first weeks of staging rehearsals. The *Orchester* rehearsal space on the

²¹⁹ These priorities may be either overt or latent. I deliberately avoid any arguments here about intentionality on the part of the house's administration. Both unintentional and intentional priorities are certainly involved, but regardless of intent, the effect is identical.

²²⁰ Most creative personnel (including directors, dramaturgs, costume and stage designers /assistants, and performers) are assigned solely to one production at a time. The exception to this is the musical staff, including the conducting staff, coach/accompanists, and the orchestra, many of whom are involved in multiple productions simultaneously. For a comprehensive explanation of the differences between the *repertoire* and the *stagione* systems, see David Ranan, *In Search of a Magic Flute* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 204-205.

seventh floor is the site of musical rehearsals. With this collection of rehearsal spaces occupied at full capacity, as many as three mainstage productions may be in preparation at any given time.²²¹ In addition, a handful of offices and studios are occupied with musical and diction (language) coachings for individual singers throughout all stages of production. Finally, the *Foyers* are used as a gathering space for the full cast on a few special occasions, including the first full meeting of the cast and creative team known as the *Konzeptionsgespräch*.

Figure F: Rehearsal Schedule

Siegfried Probenübersicht Stand:16. September 2011								
	Vorstellung	Bühne	Rödelheim	Probübühne 1	Probübühne 2	Orchester	Foyers	Verfügbarkeiten / Sonstiges
MO 12.9		7 TE Étoile	Siegfried Einrichtung	10 Étoile	10 Siegfried	10 Oa Étoile		Probenbeginn Ryan, Marsh
DI 13.9		7 TE Étoile	Siegfried Einrichtung	18 Étoile	10 Siegfried	19 OS Étoile		
MI 14.9		18 ProT Étoile	Siegfried Einrichtung		18 Siegfried	OF	Salon 14 Dispo	
		10 Pr Étoile			10 Siegfried	10 Oa Konzert Weigle		
		13:30 Bel. Étoile			18 Siegfried	19 Oa Konzert Weigle		
		19 Pr Étoile						
DO 15.9	19:30 PENTHESILEA	10 Pr Étoile	Siegfried Einrichtung		10 Siegfried	10 Oa Konzert Weigle		
				18 Étoile	18 Siegfried			
FR 16.9	19:30 TOTE STADT		Siegfried Einrichtung	10 Étoile	10 Siegfried	10 Oa Konzert Weigle		
				18 Étoile	18 Siegfried			
SA 17.9	19:30 PENTHESILEA		Siegfried Einrichtung	10 Étoile	10 Siegfried	AO 10:30 GP Konzert Weigle		
SO 18.9	AO: 11 KONZERT Weigle 19 COSI							
MO 19.9	AO: 20 KONZERT Weigle	7 WE Étoile		10 Étoile			10 Konzept +mus. Probe	Probenbeginn Stensvold, Schmeckenbecher, Baldvinsson, Arwady, Bullock, Kasper
		19 Pr Étoile	18 Siegfried					Stensvold, Schmeckenbecher weg
DI 20.9		10 Pr Étoile	10 Siegfried			OF		
		13:30 Bel. Étoile	18 Siegfried					
		18 ProT Étoile						
MI 21.9		8 Bel. Étoile	10 Siegfried			10:30 OS Étoile	Salon 14 Dispo	Stensvold, Schmeckenbecher weg, Baldvinsson in Köln
		19 Pr Étoile	18 Siegfried					
DO 22.9		10 BO 1 Étoile	10 Siegfried					Stensvold, Schmeckenbecher weg Kasper weg
		13:30 Bel. Étoile	18 Siegfried					
		19 BO 2 Étoile						

Änderungen vorbehalten! – Bitte beachten Sie den jeweiligen Tagesplan

²²¹ Mainstage productions are designated for performance at the opera house, but additional stagings as often also simultaneously in preparation. Pieces not designed for the Main Stage consist of two groups: those performed at the intimate Oper Frankfurt's Bockenheimer Depot space, and those designed as educational productions for youth audiences, which tour to schools and community centers throughout the region.

This initial concept talk for *Siegfried* was held on Monday, September 19 in the *Foyers*, followed by the start of rehearsals for most members of the cast, as visible in the column marked *Verfügbarkeiten/Sonstiges* (Availability/Other) at the far right of the chart (*Probebeginn Stensvold, Schmechenbecher, ...*). Preparations for the rehearsal period had actually begun with rehearsal set building (*Einrichtung*) on the prior Monday (cf. column *Rödelheim*, MO 12.9 – SA 17.9), and, atypically, singers Lance Ryan and Peter Marsh had also already begun rehearsals of Act I on *Probekühne 2* at the start of that week. At this phase of the process, the orchestra had not yet begun work on *Siegfried*, as it was still deeply entrenched in end-stage preparations for Chabrier's *L'Étoile* (dir. David Alden), which would premiere four weeks prior to *Siegfried* on October 2nd. The final blocking rehearsals for the Alden staging took place that same week on *Probekühne 1*, while run-throughs of the *L'Étoile* scenes already staged were simultaneously held on the *Bühne* from Monday to Thursday. That weekend, however, the *Étoile* rehearsals on the Main Stage were paused to allow for three other performances: *Die Tote Stadt*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Penthesilea* (column *Vorstellung* [Performance], FR 15.9 – SO 18.9.) *Penthesilea* had premiered on the fourth of September and was midway through its initial run, while the other two operas were *Wiederaufnahmen* (revival performances) from the 2009 and 2008 seasons, respectively.

After the *Konzeptionsgespräch*, the *Siegfried* team spent three weeks staging in *Rödelheim* from September 19 – October 6, with an additional smattering of individual musical coachings also taking place in small studios at the opera house. After a three-day rehearsal pause, during which the stage ring mechanism was broken down, transported back to the opera house, and rebuilt, a new rehearsal segment of approximately a week began on Monday, October 10, at the

opera house, utilizing both Rehearsal Stage 1 and the Main Stage. This second phase was used to continue staging, for the coordination of lighting and other technical aspects, as well as for additional run-throughs that gradually integrated the finalized versions of props, costumes, and set pieces, while simultaneous music rehearsals began in earnest upstairs on the orchestra level. This period culminated in three *Orchestersitzproben* (seated musical rehearsals with orchestra) from Thursday, October 13 to Monday, October 17. The third and final rehearsal phase ran from Tuesday, October 18 through Wednesday, October 26. During this last phase, the stage director stepped back to allow the conductor to take over the direction of rehearsals, which consisted of Act-specific rehearsals on stage with the orchestra (*Bühnenorchesterproben* or *BO 1-3*), one full run-through with a rehearsal pianist (*Klavierhauptprobe* or *KHP*), and finally, a run-through with orchestra (*Orchesterhauptprobe* or *OHP*.) Performances effectively began with the ticketed Dress Rehearsal (*Generalprobe*) on Thursday, October 27, an uninterrupted run-through three days before the premiere, open to a special audience of invited patrons, friends, family, sponsors, and opera employees.

The structural constraints of this rehearsal plan affected the work that could be accomplished during the process. During the Rödelheim phase, the fully functional set of the four motorized rings was present in the spacious studio, and singers were able to work with simplified versions of props and in rough rehearsal costumes, so that use of important pieces of the intended stage elements could begin to be explored, at least on a rudimentary level, during staging. Singing was typically “marked” (half-sung) or spoken. Rehearsals were led by the stage director, Vera Nemirova, with input from assistant directors Hans-Walter Richter and Alan Barnes, the set designer Jens Killian or his scenic collaborator Katia Gehrke, dramaturg Malte

Krasting or myself, and costume designer Inge Bernerth or her assistant Carl-Christian Andresen, all of whom were intermittently present. Also in attendance were one of several members of the company's coach-accompanist staff (who rotated duties as rehearsal pianist), the prompter Barbara Kornek, and any one of several junior members of the conducting staff, depending on the day. At this early stage, some absences and travel were still permitted to the singers, which naturally limited the scenes that could be prepared in this period. As such, rehearsal during the whole of this initial three-week phase was restricted to just a few scenes, the blocking of which progressed painstakingly slowly. The main assets in Rödelheim were a full version of the complicated set, and the requisite space to focus on movement. Therefore, rehearsals in the space concentrated on two elements: firstly, the more complicated choreography and staging work that involved quickly rotating rings, which could not be accomplished in Probebühne 1 and 2 due to the lack of a functioning ring-set there, and secondly, on Nemirova's intense style of *Personenregie*, which intensely focused on the embodiment of characters and their physical interactions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most effectively developed examples of choreography and the most dynamic characterizations of this *Ring* cycle were staged in Rödelheim. The intricate rotating battle between Siegfried and the dragon, Fafner, for example, was rehearsed in that space for four full days. The physical realization of the contrasts between the characters, as well as the precise execution of their struggle on the wildly spinning rings, were among the most visually powerful and energy-filled moments of the production—a fact that can be attributed at least in part to the extensive hours given to their precise choreography in Rödelheim. A similarly stunning example of the detailed choreographic work prepared in that rehearsal studio under

Nemirova's concentrated eye occurred again during preparations for *Götterdämmerung* in January 2012. A similarly long stretch of four days' time was also consumed with the intricate personal choreography of the Three Norns (Meredith Arwady, Claudia Mahnke, and Angel Blue) as they wove a large web of red yarn across the full cast of frozen characters and the three angled rings to create a dynamic stage picture that spanned the full surface of the rings.

The relaxed tone and comparatively long stretch of time designated for this first stage of detailed rehearsal work, in which many of the resources and personnel were still quite limited, was not without drawbacks. The example of the difficulties in Act III, scene iii, which included the visual stagnation at the close of the production, makes this point well. Despite Susan Bullock's polished musical interpretation – her material was already thoroughly prepared and vocally expressive even at the first rehearsals – her initial days of rehearsal were not scheduled with scene work in Rödelheim. Rather, she had a relatively light schedule primarily composed of musical coachings and costume fittings; the staging of her portions of Act III was left for rehearsal until the second, much shorter phase at the opera house. Bullock was also granted leave time for a large stretch of the Rödelheim rehearsal period, an absence which also included the first days of the second rehearsal phase, from September 26 to October 10, and her excused absence seems consistent with the relaxed pace of the first rehearsal phase. Yet granting the soprano absence from the Rödelheim phase, during which intense attention was given to *Personenregie* and complex choreographic blocking, was not without consequences. Especially when combined with the technical problems that developed during the shorter second phase of rehearsal when Act III was finally staged, both the *laissez-faire* approach to the Rödelheim period and the lengthy stretch of time allotted to scenework there seem to have worked to the

detriment of the creative presentation of Brünnhilde in this final scene—and of Act III, scene iii, in general.

Particularly with respect to this last example, the setup and workings of the *Siegfried* rehearsal process at Oper Frankfurt begin to provide some indication of the greater concerns and priorities of the company. Just as the experiences and priorities of individual team members directly affected the stage piece, so did matters of importance to the company; both aspects are traceable within the arrangement of the rehearsal period, and therefore also eventually within the staging. An important example of this can be seen in the problematic scenic presentation of music in Act III, scene iii, sung largely by Brünnhilde. Rehearsal time with Susan Bullock was focused minimally on movement, blocking, and scenic interactions with Siegfried, and her relatively scant schedule of rehearsals involved few hours on blocking and characterization compared to scene work with other cast members. The schedule seems to imply that her presumed contribution of Bullock to the scene seems primarily to have been considered her singing.

An accentuation of music over drama in this scene might indeed be justifiable in this scene, as there are compelling reasons for Wagner's music to be prioritized in the onstage presentation of *Siegfried's* conclusion. Not only is the music of the Siegfried-Brünnhilde duet among the cycle's most lush musical moments, but there are interesting historical reasons to justify the foregrounding of the soprano's musical material at the end of Act III. The dreamy score of this act links the confessions of love between the young hero and the Valkyrie to the passionate romance between Wagner and his wife, Cosima; at least one of the musical motives sung by Brünnhilde in this final scene are also featured in a highly personal Wagnerian composition

known as the *Siegfried Idyll*.²²² Renamed after its later publication, but originally called the *Tribischen Idyll* after the home of the new family, the symphonic work was composed as a birthday gift for his wife and presented in a surprise performance at sunrise on Christmas morning in 1870.²²³ For fans of the composer, this segment of the opera is undeniably a musical highlight of the cycle.

Nonetheless, theatre—even opera—slides towards the communication of meaning through visuality, a proclivity demonstrated quintessentially by the overwhelming impression of the fire ring’s glow as it filled the vast auditorium with light at the opening of the act. Due to the inevitable intoxication provided by the stunning visual images in the prior scene, the switch of the central presentational object from visual to aural (or musical) elements was simply too abrupt. After the confrontation with the awe-inspiring fire-ring, the subsequent shift to aurality is resisted, leaving spectators craving the mesmerizing image, and the impact of the music is lost, unable to compete with hunger for the lost visual object. Theoretical writings of the early twentieth century performance theorist Antonin Artaud illuminate the reasons for the power of the visual images, which explain that transitional difficulty: he argues that theatrical images provide the ultimate “spectacle capable of fascinating (the mind).”

The theater takes gestures and pushes them as far as they will go... and before our eyes is fought a battle of symbols, one charging against another in an

²²² "Siegfried Idyll" *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

²²³ Cosima’s birthday was December 24. The couple had finally been married earlier that same year, and the writing of the opera *Siegfried* had taken place the prior year, in 1869, the year as their son Siegfried’s birth. The piece was later published due to family financial hardships in 1877 under the new title, *Siegfried’s Idyll*. A vivid description of the touching presentation scene is presented in Cosima’s diaries. Cosima Liszt Wagner, *Cosima Wagner’s Diaries 1869-1877* Vol. 1, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), 312.

impossible melee; for there can be theater only from the moment when the impossible really begins and when the poetry which occurs on the stage sustains and superheats the realized symbols... These symbols, burst forth in the guise of incredible images (...) In the true theater a play ... imposes on the assembled collectivity an attitude that is both difficult and heroic.²²⁴

Artaud's thoughts explain well the "assault" of the visual image on the audience, which supplies it with extreme power. With this in mind, the words of Linda and Michael Hutcheon ring particularly true for the comparatively empty impression left by the final scene of *Siegfried*. Despite the aesthetic musical appeal and the biographical relevance of the final scene, the fact remains that "for audiences, the act of going to the opera (that is, to live opera) is not only an aural experience, but also an intensely visual one."²²⁵

But putting aside arguments for or against the prioritization of the music material over the visual drama of this scene, two practical reasons can quickly be found to justify Bullock's scant assignment of rehearsal time. Firstly, her role in this opera is quite minor; the soprano's character appears only in the final scene. And secondly, the fact that she was allowed such a substantial absence precisely during the important staging weeks in Rödelheim was based at least in part on rehearsal commitments outside of Frankfurt. Accommodation of her outside work schedule is also a practical concern for the company, and reveals a managerial priority: celebrity singers are afforded some unusual privileges and scheduled somewhat differently than the majority of

²²⁴ Antonin Artaud. *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans, Mary Caroline Richards. (New York: Grove Press, 1958): 27, 114.

²²⁵ Linda and Michael Hutcheon, "The 'Phenomenal Image' in Opera," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104 no.1 (Duke University Press: 2005): 65

performers in the Ensemble or the Chorus.²²⁶ Prized for their exquisite voices, certain high profile singers (usually “guests” not belonging to the permanent ensemble) occupy an unusual position at the company. As a soprano in high demand globally, with a longstanding history as a guest artist in Frankfurt, it seems worth the company’s while to create a rehearsal structure amenable to the needs of singers like Bullock. With an understanding of that priority, the reasons behind granting her leave become clearer, along with the unusual number of rehearsals designated as musical coachings for Ms. Bullock, when compared to the minimal time scheduled for scene work.

Oper Frankfurt, Past and Present

Oper Frankfurt is certainly not the first opera company to place high-profile singers in the foreground. Indeed, the extent to which this is done in Frankfurt is still fairly moderate, especially in light of the number of ensemble singers regularly used for lead roles in new productions. However, when the present-day prioritization of the matter is compared to practices at the house in the 1980s, a shift of emphasis becomes visible: there is an increasing focus on star

²²⁶ As recounted by the Oper Frankfurt dramaturg Malte Krasting in an interview on June 24, 2010 interview. See Appendix A, Interview #1, p.291-293. Ensemble members at the Oper Frankfurt are singers contracted with the company for a salaried contract with a set number of assignments each season. Fairly common within Germany and within the system of *repertoire* houses, such singers can expect a certain amount of work with the house every year in either lead or *comprimario* roles, and depending on their level within the ensemble, some are also afforded the ability to work with other companies. “Chorus” singers, like the orchestra, are offered a long-standing (essentially lifelong) position with the company, and can also count on a steady amount of work every year. Contract terms and rehearsal expectations for both groups are fixed, and in Germany, these aspects are well-regulated: they are handled by the *Betriebsbüro*, (*KBB*) an internal department of the house common in Germany concerned with handling the personal interests of employees, and they are also regularly reviewed by representatives of the musician’s division of the Vereinte Dienstleistungs-Gewerkschaft (VERDI), the German Freelancers Union.

singers who draw in audiences. As seen in preceding chapters, operas staged during the Gielen Era were approached from a distinctly different standpoint. Guided by an intentionally politicized and avant-garde approach to opera as a musical-theatrical craft, pieces staged between 1979 and 1987 were bold both in terms of their unconventional artistic perspectives and with respect to their creative methods, which claimed the intentional prioritization of ensemble work and the collaborative nature of making (musical) theatre. These early days of *Regietheater* were marked not only by provocative readings, but also by a consistently team-driven approach to conceptualization and creation when staging a new version of a canonized *Werktreue*. Remnants of this collectively-authored approach certainly remain visible in *Siegfried* – indeed, the cooperative atmosphere seen among director Nemirova, conductor Weigle, designers Killian, Bernerth, and Winter, dramaturg Krasting, and the numerous singers and collaborators continues to echo that theme, albeit to a lesser degree than three decades ago. Yet a growing number of allowances seem to reveal a real, if also subtle, shift of guiding vision.

A number of factors could account for the change. Certainly, the attitudes of the artistic direction play an obvious role in questions of operational priority, and an understanding of key personnel within the artistic leadership can shed some light on the evolution of the house's current tactics, goals, and artistic vision. The present Intendant, Bernd Loebe, assumed his position in 2003, immediately upon the heels of his work as an Artistic Director in Belgium, but he had worked as a international music journalist for years prior to that position. As detailed in several passages of my interviews with Malte Krasting (see Appendix A) one of Loebe's strengths is the cast of "world-class" singers he has been able to assemble for recent productions: based on his own longstanding professional acquaintance with many leading world voices,

Loebe's emphasis on their recruitment has placed a spotlight on "excellent quality" singers (both well-established and those with growing careers) at the Frankfurt Opera.²²⁷ This effort has been a conscious one, further supported by the *Liederabend* series created shortly after the intendant's arrival, designed precisely for this purpose through the established Frankfurter Museumsgesellschaft.²²⁸ The opportunity to offer a concert in this series typically accompanies a new guest artist contract; it provides singers with the relatively rare and coveted opportunity to present a solo program of art song literature, and has become an enticing draw for a number of both blossoming and established international artists, including John Tomlinson, Alice Coote, Cristiane Karg, Anne Schwanewilms, and Anne-Sophie von Otter, to name just a few of the celebrity appearances since 2011.²²⁹

Qualität, Vielfalt, Emotion

With respect to both the singing and the artistic work produced at the house, the reference to "quality" is verbalized distinctly and frequently in Oper Frankfurt's current building on Frankfurt's Willy-Brandt-Platz. Interviews with Krasting and unofficial conversations with

²²⁷ Taken from my Interview #3 with Malte Krasting, in Appendix A, 24 June 2010, p. 291. Krasting immediately raises the notion of quality when asked about any guiding mission for the company. In the follow-up interview (No. 4), Krasting admits that he has been considering the fact that he has no further definition for the term, though it is frequently used by the artistic administration when speaking to the public about their work.

²²⁸ Paul Bartholomäi, *Das Frankfurter Museumsorchester*. (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 7–11. The *Museumsgesellschaft* is a cultural board of Frankfurt citizens which has existed since the 1780s, an organization that guides many of the artistic institutions in the city.

²²⁹ A basic overview of the *Liederabend* series, which has been offered every season since 2003–2004, can be seen on the Oper Frankfurt website: <<http://www.oper-frankfurt.de/en/page681.cfm>>.

various members of the direction have all returned to the theme on numerous occasions. According to Krasting, “quality” was also one of three organizational focus points identified for the Oper Frankfurt by the private consulting agency, *McKinsey & Company, Inc.*, who performed a detailed review and report about the opera company’s business structures in 2006. Based upon extensive interviews and workshops with members of the artistic direction designed to provide the organization’s leadership with a clearer sense of their (unspoken) goals, the McKinsey report was undertaken with the ultimate goal of helping the company improve the consistency of their presentation to both present and potential audience members. The results of that work identified the words “quality, diversity, and emotion” (*Qualität, Vielfalt, Emotion*) to best summarize the company’s profile.²³⁰ These three points, which were those perceived by the artistic direction to reflect the needs of most attendees, were also taken from a larger list, which had originally also included “reliability,” “innovation,” “openness to risk,” “sensuousness,” “intellectualism,” and “provocation”, although these other suggestions were eventually stricken from the final collection.²³¹ Interestingly, the report also contains a second group of terms, which included the artistic direction’s perception of another audience subset: potential and infrequent audience-members. Traits identified as appealing to this group were “intellectual challenge,” “provocation,” and “emotional distance”—some of the very words included on the list of discarded suggestions.

In this context, the choice to forsake “challenge,” “provocation,” and the simultaneous lack of any word similar to “collaboration,” or another term to address the nature of the artistic

²³⁰ Internal Report, McKinsey & Company, “Oper Frankfurt,” (Frankfurt am Main: 2006), 16

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

process, seems to indicate another shift of emphasis. Indeed, current priorities within the Oper Frankfurt leadership seem to have shifted away from the prioritization of collaborative methods and encouragement of experimental artistic content. Instead, emphasis is placed upon providing work of “quality,” a word that neither Krasting nor the McKinsey group ever defines, but which is by definition linked to perception and expectations, and therefore reception.

This notion of “quality” therefore indicates a distinct focus on the perceived needs and reactions of the majority of operagoers. Interestingly, the same page of the McKinsey report continues on to identify messages that the artistic direction would like to publicly communicate, including two statements that indicate a complex and undecided perspective within the direction on the matter of provocative stage work: “Intellectual stimulation and emotional impact are not mutually exclusive,” states one bullet point, while the next articulates the complexity of the company’s present perspective on this controversial issue, “the house stands for innovation—but not for thoughtless provocation.”²³² Regardless of whether or not the artistic direction is aware of the link between their perception of quality music and audience desires, the company’s struggle to articulate a clear stance on theatrical provocation seems rooted in an intent to please a general audience and therefore also to the pull away from riskier artistic work.²³³

²³² Translation mine.

²³³ Interestingly, two of my interviewees, both of whom asked to have this part of their interviews remain anonymous, confessed that they would like to see the present-day company more willing to offer pieces featuring challenging interpretations. The significant internal conflict within the company over the extent to which theatrically provocative work should be produced is a larger topic addressed in further chapters of my dissertation. At present, the company solution seems to be to leave the mainstage for less controversial work, but to present smaller-scale productions of a more experimental nature at the company’s second space, a former railway station known as Bockenheimer Depot, which has been renovated into a theatre space. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

It hardly seems surprising, then, that the 2011 *Siegfried*, like most mainstage works produced at the house in recent years, can neither be taken as particularly risqué, nor can it be aligned with the provocative style of work typically understood to represent the avant-garde side of today's opera industry that offers wholly new conceptual layers in the presentation of a canonized work, typically termed *Regietheater*. As earlier discussion of the production has already implied, despite the dynamic, mechanistic set design, the extreme subtlety of the directorial *Konzept* implied by the costume and stage design of the new Nemirova *Ring* cycle left the audience with a relatively typical interpretive presentation of Wagner's operas – and therefore is unlikely to be identified as *Regietheater* according to prevalent definitions. As Stephan Mösch has articulated about this type of contemporary productions, “The transport of themes can only work when they are anchored on many levels, or rather, are possible to anchor (in that fashion). *Regietheater* immediately and necessarily falls flat when directors equate the transport of themes with the transport of the text.”²³⁴

While Nemirova's style of work does offer some minor conceptual additions, they are implemented subtly enough to be overshadowed by her intense focus on transporting the meaning of the text through expressive embodiment and relatable transmission of human emotion. Furthermore, the visually dynamic set pieces and costumes seem to work on a wholly

²³⁴ “Ein Transport von Themen kann nur dann funktionieren, wenn diese auf mehreren Ebenen verankert werden bzw. überhaupt verankerbar sind. Regietheater wird sofort und zwangsläufig platt, wenn Regisseure Thementransport mit Texttransport gleichsetzen.” Stephen Mösch, “Störung, Verstörung, Zerstörung: Regietheater als Rezeptionsproblem,” in Robert Sollich (ed.), *Angst vor der Zerstörung: der Meister Künste zwischen Archiv und Erneuerung*. Theater der Zeit, 52 (2008), p. 220. Translation is mine.

different level from the emotional intensity delivered dramatically by the singers, while the singing and orchestral music attends to still other goals. With such disjuncture, the various creative elements of *Siegfried* each seem to present singular ideas – all interesting, but with little overlap or reinforcement of other elements. While the various themes raised by set, costuming, lighting, musical choices, and the *Personenregie* were all undertaken with a great deal of forethought, and offer moments of interest, the themes raised are neither underscored with enough repetition, nor are they addressed on the multiple levels necessary to sufficiently rise to the surface and provide a new overarching perspective or an updated reading of the text. Because of this, Nemirova's *Siegfried* is at heart an aesthetically rich and relatively effective traditional interpretation of the Wagnerian work, but one without any major conceptual additions to the Wagnerian text.

Based on the analysis of the company's aims and intended audience as articulated in the McKinsey report, and in light of the various analytical observations, it seems likely that *Siegfried* was celebrated by both Oper Frankfurt patrons and house employees for a combination of two reasons: firstly, the production offered no alternative conceptual reading that might controversially cast it as *Regietheater*, but on the other hand, it overwhelmingly delivered a rich and theatrically convincing presentation of the music, narrative, and textual themes. Given the company's growing emphasis on 'quality' and 'emotion', two of the three descriptors foregrounded by the McKinsey report, the 2011 staging seems to align with the company's present expectations of a mainstage production.

Based on the perspectives and conclusions presented in the past several chapters, productions at the present-day Oper Frankfurt seem to reflect some major differences from their

counterpoints three decades prior. That observation immediately begs the question of whether these differences are motivated by mundane differences of creative approach, or by some deeper philosophical or political shifts within the house—or perhaps even of the global opera industry. It is still possible to argue that the present management of the rehearsal process and the approach to business matters, such as contracting incentives and the marketing of star singers, might have assumed their current form as the simple result of minor operational changes. Perhaps the present organization and administration of production periods at today's Oper Frankfurt (or rather, the differences from the approach taken there in the mid-1980s) stem more from changes in logistical constraints than from overt goal shifts. Indeed, many minor changes within the company as a business entity have taken place over the last few decades, many of which might simply be attributable to subtle internal improvements in the handling of operational or business matters. That is, it is possible that such differences between today's house and the company of the 1980s may be merely functional, too trivial to be convincingly linked to major shifts in the company's artistic vision. Further conclusions on the matter will continue in Chapter Six, after a substantial comparison of business matters during the two eras. An attempt to draw such conclusions now, however, on the basis of only one production, would be premature.

For that reason, before attempting that analysis, I will turn to an examination of the company's present-day approach to the creation of less mainstream productions than the Nemirova *Ring*. Having been alerted to the significant internal conflict within the company over the extent to which theatrically provocative work can (or should) be made in the present-day climate, it will be instructive to look in a different direction, just north of the main opera house to the university neighborhood of Bockenheimer. Chapter Five of this dissertation will turn to

analysis of a recent production at the Bockenheimer Depot, the opera's secondary, more intimate performance venue, in which the company currently produces productions of a more controversial nature.

Chapter Five

Bockenheimer Depot: A Place for Contemporary Production

‘Small projects’...demonstrate a particularly important part of the Opera; Contemporary opera *must* exist, and chamber opera, too, which would be out of place in the main opera house. These belong (in the Bockenheimer Depot), and there, they have found precisely their proper place.

- Berndt Loebe, Oper Frankfurt Intendant²³⁵

The prior chapter’s examination of the Nemirova *Ring* (2010-12) has shifted the subject of analysis for the second half of this dissertation to productions mounted under the present Oper Frankfurt administration. Final remarks about that staging have cast it as a compelling and aesthetically appealing interpretation of Wagner’s music and libretto set within a traditional interpretative frame, although it exhibits no real preoccupation with the reconsideration of Wagner’s text through a novel conceptual lens. By contrast, the first half of this dissertation has shown that readings presented by the company during the avant-garde Gielen Era prioritized the presentation of experimentally minded conceptualizations of *Musiktheater* by consistently featuring novel interpretations of canonized operas. Since the Nemirova stagings can also be understood as largely representative of the production style frequently offered at the house today, the conclusion drawn at the end of Chapter Four might seem to imply that the tone of present-day artistic work undertaken by the company differs fundamentally from that of the 1980s.

²³⁵ Thiemo Hehl, *Kurzportrait der Oper Frankfurt*, Oper Frankfurt Video, 5:10. June 2010. http://www.oper-frankfurt.de/de/page1171.cfm?video=/fileupload/videoab13/FFM_Imagefilm.mp4&startBild=/fileupload/videoab13/FFM_Imagefilm-Startbild.jpg.

Yet it would be false to conclude that the present Oper Frankfurt administration fails to prioritize the staging of readings with an innovative conceptual apparatus, or that the company shies away from avant-garde *Musiktheater*. On the contrary, today's company offers three new productions each season that transcend the conventional operatic mold and can clearly be considered "experimental" or "innovative." Those stagings can largely be grouped into two categories: contemporary pieces composed in the 20th or 21st centuries, or stagings of rarely performed "early" operas from the Renaissance or Baroque periods. These productions demonstrate that the present administration of the house *does* support both the presentation of texts outside the operatic canon and innovative theatrical approaches to staging opera. Yet the current presentational *context* of experimental opera differs significantly from that of the Gielen Era. Since 2004, Frankfurt audiences have been regularly offered productions of a more radical nature in a secondary theater located in a former railway building, the Bockenheimer Depot.

This chapter will discuss that performance context in detail as I examine idiosyncrasies of the Bockenheimer Depot space against the contrasting context of the main opera house at Willy Brandt Platz. An introduction to the building's features and history will highlight differences between the Oper Frankfurt's secondary performance site and more traditional opera houses, and those variations will be shown to reinforce the 19th-century aesthetics culturally associated with the art form as well as its historically elite social function. Later theoretical discussions will address the impact of performance spaces (and of the work of places, in general) in order to reveal how an artistic object—in this case, an opera performance—is deeply intertwined with its context. These arguments show how theatres affect artistic aspects of the productions within them and influence audience perceptions. More specifically, discussion of the Bockenheimer

Depot will show how performance spaces—particularly those with non-traditional configurations—help to garner new audiences and generate novel, vibrant performance practices.

Matters of place are especially useful for the analysis of productions at the Depot, as those discussions identify correlations between the reception of productions and their theatrical context. The conclusion will emerge that alternative venues like the Depot are advantageous for unconventional opera theater, and for that reason, issues related to the place of the Depot figure centrally in the production analysis I present in this chapter. As I discuss Christian Pade’s 2011 staging of Salvatore Sciarrino’s 1998 opera *Luci mie traditrici*, I give special consideration to the use of this performance space, which will be shown to heighten many of the production’s most noteworthy musico-theatrical features.

An Unconventional Theater

The Bockenheimer Depot is an unusual space for opera performance; the building is a preserved historical landmark, the shell of a former railway station in central Frankfurt within the lively university neighborhood of Bockenheim. The current structure was renovated to its current brick form in 1900 from an older wooden structure for continued use as a tram servicing station by the Frankfurt Rail Company, the city’s public transportation network, abbreviated VGF.²³⁶ For a theater, the building is small, the hall is less than 2700 square meters.²³⁷ The performance hall occupies the entirety of the historical depot, originally designed to service streetcars and

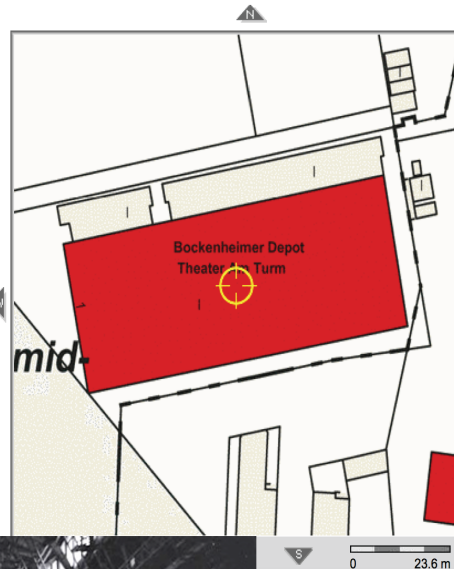
²³⁶ For a brief history of the company, see <https://www.vgf-ffm.de/en/vgf/history/>

²³⁷ Structural information on the Depot is available online, as a designated historical building: <http://denkxweb.denkmalpflege-hessen.de/cgi-bin/mapwalk.pl?session=1846177&event=Map.Zoom.Out>

house work animals.²³⁸ The building served as a transit service point until 1966, when the construction of a modernized maintenance station was completed.²³⁹ Like its name, the Depot's façade recalls its former function. The upper left photo in Figure G shows the entryway, which proceeds through massive wooden doors on the west side, huge gates built to allow passage of sizeable trams. "The building looks encumbered by memory," and both the

Figure G:

Carlo-Schmidt-Platz 1



Bockenheimer Depot
Current Exterior (above left)

Bockenheimer Depot
Architectural Overview
(above right)

Bockenheimer Depot,
Current Interior (bottom)



²³⁸ Electric trams did not fully replace horsecars in Frankfurt until 1904. Dieter Höltge & Günter Köhler, *Straßen- und Stadtbahnen in Deutschland*, v.1, (Freiburg: EK-Verlag, 1992), 119.

²³⁹ Horst Michelke & Claude Jeanmaire: *100 Jahre Frankfurter Straßenbahnen: 1872 - 1899 – 1972*, (Brugg, Switzerland: Verlag Eisenbahn, 1972,) 289.

architecture and aged brick hint at the place's history, physically marked by horseshoes, steel wheels, and work boots that passed through it for over a century.²⁴⁰

In 1978, when the Depot's few lingering rail duties were finally reassigned, the future of the building seemed unclear. The public transit system continued to use the space for storage until 1981, when it was briefly transformed into the region's first Light Rail Museum, which would provisionally inhabit the structure until 1985. It lay vacant again until the catastrophic fire at the opera in 1987, when it was purchased by the city's local stage company, who renovated the structure into a theater space for the use of the *Schauspiel*—the city's primary spoken theater had been displaced from its own venue to accommodate its homeless neighbor, which left them in dire need of a performance hall. The Depot's restoration included minor physical adjustments to accommodate the modern theatrical style commonly featured by the *Schauspiel* productions in the 1980s; it was equipped with modern light- and sound-rigging and extended with a long addition on the north side: two lengthy trailers used for the box office, technical controls, and dressing facilities. Frankfurt's theater would use this alternative house as its primary hall from 1988 until 1991, when the opera was reopened and the theater company returned to Willy Brandt Platz (at that time called *Opernplatz*, or Opera Plaza.)

The transformed Depot was used primarily for performances by private touring productions from then until 1995, when Frankfurt's *Theater am Turm* (or TAT), an independent,

²⁴⁰ Ethnomusicologist Paul Chaikin observes a similar historical weight on the physical features and design of Berlin's Staatsoper Unter den Linden. Chaikin, 51.

avant-garde theater company, relocated to the building.²⁴¹ The Depot's association with experimental theater began as result of several provocative pieces staged by the Schauspiel in the 1980s, and that reputation intensified during the years of the TAT residency. Founded in 1966 and originally housed in the *Volksbühne*, that company had established a reputation for provoking controversy as part of a scandalous performance week in Frankfurt known as the *Experimenta I*.²⁴² With its transfer to the Depot, the TAT became affiliated with the local public stage company and therefore benefited from the city's financial support; as it assumed the status of an official Frankfurt theater, it was no longer a purely private entity. Its tenure at the Depot was short-lived, however, and the company closed in 2004. The building remained the property of the city stages, which enabled the easy use of the space by the opera; usage began that April with *The Golden Vanity*, a little-known work by Benjamin Britten. The production was well received, and the opera's presence at the house intensified. By 2006, the company would offer four premieres at the venue each season, which remains the current programming pattern in the 2015-16 season. Although the opera company has become a fixture at the Depot, the location is still occasionally used by other groups, as well; the private modern dance company of William Forsythe, who directed the *Frankfurt Ballett* until its closure in 2004, performs intermittently in the Depot building, and the Schauspiel also continues to mount occasional productions there, albeit irregularly.

Under the weight of this history, the Depot building seems far from a conventional theater, with none of the high art trappings of an opera house: an observation that can also be

²⁴¹ The TAT moved after the Volksbühne was sold. K. Braun, "Der Abschaffung TATSachen: das Frankfurter TAT wird geschlossen," in *Theater der Zeit* 57, 10 (2002), 12-15.

²⁴² "Das Publikum plünderte die Bühne: Skandale und Skandälchen auf der *Experimenta I* Woche zeitgenössischen Theaters in Frankfurt...", *Hamburger Abendblatt*, June 15, 1966.

made upon entering the heart of the building. Within the archways are wooden doors that are pulled aside like the entrance to a barn, and upon crossing the threshold, the presence of the exterior is still felt in the inner walls of bare brick, brick exposed to show the building's age (Fig G.) The arrangement of the interior was left flexible during the 1987 renovation to accommodate multiple performance configurations, but setup typically follows a pattern: Just inside the doors stand several tall tables, with a mobile bulletin board at the far right to display press clippings about the production; together these delineate a makeshift lobby. An exposed gray concrete floor stretches the length of the room, interrupted only by the seating area, the entrance to which is blocked by a simple rope that hangs between two portable, waist height poles. The sparse décor is rough and modern, the design antithesis of the opera house.

The configuration of the seats is changeable, set on separable, black platforms that comprise moveable modules, sturdy but easily adjusted to whatever dimensions or form a production may require. Sturdy chairs are aligned individually in rows atop the supporting construction. Once the audience and stage area have been placed, tables for technical equipment, which includes soundboard, light board, and laptop computers through which to sequence cues and supertitles, along with several visual monitors, are mounted on an extra platform behind the top row of seats, where the stage management staff will run technological elements of the show from behind the audience. The building itself contains no internal structural margins to separate the lobby, audience, and technical areas. No proscenium lies in front of the chairs, and no curtain hangs from the grid of lighting instruments that scaffolds the ceiling. The stark black platforms that will constitute the performance area are separated from the public areas only by the careful placement of chairs, and from nearly any perspective, the entire hall is visible, apart from the

small area blocked by the elevated scaffolding that forms the rear side of the seating area. Only a narrow, dark canvas block the visibility of the performers' door, it hangs in the back left corner of the room and runs along a short section of the adjacent path, which extends several meters further before it reaches the modest stage at the front of the seating area. The direction of the chairs reveals that space to be the visual focal point of the room, although the placement, size and shape of its slightly elevated playing surface vary with the needs of the production. No velvet is present, nothing plush or gilded. The Depot's simple interior recalls the style of black-box theater, with neither the opulence nor the permanence of the main opera house.

The Aura of an Opera Production

The current approach to experimental opera at the Oper Frankfurt involves programming the majority of productions outside of the traditional repertoire into this alternative space, far from the main theater. Yet the choice to utilize a second building, especially one so contrasting to the city's main opera house, seems particularly well-suited for the presentation of productions that feature an innovative conceptual apparatus or unusual production values, or that present new or little-known operas. Discussions by 20th-century German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin address the matter of how performance context influences perceptions of the work of art, and they indicate some reasons for such a conclusion.

Benjamin's notion of "aura" provides a basis to understand how seemingly external, contextual elements of an artwork, such as performance space, are ultimately incorporated into the piece itself: such features eventually become fundamental aspects of the artwork. The term "aura" can be understood as the "unique phenomenon of distance" that stretches between the

audience and the “pure” cultural object, which includes “the cult value of the work of art in categories of space and time perception.”²⁴³ According to Benjamin, who borrows from Baudelaire, auratic elements “cluster” around the perceived object, and they function similarly to *mémoire involontaire*: they are impressed upon us subconsciously, without an intentional commitment to consciousness.²⁴⁴ The deep-seated influence of auratic elements, which comprise an influential “halo” around the work as it is perceived, demands that the definition of the artwork be expanded to include not only the piece itself, but also its surroundings.²⁴⁵ As it pertains to an opera production, discussion of “aura” means to address the elements of the performance in context, including the structure of the theater, its décor, and the habituated patterns of behavior ritualistically observed (and taken for granted) within it.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, as ethnomusicologist Paul Chaikin has also claimed, these elements have historically been excluded from the analysis of art as part of the quest for aesthetic autonomy, as the dominant intellectual tradition has been preoccupied with the “pure” artwork since Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 243.

²⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs on Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 186.

²⁴⁵ For more on aura as halo, see Benjamin, *On Hashish*, 58.

²⁴⁶ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, 221-223.

²⁴⁷ Chaikin, 37. Chaikin claims that this exclusion accompanies the “Romantic amalgamation of aesthetics and metaphysics—the kiln in which the ideology of aesthetic autonomy hardens,” and refers specifically to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* (transl. Kaufmann) and Arthur Schopenhauer’s “Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (1819),” (ed. P. Le Huray, 1981).

Benjamin rejects such aesthetic autonomy as he recognizes that auratic elements are of fundamental importance to aesthetic perception, and therefore also to the analysis of art.²⁴⁸

The space of the opera house is a key aspect of the cultural aura of opera, the extra-musical context that is nevertheless inextricable from the work itself. Paul Chaikin has argued similarly in his 2010 ethnography of the Berlin Staatsoper, and as he reflects on how that house's 18th- and 19th-century design elements participate in "shaping operatic experience," he identifies concrete elements of aura found in that company's traditional-style opera house.²⁴⁹ I echo his conclusion, that "architecture and interior design have subtle but regulative effects on the opera-going public," and I believe that this understanding also justifies the extension of the "aura" concept beyond the traditional opera house to alternative operatic spaces.²⁵⁰ Contemporary performance spaces will certainly also affect audiences, albeit differently than do the monuments of grand opera. Furthermore, Chaikin's detailed observations about the Berlin building are also interesting to consider alongside my own comparisons of the two Oper Frankfurt performance spaces, as his conclusions find echoes in the company's main building. As he illustrates, the auratic aspects of opera houses are traditionally quite grand; moreover, stagings produced in such theaters exhibit stark contrasts of *aura* to productions showcased in the Bockenheimer Depot, due to the disparities in the physical features of the two Frankfurt buildings. As the following

²⁴⁸Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, tr. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1-17.

²⁴⁹Chaikin, 48. It should be noted that at present, the Berlin Staatsoper's permanent building on Unter den Linden is undergoing renovation, and the company is presently performing across town at the Schiller Theater, another building with a similar classical facade. The Staatsoper was in residence in its own building at the time of Chaikin's dissertation, however, and a return to the original theater building is planned for October 2017.

²⁵⁰Ibid, 39.

description of Frankfurt’s primary opera house will illustrate, the aura of the Bockenheimer Depot provides an escape from opera’s history as high art, which remains so overtly manifest in the edifice of the main theater.

Like the Berlin venue profiled by Chaikin, the primary Oper Frankfurt theater at Willy-Brand-Platz exhibits aesthetics that perpetuate opera’s lofty social status. The building provides a “ceremonial context” similar to the Berlin building on Unter den Linden; the physical features of the Frankfurt opera house provide material echoes of that celebrated status.²⁵¹ The architecture of the main theater building is grandiose, and although the exterior of the rectangular structure is modern—it was rebuilt after the fire of 1987 that destroyed most of the former house—it remains impressively immense and luxurious, constructed almost entirely of glass. The anterior face of three-story front entrance reflects the bright light of the sky by day, and projects the elegant, shimmering interior of the public restaurant/bar and reception space by night.

Fig H:



²⁵¹ Ibid, 16-17.

Regardless of the hour, the contemporary-style exterior mimics the grandiose effects supplied by the façade of classical buildings like the Berlin Staatsoper Unter den Linden; the Frankfurt house is equally majestic despite its construction over two centuries later.²⁵² Hegel’s words reflect the profundity of such architecture, which seems to provide “a fit place for concentration of spirit, and for its direction to the mind’s absolute objects.”²⁵³ Indeed, the splendid exterior, functionally similar to most major opera houses, promotes the contemplation of the divine. In Frankfurt, the extreme height draws the eye high, and the glass’s reflection (or projection) of bright light casts a glow from the vast structure that confers holiness on the art within it. The halo of light emanating from the facade offers the physical incarnation of operatic aura.

The interior heightens that impression, further ingraining the sanctity of the art presented within. Four slight steps deliver spectators from the plaza into the foyer as they pass ticket collectors at the door. The majority of the house’s public areas belong to the lobby, flanked on both sides by ornate staircases and wardrobe areas. Plush carpeting covers the floor, and crystal chandeliers of opulently abstract design hang above. The staircases are broad, but as they trace along the front wall of the atrium to the corners of each higher floor, their layout leads the crowd through each level in a zigzag pattern on a gradual path to the balconies. Between the atrium and the performance hall are several doors hung with velvet curtains, and as Chaikin has also stressed, such rich fabric symbolically protects “treasures” inside.²⁵⁴ Frankfurt’s opulent 20th-

²⁵² The Staatsoper was constructed for King Frederick II in 1742, and rebuilt after a fire in 1843. The exterior maintained the style of the original, but the interior redesigned to be more lavish.

²⁵³ GWF Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, tr. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1993), 90-91.

²⁵⁴ Chaikin, 65.

century opera house demonstrates the honored status of the art offered there: as the audience enters the hall, whether at Orchestra or balcony level, the s-curve of the railings and the vast space inside the hall guide the gaze to the stage. The interior design directs attention so that “the hallowed work of art emerges repeatedly as the magnetic center of operatic experience.”²⁵⁵ Quite literally, the performance is the heart of the theater. Both décor and design of the interior places focus on the stage, which encases the production as a frame surrounds a painting. Both delineate the boundaries of the artwork as their margins separate onstage images from things outside the frame, rendering the performance “to our attention as an exceptional object.”²⁵⁶

Social Ritual and Operatic Taste(s)

This description of the Oper Frankfurt’s main theater provides a vivid illustration of how extra-musical features of the buildings used for opera “highlight the constitutive but subtle dynamism of context” for those who partake of the productions featured there.²⁵⁷ Like Benjamin’s assertions about aura, arguments by social theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas highlight how the presentational context of an artwork significantly influences its perception. Viewed in tandem, their ideas, which also demonstrate how cultural events like opera performances serve as social rituals that validate and perpetuate social divisions of power, indicate that the place of a performance significantly influences the development of cultural taste. Ultimately, their ideas show how differences in performance places influence reception, a

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 119.

²⁵⁶ Karl P. Moritz, “Preliminary Ideas on the Theory of Ornament,” in *Theory of Decorative Art*, ed. Isabelle Frank (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 259.

²⁵⁷ Chaikin, 178.

notion that provides theoretical grounding for my later argument: that productions featured at the two contrasting Oper Frankfurt theaters assume somewhat differentiated social functions.

Chaikin has asserted that the splendor traditionally exhibited in opera houses embodies a quasi-religious reverence for opera and art music, an argument that he justifies with a demonstration of the design parallels between the Staatsoper and Classical temples.²⁵⁸ The Oper Frankfurt's main theater echoes his points and shows how a modern opera house may retain that function; despite its newer design, the aura at Willy Brandt Platz still bathes its productions in opulence as it casts the performance as the deified gem in the center of a ritualized social event.²⁵⁹ This aura communicates a reverence for the artwork, inscribed through acts of social ritual with the participation of the opera's overwhelmingly "wealthy, cosmopolitan" audiences.²⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu has summarized the matter succinctly: "The most successful ideological effects... ask no more than complicitous silence."²⁶¹ For Bourdieu, opera fulfills the powerful "social function of legitimating social differences" as it contextualizes those who enjoy it within a certain cultural sphere.²⁶² Furthermore, the potency of this ritual becomes evident in cases where that function is *not* maintained; Bourdieu argues that when an artwork defies the

²⁵⁸ Chaikin, 49 – 56.

²⁵⁹ Long understood to replicate dominant cultural attitudes, the ritualistic function of theater and performance is well established. Christopher Small has demonstrated the point for music; his analysis reveals how orchestral concerts unambiguously project participant relationships through delineated social space. See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998), 48.

²⁶⁰ Chaikin, 131.

²⁶¹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Outline to a Theory of Practice," tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 188.

²⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 7.

notions that it implicitly serves to reinforce, it “spurn(s) audience expectations” and is met with resistance and rejection.²⁶³ When the expected aura fails—that is, when it deviates from that which is socially anticipated—the reception of the artwork is poor.

Following Bourdieu’s logic, enthusiasm for a production not only indicates approval of the aesthetic object, but it also demonstrates comfort with the surrounding aura. Interestingly, the application of such observations to the recent history of the two Oper Frankfurt performance spaces prompts the conclusion that the auratic differences between the two theaters have not been particularly disturbing to audiences attending productions at that secondary theater—on the contrary, there is a growing demand for Depot performances.²⁶⁴ The longstanding success of productions mounted there indicates that the theatrical context is received by Depot audiences (or at least by the subset who attend Bockenheimer Depot productions) as perfectly acceptable,

²⁶³ Paul Chaikin’s analysis of Peter Mussbach’s 2006 production of *Die Lustige Witwe* demonstrates his point well: Negatively critiqued by the press, met with vocal “boos” and troubled by low attendance, quickly stricken from the set of revivals under consideration for inclusion in the next season, the production was a clear failure—because it “spurned the expectations of the audience.” See Chaikin, 174 – 175.

²⁶⁴ The Depot has been quite successful as a satellite venue, as demonstrated by the seasons programmed: the number of pieces scheduled there increased each year between 2003-4 and 2007-2008, and has held steady since then. “Spielzeit 2003-4” through “Spielzeit 2014-15,” *Standortkatalog Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt am Main, Oper und Ballet*, Collection Oper Frankfurt: 1945 - present, Musik-Theater-Kunst Reading Room, Goethe University Library. Additionally, since the building had already been used for experimental productions of spoken theater by the TAT before the cancellation of that division during the tight financial times for the city’s arts institutions during the 1990s, for a number of years when the Oper adopted usage of the space, playing to sold-out houses, it was already clear that there was a Frankfurt audience for experimental productions.

in accordance with expectations.²⁶⁵ Yet that conclusion is theoretically troubling, as it seems to mitigate Bourdieu's primary point; his work is predicated on the declaration that aesthetic taste is not universal, but reflects a particular social position as it works to maintain the social status quo. If opera's success as an art form depends on its maintenance of its status as high art, it would seem that the failure of the Depot to project the grand aura expected of opera should doom the productions there to the public's rejection, which has clearly not been the case.

Yet a later assertion of Bourdieu presents a more nuanced understanding of the reception of works of art, and better accounts for the incongruity:

The laws governing the reception of works of art are a special case of the laws of cultural diffusion. ...In a differentiated society, a close relationship is therefore established between the nature and quality of the information transmitted and the structure of the public, its "readability" and its effectiveness being all the greater when it meets directly as possible the expectations, implicit or explicit, which the receivers owe chiefly to their family upbringing and social circumstances (and also... to their school education) and which the diffuse pressure of the reference group maintains, sustains and reinforces by constant recourse to the norm.²⁶⁶

Moving beyond the simple notion that opera legitimates and reinforces the power of the elite social class that sustains it, the passage above highlights a more complex claim: that cultural taste is a layered matter, differentiated by multiple social factors. This point rings true, for *within* the social groups that frequent the opera, artistic taste is clearly varied, as evidenced in the

²⁶⁵ Although there have been no official demographic studies of the Frankfurt theater spaces, abundant media reports attest to the high demand for Bockenheimer Depot productions. As reported here, "According to opera intendant Loebe, patrons have had to be sent home in the last season because the events in the Depot were faced with such great demand." ["Laut Opern-Chef Loebe mußten in den vergangenen Spielzeiten Besucher nach Hause geschickt werden, weil die Veranstaltungen im Depot so großen Zuspruch fanden"] See <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/frankfurt/theater-bockenheimer-depot-auch-kuenftig-spielstaette-1281815.html>

²⁶⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception," in *The Field of Cultural Production*, tr. Randall Johnson. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 295-296.

stylistic variations among contemporary opera productions and the divergent reactions to them. The point is similar to arguments by Jürgen Habermas about the nuanced nature of cultural taste. He believes that the finer differentiations are able to develop within those who participate in a certain art form, and that these changes occur as “an audience-oriented subjectivity communicate(s) with itself.”²⁶⁷ His argument, like those of Bourdieu and Benjamin, sets the site of the performance as the place in which taste becomes developed and refined. In essence, he indicates that variations in artistic taste are refined by the context of the setting itself.

Habermas’s more nuanced understanding of the production of artistic taste—and even more so, his identification of the performance setting as its site of development— may offer some explanation for the enthusiasm for atypical productions featured in the Oper Frankfurt secondary performance space. Habermas and Bourdieu account for the development of finely differentiated operatic taste, and together their thoughts can account for the development of a healthy appetite for avant-garde opera within at least one subset of Oper Frankfurt patrons. With their arguments in mind, the auratic contrasts between the main opera house and the Bockenheimer Depot can be understood to reveal not only variances in the production styles commonly featured in each location, but also distinctions of audience taste and expectations between the groups who patronize the two houses. The two theaters produce wildly different environments; furthermore, the Bockenheimer Depot’s spatial organization and design fails to conform to traditional norms for the presentation of opera. The unusual context reinforces a parallel nonconformity in the theatrical style and textual content of the company’s productions

²⁶⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, tr. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT press, 1989), 29. He characterizes theater as a *setting*, not an aesthetic object, which makes clear its nature as a commodity, reliant on the participation of a willing audience.

within the secondary theater. Moreover, as Habermas argues, the nuanced taste for the divergent artistic style and content of the productions seems to be enabled and developed, at least in part, by the auratic contrasts projected by the Bockenheimer Depot theater, itself.²⁶⁸

The Place of a Production

Together, the theories of Bourdieu and Habermas lead to my argument that the features of Bockenheimer Depot venue contribute to the positive reception of the unconventional productions mounted there; likewise, they provide reasoning as to why this secondary performance space has become such an established, viable location for the opera company's less traditional productions of the last decade. But the public acceptance of an opera production is not the only matter affected by the theatrical aura of a performance space. Features of the venue also influence how creative professionals set the production within the space, and what the location can offer the processes of theatrical creation and performance. The scholars Edward Casey and David Seamon have discussed dynamics of space and place in detail, and their observations can be easily applied to practical aspects of performance, as has been attempted by theater scholar David Filmer. An exploration of the issues they raise can reveal much about how the place of the Bockenheimer Depot influences the practical work of preparing and performing an opera production there—as well as important points about the resultant production, itself.

²⁶⁸ Unfortunately, no demographic studies exist that directly address Frankfurt audiences and the theaters in the Rhein-Main region. A few newspaper articles have addressed the public reactions to the theater, however, and there are larger-scale studies that give indications about classical music, theater, and new music audiences in Germany more generally. Further discussion of these sources will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, which most specifically addresses differences in 21st-century opera audiences.

Edward Casey devotes his attention to matters of “place,” which he finds a richer (and therefore more fitting) concept for our understanding of the physical world than “space,” which can be considered “mute and blank.”²⁶⁹ Places are comprised of human experiences, and they have specific “depths” and “horizons,” which are “configured in odd protuberances, in runs, rills, and flats,” features that produce the framework for our physical experience of whatever occurs in space and time. Place is a foundational aspect of human experience, since “to be is to be in place—bodily.”²⁷⁰ Such phenomenological perspectives on the particular environment of implacement provide an understanding that meaning includes “bodily, visceral, intuitive, emotional and transpersonal dimensions.”²⁷¹ David Seamon expands these explanations of place with his notion of *lifeworlds*: physical places that provide direct environmental experiences for those who inhabit it, who encounter it constantly, both in “movement” and at “rest.”²⁷² Above all, “knowledge of a place begins with the bodily experience of being-in-place,” shaped by factors related to our bodily position within it. As we perceive the physical aspects of our surroundings, which we sense in dyads such as “near and “far,” a place becomes evident to us as a container, a frame with particular dimensions.²⁷³ Not only does it have distinct margins, but

²⁶⁹ Edward Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time,” in *Senses Of Place*, ed. Steven Feld & Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996), 15.

²⁷⁰ Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 340.

²⁷¹ David Seamon, “A Way of Seeing People in Place,” in *Theoretical Perspectives in Environment-Behavior Research*, ed. S. Wapner, (New York: Kluwer Publishing, 2000), 162.

²⁷² David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter* (London: Croom Helm, 1979.)

²⁷³ Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993), 43 – 70.

like a room with “windows,” it can also be seen in relation to other places.²⁷⁴ With an emphasis on its composition of physically perceived elements, Casey and Seamon illustrate how place is all-encompassing a rich framework that can provide a physical understanding of all that occurs within it.

Within any theater, the physical experiences of place necessarily by definition experiences of both audience members as well as of practitioners, and applied to the perceptions of those individuals, the concept of place has particular importance for productions at the Depot. Not only will those within a theatrical place be understood to experience its particular aura, in its concrete detail, but they will also feel physical contrasts to the opera house. Yet both of these contrasting “containers” are experienced as dwelling places, and as we inhabit them, they are incorporated into our identities, bound to “who and what we are.”²⁷⁵ To reside in a place will eventually produce an identification with it, and the contents that define it; or to restate the point in Habermas’s terms, artistic taste is refined within the theatrical context. Participation in an artistic event produces the appreciation of it. As “every culture is emplaced, the place itself affects the features of those who inhabit it.”²⁷⁶

In these ways, theatrical places and their inhabitants—be they creators or audience members—mutually affect each other. Theater scholar Andrew Filmer, who has applied the points of Seamon and Casey to the study of performance, has extended that point to demonstrate

²⁷⁴ Edward Casey, “J.E. Malpas’s *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Converging and diverging in/on place,” *Philosophy & Geography* 4, no.2 (2001): 225 - 230.

²⁷⁵ Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, xiii.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 31.

how theatrical places “communicate messages about the power, status, and taste of their inhabitants.”²⁷⁷ The physical aspects of these halls “[make] possible the spatial practices of users”, and their inhabitants become “subjects *and* agents, empowered *and* disempowered by the buildings in which they live and work.”²⁷⁸ His study of performance spaces in Sydney, Australia addresses how those places shape the pieces produced within them as they directly affect the actions of practitioners. Filmer offers theoretical arguments for how specific place of a performance affects the creation of theater, and analyses several examples; of particular interest are his vibrant illustrations of how performers’ physical emplacement affects their physical maneuvering, which includes examples of how their bodies are directly affected by the spatial particularities of the theater, and how territories are marked within it.

Filmer, however, omits the discussion of sound from his analysis of theatrical places. Yet physical attributes of performance spaces certainly affect sonic matters along with more overtly spatial issues like maneuvering and territorial divisions. As Don Ihde has argued, as we learn to distinguish sounds, “we hear shapes,” and furthermore, we also perceive the texture of the physical materials that produce them, as well as properties of their edges and surfaces.²⁷⁹ As his points about the phenomenon of echo make clear, sounds bear the properties of the places in which they are created:

With the experience of echo, auditory space is opened up. With echo, the sense of

²⁷⁷ Andrew Filmer, *Backstage Space: The Place of the Performer* (University of Sydney, 2006), 36.

²⁷⁸ Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London: Routledge, 1999), 20.

²⁷⁹ Don Ihde, “The Shapes of Sound,” in *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*. (Stony Brook: State University of New York Press, 2007), 61 – 69.

distance as well as surface is present. And again surface significations anticipate the hearing of interiors. ...The space of sound is “in” its timefulness. ...The depth of the well reveals its auditory distance to me as I call into its mouth.²⁸⁰

Ihde’s comments lead directly to the conclusion that the theatrical environment literally shapes the sounds of a performance. Its sounds, in their echoes and silences, allow for the direct perception of the materials and dimensions of the performers and objects involved in the production. As a unique container with particular sonic properties, the place in which a production is offered will affect presentations there and will differ sonically from other venues. For the discussion of opera, a musical genre in which voice and music figure centrally, the matter of place is particularly relevant, and this is also borne out in the acoustics of the venue. Richard Cullen Rath’s article on the distinctive acoustics of early Quaker Meeting Houses demonstrates that point well with respect to the singing of shape-note hymns; his work is a helpful starting point to consider how the relationship between the acoustics of a performance space and that which inhabits it. Not only does he provide an example of how the physical properties of a particular performance venue add layers of meaning to the music performed it, he further shows how the acoustics of a performance space underscore that beliefs of the people that hear music within it.²⁸¹ His work demonstrates the importance of considering acoustics when considering issues of place with respect to a musical venue, in addition to the matters of maneuvering and territory raised by Filmer. Together, discussion of these issues will reveal how the place of Bockenheimer Depot becomes manifest in its productions.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 69.

²⁸¹ Richard Cullen Rath, “No Place for the Devil to Hide,” in *The Sound Studies Reader*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

In two ways, the matters discussed in the previous sections support the assertion that the place of a performance fundamentally influences the substance of an opera production. First, these arguments provide the fundamental understanding that the environment of a theater is rich with details that affect the presentation of the aesthetic object. Second, they indicate that the particularities of that theatrical aura correspond to the taste and beliefs of those who participate. Following those arguments, the analysis that follows in pages to come will demonstrate how the place of the Bockenheimer Depot—in its form, dimensions, and organization—provides alternatives for movement and sound that support nontraditional opera productions. From a socio-cultural standpoint, Oper Frankfurt’s secondary performance space, which significantly contrasts with the opera house, enables the success of the atypical productions presented there.

Bockenheimer Depot: A Place for New Opera

Luci mie traditrici, a recent opera by Salvatore Sciarrino, had its world premiere in the summer of 1998 at the Schwetzingen Festival in Germany. The piece had been produced three subsequent times in a series of European contemporary music festivals before 2010, when the Oper Frankfurt created a new version of the piece in cooperation with the Cantiere Internazionale d’Arte Festival in Montepulciano. The production was performed in two separate performance runs in two locations: The first set was musically directed by Marco Angius and performed by instrumentalists of the Ensemble Algoritmo in Montepulciano from July 29 – August 1, 2010, shortly after which the stage elements and costumes were transported to Frankfurt to be reset within the Bockenheimer Depot. The second group took place between May 14 and May 22, 2011, with a Frankfurt stage management team and local orchestral musicians—those performances were conducted by Erik Nielson and played by members of the *Frankfurt Opern-*

und Museumsorchester. Directed by Christian Pade and featuring the costume designs of Alexander Lintl, with Oper Frankfurt's Agnes Eggers as dramaturg, and sung by four singers from the Frankfurt ensemble: baritone Christian Miedl, mezzo-soprano Nina Tarandek, countertenor Roland Schneider, and Simon Bode.²⁸² As the following two analytical sections will illustrate, both Sciarrino's musical construction and Pade's staging underscore the slowly mutating emotional situation between the main the characters, the details of which will be explained presently. Not only do the orchestral parts and the singers' use of vocality illustrate the unnerving erosion of fidelity and trust between the two main characters, but keen and purposeful use of sets, costumes, props, and blocking also accentuate their transformation. Furthermore, as I will show towards the end of my analysis, the physical and design properties of Bockenheimer Depot performance space heighten the ways in which the music and the staging illustrate the dramatic progression.

The opera features four roles: "Il Malaspina," the Duke; "La Malaspina," the Duchess; "L'Ospite," the Guest; and "Un Servo," a Servant.²⁸³ The score and libretto, both composed by Sciarrino, find inspiration in the macabre historical example of a murder by Renaissance nobleman and composer Carlo Gesualdo (1566 – 1612) of his unfaithful wife and her lover. Although the source of the story is indisputable, the textual and musical references to Gesualdo are indirect, as Sciarrino modeled the scenes after Giacinto Andrea Cicognini's late 17th-century

²⁸² Christian Pade, a Munich-born director born in 1962 whose career has largely been revolved around stage direction of spoken theater, often approaches projects in tandem with the designer Alexander Lintl.

²⁸³ Miedl sang the Duke, Tarandek sang the Duchess, Schneider sang the Guest, and Bode sang the servant.

drama about the subject, *Il tradimento per l'onore*.²⁸⁴ The score features an intriguing combination of musical features as it sets Sciarrino's distinctive late 20th-century compositional idiom within a Renaissance frame. The contemporary operatic setting of this drama is told in two acts, comprised of eight scenes and three instrumental intermezzi. The opera begins with an *a cappella* musical prologue, a quotation of a Renaissance elegy borrowed from the 16th-century Franco-Flemish composer Claude La Jeune; an offstage soprano voice sings the strophic, highly chromatic Renaissance song; she reveals herself near the end of the chanson as the hooded Duchess.²⁸⁵ Refigured versions of the song will appear intermittently throughout the opera to mark critical developments the story, and its treatment is handled symbolically, providing insights into the dramatic themes. Figure I provides an overview of the opera's structure, broken down into scenes and orchestral intermezzi:

Figure I:

Act I	Act II
1. Prologo / [Prologue]	1. Scena VI [Scene VI]
2. Scena I / [Scene I]	2. Intermezzo II [Intermezzo II]
3. Buio I [Darkened Scene I]	3. Scena VII [Scene VII]
4. Scena II / [Scene II]	4. Intermezzo III [Intermezzo III]
5. Intermezzo I	5. Scena VIII [Scene VIII]
6. Scena III [Scene III]	
7. Scena IV [Scene IV]	
8. Buio II [Darkened Scene II]	
9. Scena V [Scene V]	

Scene I depicts The Duke and Duchess as they declare their eternal love at daybreak. As the Duchess plucks a rose from the garden, she pricks herself, and the sight of her blood makes

²⁸⁴ Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, *Il tradimento per l'onore*, (1664; rep, Viterbo: Centro studi sul teatro medioevale e rinascimentale, 2002).

²⁸⁵ More historical information on the Le Jeune quotation, and an examination of its structural role in the organization of Sciarrino's opera, will follow later in this analysis.

her husband woozy. He regains his strength in Scene II, when she challenges him to recommence the game of love, but before they can leave for the bedchamber, a jealous servant interrupts them with news: a Guest has arrived. The first and most literal echo of Le Jeune's elegy, the orchestral Intermezzo I, brings us to midday. The Duchess and the Guest encounter each other in the garden during Scene III, and their eyes betray a treacherous passion. The Servant observes their promises of love in Scene IV, then their departure to a secret rendezvous. Night falls. Scene V reveals the Duke and Servant alone as the lord bears the disturbing news. Devastated, he declares that those who have destroyed his honor must die. He kills the servant, an act that forecasts the inevitable events to come. Act II proceeds with no intermission. Scene VI opens with the sounds of evening, and after an agonizing exchange, the Duke forgives his wife for her transgression agreeing to reconcile later that night. Intermezzo II repeats Le Jeune's elegy again, but the transfigured melody begins to decay: it loses its beauty as it melds with Sciarrino's atmospheric orchestral sounds. In Scene VII, he inquires about her embroidery; the Duchess explains that she is stitching a token to symbolize her fidelity. The Renaissance melody becomes indistinguishable in Intermezzo III, disintegrated into a pianissimo web of sound that compels the final scene. Husband and wife meet in Scene VIII in their chamber, where the Duke circles his prey in a vile mimicry of their earlier courtship dance. He lures the Duchess to open their curtained bed and prove her allegiance. Aghast at the realization that she has not been forgiven, the cornered Duchess opens the canopy to reveal the dismembered body of the Guest. The endgame completes, and as she slowly dies upon his sword, the Duke realizes that he is doomed to live in eternal torture.

From a musical standpoint, this opera seems a particularly appropriate text for the Bockenheimer Depot, as its score exhibits a relationship to both of the operatic branches commonly featured in the secondary theater.²⁸⁶ Scarrino's composition links the two seemingly divergent styles, drawing upon early music as well as that of the late 20th-century avant-garde; he creates a new opera deeply linked to the musical past. The score features avant-garde musical elements, including unusual playing techniques and his own distinctive version of 20th-century musical style, yet it is also laced with references to the music of the late Renaissance. The opera is constructed in an interlocking fashion that features the interplay between the two largely contrasting musical styles, and the results are unusual, yet cohesive. Guided by the composer's interpolation of his own avant-garde vocal and instrumental style into a musical structure reminiscent of the late Renaissance, "...Sciarrino has created, in many respects, a future-oriented opera of memory," which "regenerates the past," as dramaturg Agnes Eggers has indicated in the program booklet that accompanied the Frankfurt performances.²⁸⁷ The composer, too, has addressed the matter of the stylistic combination quite philosophically: "We must recognize our identity, in addition to all its modernity, as the fruit of the past."²⁸⁸

Sciarrino's extensive use of unusual instrumental techniques helps him to suspend an uneasy canopy of tension around Duke and Duchess. In fact, it is through unusual orchestral

²⁸⁶ The stylistic "specialities" of contemporary opera and early opera are reserved for the Depot, as Berndt Loebe has explained. See Thimo Hehl, *Kurzportrait der Oper Frankfurt*, Oper Frankfurt Video, 5:10. June 2010.

²⁸⁷ Agnes Eggers, "Von der Vergangenheit Verfolgt: Luci Mie Traditrici- Eine Oper des Erinnerns" *Programmheft*, (Oper Frankfurt, 2011), p.8. ["hat Salvatore Sciarrino in vielerlei Hinsicht eine zukunftsweisende Oper des Erinnern geschaffen," die "regeneriert Vergangenes."]

²⁸⁸ "Wir müssen neben aller Modernität unsere Identität als Frucht der Vergangenheit erkennen," Quoted in Eggers, 8. Translation mine.

sound effects that the composer illustrates the characters' internal feelings; the instrumental parts will frequently serve either illustrate the characters' emotional states or heighten the import of their poetic utterances throughout the scenes of the opera. Unconventional instrumental sounds become an essential aspect of the score as early as the first measure of Scene I, when the quotation of *Le Jeune* in the Prologue is abruptly interrupted by Sciarrino's orchestration. As the married couple meets onstage, the lord greets the lady metaphorically, calling her "my life." (p.2, mm. 1-2, beat 1, *Il Malaspina*).²⁸⁹ Immediately thereafter, the orchestra's unconventional sound effects supply a peculiar echo of that first utterance. The instrumental answer seems to border on noise, and furthermore, the entrances of the viola, and the cello begin a layered texture of staggered entries that mimic the uneasy flutter of his Duke's heart, then supply his words with an eerie symbolism, which musically casts them as ironic, given the later murder. (p. 2, mm1, beats 3-4, viola;) As the viola pulses in oscillating harmonics that seem to illustrate his aroused heart, a cello *sul ponticello* glissando blows an eerie wind through the scene, giving an uneasy meaning to his line. (p. 2, mm.1-2, beats 4 & 1, cello.)

Another illustration of how instrumental sound effects illustrate the characters' emotional state appears in the instrumental writing at the beginning of Scene Six, as the couple confronts each other after their betrayal. The first 36 bars of the scene are entirely instrumental, illustrating the dramatic progress of the action that is progressing silently onstage (pp 133 – 143). In this scene, the friction between the couple is defensive, not amorous, as the two deal with the reality of the Duchess's transgression. Nonetheless, the orchestra illustrates the tension in the scene in a

²⁸⁹ "Mia vita." All translations mine...Salvatore Sciarrino, *Luci mie traditrici: opera in due atti su testo dell'autore; da Il tradimento per l'onore di Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, 1664, con una elegia di Claude Le Jeune, 1608*. (Milan: Ricordi, 1998).

similar manner to its role in earlier moments; this time the anxiety is heard in the muted sounds of the upper winds, who enter and exit independent in scarcely audible pulses of pitch and breath that illustrate the bubbling nervousness of each step taken by the Duke and Duchess as they approach each other to perform a slow and muted version of the courtship dance originally seen in Scene Two. (p.133, m. 3, flute 1 & 2 & clarinet). Fleeting interjections from the viola, flutes, saxophones, puncture the still atmosphere provided by the nearly inaudible woodwinds; the punctuating instrumental cries intermittently plead and shout out accusations before returning to the murmuring stillness of the sustained background atmosphere (p.135-137, mm. 9 & 12-13). Throughout the entirety of this orchestral dialogue, the instruments retain a dynamic restraint that builds intensity—the wind section dynamics are marked *pp* and *ppppp* for all but a few beats of these ten pages, which surge in brief flickers of animation, but quickly regain their controlled dynamic (p.137, m.13, flute 1; p.139, m.20, viola.) The voices retain a similar inhibition; the singers sing primarily in a hushed *Sprechstimme*, rising to full resonance only at fleetingly in moments of fear throughout the scene (Duchess, p.148, m.20). The restrained sonic environment illustrates the discomfort that intensifies within Act II, particularly for the Duchess, who must maneuver carefully to cope with the peril of her deteriorating marriage.²⁹⁰

Sciarrino's idiosyncratic style weaves these avant-garde sounds into a musical fabric that seems to suspend time as it maintains the texture of this soundscape for an extended period, the peculiar plane of sound is sustained so long that it becomes atmospheric. Yet Sciarrino also interjects periodic disruptions that abruptly puncture that consistency. These movements of

²⁹⁰ Mezzo-soprano Nina Tarandek has discussed the challenging nature of the vocal writing, which she attributes to the extreme restraint required for the later scenes. Interview with Nina Tarandek, "Bonus feature," in *Sciarrino: Luci mie traditrici*, 2012, (27:11 – 27:35.)

rupture provide place markers at key points in the progression of the piece, and they also keep listeners localized within the piece, a feature that Joseph DiPonio has argued is characteristic of Sciarrino's oeuvre.²⁹¹ Important both musically and dramatically, these sonic interruptions mark key moments in the story. Scene One provides an excellent example, the first of many moments within in which a characters' emotional modulation signals a sonic puncture in the consistent musical texture. As the Duke and Duchess woo flirtatiously, the Duchess plucks a rose, but pricks herself and draws blood: a pivotal moment in the scene. Sciarrino's score, however, maintains a repetitive polyphony of solo instrumental entrances throughout, even including the moment when the rose pricks the Duchess. It is not until the emotional importance of that event sets in, when her blood appears, that the orchestral texture breaks. As the Duke panics, he exclaims: "Too great a price, your blood," followed by an abrupt surge from the full orchestra (p.9, m.25, end of beat 3).²⁹² The four upper string instruments enter together, climactic and *sforzando*; they move from *pp* to a sudden *ff* as they issue an alarming *sul ponticello* phrase that lasts only two beats before the subdued polyphonic texture that predominately accompanies the scene is resumed.

Such punctuations of time and texture, in combination with the unusual instrumental sounds effects, produce a charged atmosphere particularly useful for compelling drama. The

²⁹¹ Joseph Diponio has drawn upon Deleuze and Guattari for a similar characterization of Sciarrino's work. He argues that the composer first creates a temporal field, which he subsequently disrupts, and the process provides a sense of place. See Joseph Diponio, "Freudian Identity and the Prism of Deleuze and Guattari: (De)Territorializing the Narrative of Salvatore Sciarrino's *Infinito Nero*," Unpublished paper, ECHO conference, UCLA, 2007. Background on the basis for his argument, can be found in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, tr. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 266-270.

²⁹² "Troppo gran prezzo il vostro sangue."

instrumental ensemble not only supports the characters with punctuation of texture and dynamics as their emotions swell but also each scenic atmosphere depicts the environment that envelops the characters—the orchestra reveals their internal state as well as the context of their surroundings. Apart from the interjections, Sciarrino’s sustained planes of sound exhibits an unusual transparency, an idiosyncratic sound heightened by Sciarrino’s gravitation towards extremely soft dynamic levels, which flautist Megan Lanz has called the “stillness and transparency often associated with silence.”²⁹³ Throughout the bulk of the opera’s eight scenes, an abundance of silences and near-silences “(clarify) his music’s delicate features and provides the audience with a heightened listening experience.”²⁹⁴ Although expressed in somewhat different terms, Lanz’s observations recall Marco Angius’s comments about the role of the orchestra in *Luci mie traditrici*; in a 2010 interview, the Montepulciano music director observes that Sciarrino’s characteristic orchestral music provides a transparent atmosphere that comprises the context for each scene, overwhelmingly *pianissimo* and exposed.²⁹⁵ This approach sustains a setting in which the orchestra is able to illustrate the particular emotional tensions of each scene,

²⁹³ Megan Lanz, “Silence: An Exploration of Salvatore Sciarrino’s Style Through *L’Opera Per Flauto*,” DMA Thesis, (Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 2010), 9.

²⁹⁴ Lanz, 10. The study of silence has been shown powerful to the study of sound: “The focus on the phenomenon of musical silence is analogous to deliberately studying the spaces between the trees in a forest: somewhat perverse at first, until one realizes that these spaces contribute to the perceived character of the forest itself. Thomas Clifton, “The Poetics of Musical Silence,” *The Musical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (April 1976): 163.

²⁹⁵ Both Sciarrino and Marcus Agnius, the Music Director in Montepulciano, emphasize that the instrumental music in *Luci* creates an ambient environment that amplifies the feelings of the characters and projects the setting. The approach places the listener within the perspective of the protagonists. Sciarrino explains the atmospheric approach with the example of Scene V, in which shifts the location inside the manor. The new setting prompts the sounds of nature to be muted, as the windows are shut. See: Interviews with Marco Agnius & Salvatore Sciarrino, “Bonus feature,” in *Sciarrino: Luci mie traditrici*, Video, 2012, 5:50 – 6:15, 12:18 – 12:32.

as demonstrated in Scene III. The first meeting between the Duchess and the Guest has them share a mutual gaze, in the most overt scenic reference to the opera's title. *Luci mie traditrici* can be translated as "my traitorous lights," the word "lights" used in Italian as a metaphor for eyes, and the intense light contrasts onstage brighten their faces while the orchestra reverberates with a thick, multilayered texture unheard until this point. Firstly, the sounds of the garden remain alive and murmuring throughout the full scene, the flutes illustrating an ongoing twittering of the birds in the background, with the exception of two striking pages of garden silence in the score at the moment when the characters first lock eyes. (See p.55 – 59, flute 1 & 2. Notice that the flute disappears conspicuously at p.59 – 61, just as the vocal lines begin a gradual overlap that leads to motivic convergence.) Amidst this environment, the string entrances move in parallel with the pulsing fans and hands of the onstage lovers, their entries overlapping in a doubled tempo that provides a *stretto* effect when compared with the Scene II courtship scene between Duke and Duchess. (Contrast the accelerated tempo of the string entrances on p.57-62, mm. 10-40 with the slower entry cycles of p.22-37, mm 20-50.)

Sonic and dramatic tension builds throughout both acts of *Luci* in such sustained scenic atmospheres supplied by the orchestra. These are broken only a handful of times, punctuated by eruptions that expose pivotal emotional or dramatic shifts.²⁹⁶ As mentioned before *sforzando* outbursts from the tense, nearly silent compositional texture rupture the sheen of Sciarrino's surface at the moment most fraught with emotion; see for example, the end of Scene V, when fifteen of the sixteen instrumental parts play their characteristic effects simultaneously, suddenly unmuted, beginning one beat after the Duke's line "for you—for the first strike," after which he stabs the Servant in the back (p.128, mm 74-76), a surprise act that foreshadows the inevitability

of the opera's gruesome ending.²⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, the most dramatic sonic rupture of Sciarrino's transparent, near-silent texture occurs in the final minutes of Scene VIII, the long awaited climax of the piece. The moment is again triggered by the voices, and the scene quickly escalates when Duchess exclaims a piercing rebuke to the Duke's menacing behavior: "Your face has changed, Sir. Love should not turn into a funeral" (p.256-258, mm. 68 – 72, La Malaspina.)²⁹⁸ As the couple erupts in anger, an orchestral roar follows their lead, and shortly thereafter, the Guest's dismembered body is unveiled. The sound diminishes back to the accustomed *pianissimo* only seconds before the end of the piece, as the Duchess is first pierced by the Duke's sword (p.272, m.98, beat 3.) This musical material throughout the section is fiery and volatile, antithetical to Sciarrino's style throughout most of the rest of the opera as it swells and ebbs with the shifts in vocality. The passage sonically depicts the uncontrolled, emotional chaos that unfolds onstage, and the frenzied bursts of fortissimo orchestral material provide an excruciating climax.

Intriguingly, Scarrino sheathes this late 20th-century compositional language in the formal structures of the late Renaissance, which provide a framework of contrasting music that lends shape and large-scale direction to Sciarrino's characteristic idiom. Between key episodes of the narrative, the composer interlaces a scaffold of late Renaissance music and lyric poetry: The historical frame consists of four repetitions of a chanson borrowed from the 16th-century Franco-Flemish composer Claude La Jeune, published posthumously in 1608.²⁹⁹ The piece is first quoted

²⁹⁷ "A te, per primo tocca."

²⁹⁸ "Signore, vi vedo cangiato nel viso, non si han da cangiare gli amori in esequie."

²⁹⁹ Claude Le Jeune, *Second livre des Airs*, (Paris: Ballard, 1608).

in the Prelude, in which a single *a cappella* melody containing the elegy's first two verses of the poem is sung in a monophonic reduction. Set to poetry of Pierre de Ronsard, featuring a highly chromatic melody that ends as it begins, the piece exhibits features that, in combination with the dramatic context of Cicognini's play, seems evocative of Gesualdo's own style.³⁰⁰ The form is strophic and cyclical, the last melodic line beginning like the first and structures the dramatic and musical development throughout the opera.³⁰¹ The material recurs in the three subsequent Intermezzi that frame the story, although solely in the orchestra. Intriguingly, the repetitions progressively verge on the style of Sciarrino's scenic music.³⁰² This treatment of the chanson parallels the dramatic transformation of the couple's relationship; the orchestrated melody further decomposes with each re-appearance. By Intermezzo III, the chanson is hardly recognizable, its entrances displaced temporally, its tune hesitating and fragmented, overpowered by Sciarrino's atmospheric effects. With such musical treatment, the successive changes to the Intermezzi sonically illustrate the dramatic developments in the plot.

The choice to open with an *a capella* chanson signals the centrality of vocal expression in Scarrino's score. The voices drive the progression of the opera dramatically and musically,

³⁰⁰ For more on Gesualdo's style, see Edward Lowinsky, "The musical avant-garde of the Renaissance, or the peril and profit of foresight," in *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 111-162. An interesting set-theory analysis has recently cast his chromaticism a means of text-painting morbid themes: Joseph Knowles, "Chromaticism in Gesualdo's Madrigal 'Mercè rido piangendo'," in *Reappraising the Seicento: Composition, Dissemination, Assimilation*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 15-42.

³⁰¹ Figure J provides the text of the chanson as well as a modern transcription of Le Jeune's melody, which will be further discussed shortly.

³⁰² For more on the musical transformations of Le Jeune's chanson, see Marion Saxer, "Dekonstruktion und Konstruktion zugleich: Zur Bearbeitungstechnik Salvatore Sciarrinos am Beispiel der Intermezzi aus der Oper *Luci Mie Traditrici*." In *Rückspiegel: Zeitgenössisches Komponieren im Dialog mit älterer Musik*. (Mainz: Schott Musik International, 2010), 53-67.

signaling developments that will be repeated and intensified by the orchestra, as has been shown. Through such intensification, the orchestra illustrates both the emotional state of the characters and the context that surrounds the characters, but it is through voice that the story is told. Timbre and dynamics signal the emotions painted in the motives sung by each character. As the singers fluidly move through vocal gestures, resonant classical singing, and *Sprechstimme*, they demonstrate modulations in the characters' internal states. A particularly clear example is heard in the duet between the Duchess and Guest in Scene III: The Duchess sings in a rare moment of full vocal resonance for the first utterance of the opera's title phrase: "my traitorous eyes!"³⁰³ (p. 72-73, mm. 81-82, La Malaspina). Her exclamation is followed by a textual echo from the Guest, but in a pianissimo, gestural style, half sung, and punctuated by *Sprechstimme* style on the last two notes as his voice plummets downward in a glissando of over an octave (C⁵ – A³); his voice breaks briefly from his lyrical alto voice into a spoken male register, which is otherwise entirely absent from the character's singing. He quickly regains his singing voice to enter simultaneously with the Duchess one measure later, with his resonant countertenor voice joining her to sing a motivic repeat of her original exclamation in unison. (p.73, m. 87, L'Ospito) The orchestra takes up its usual atmospheric function; it plays a secondary role as it supports the voices: *tremolo* in the upper strings draws attention to the voices, and the viola pulses in parallel with the vocal duet, supporting their lament by underscoring its rhythm.³⁰⁴ Such orchestral material answers the voices in a way that accentuates their emotional expression. Whether through the unusual

³⁰³ "Luci mie traditrici."

³⁰⁴ Angius also claims that the orchestral material illustrates and supports the vocal writing, which is declamatory, or *recitar cantando*. Interview with Marco Angius, "Bonus feature," 5:30 – 5:46.

atmospheric sounds typical of Sciarrino’s own compositional oeuvre or in Renaissance polyphony, the orchestra’s function seems to be to illustrate the emotional state of the characters, and to depict the sonic context that surrounds them.

Fig. J

in Claude Le Jeune, *Second Livre des Airs (...)*, Paris: Ballard, 1608

<p>Qu'est devenu ce bel œil qui mon ame éclairoit ja de ses rays, Dans qui l'Amour retrouvoit ses fleches, flames & traits? Qu'est la bouche or devenue, & ce ris si mignard, & ce discours? Dont ma maîtresse attrapoit les plu' farouches en amours?</p>	<p>What happened to the lovely eyes that lightened my soul with their rays, Where Love found his darts, his flames, his traits? What now of the mouth, of the pretty laugh, and talk With which my mistress caught the wildest in love?</p>
<p>Qu'est devenue cette joue & d'amour & de honte le pourpris, Sur qui l'Amour étoloit cent mille rozes & lis? Qu'est devenu le fin or de ce poil prime frizé reluizant, Dont mille Amours, mille rets ...</p>	<p>What became of that cheek, crimson with love and coyness, On which Love laid thousands of roses and lilies? What of the fine golden curls, once shining, Of which thousand Cupids, thousand nets...</p>

Voce dietro il sipario (Soprano)

Qu'est de - ve - nu ce bel oeil qui mon âme é - clai - rait ja de ses rais,
 Qu'est de - ve - nue cet - te joue et d'a - mour et de hon - te le pour - pris,

Voce

Dans qui l'A - mour re - trou - vait ses fiè - ches, flam - mes et traits?
 Sur qui l'A - mour é - ta - lait cent mil - le ro - ses et lys?

Voce

Qu'est la bouche or de - ve - nue, et ce ris si mi - gnard, et ce dis - cours?
 Ch'œr de - ve - nu le fin or de ce poil pri - me frizé re - lui - sant

Voce

Dont ma mai - tres - se at - tra - pait le plus fa - rou - che en a - mours?
 Dont mille A - mours, mil - le rets

(Sipario) interruzione brusca

Yet the poetry and melodic construction of Le Jeune’s chanson also accentuate the opera’s primary nonmusical theme: the decomposition of love from the agent of beauty into the vehicle of death. The Prologue begins with a visualized presentation of this song as it introduces the textual motif of love’s transformation. The elegy that describes the former image of a dead beloved whose beauty is decomposing. Figure J above shows the first two verses of the French text (with English translation) utilized by Sciarrino, along with his setting of the melody. The text asks what has become of “the lovely eyes which lightened my soul,” as well as the “crimson

cheek” flushed from love, which was showered “with roses and lilies.” The chanson foregrounds the thematic objects around which the opera’s story is concentrated, and the structure of the melody underscores the key items, placing the “roses” on the reciting tone of the melody, the pitch D, and the word “eye,” the deciding image around which the opera is constructed, falls on the melody’s final, the pitch A. The conceptual emphasis on the relationship between love’s beauty and its decomposition is reflected in the text and story: arousal serves as the catalyst for both life and death. In Scene I and Scene VIII, the Duke and Duchess play poetically with the theme as they call each other both “my life”, and “my death,” but while the word order stresses “vita” in Scene I, it is troublingly reversed to stress “morta” in Scene VIII.

Ronsard’s central poetic image of the rose is not only emphasized by Le Jeune (and Sciarrino) but also within Christian Pade’s staging. In this production, the beauty of love, discovered here in the garden, is physically symbolized by roses, which are used strategically in several scenes. With each appearance, Pade also manages to foreground the flower’s thorny prick, which rouses blood: The tantalizing rose pierce’s the Duchess’s finger in Scene I, which excites her husband to the point of collapse. In Scene VI, just before their confrontation, he approaches the Duchess from behind to angrily shower her with a cascade of roses. The image of drawing blood becomes more intentional, still, as she slowly and heavily rolls the stem of a rose across her arm during Scene VII—she attempts to raise her own blood for his benefit as she stitches the embroidery meant to prove her fidelity. Pade stages the metaphor in exaggerated gestures to emphasize the letting of blood. Furthermore, the rose is one of only four props to

appear in the staging, and the minimalistic design foregrounds its thematic importance.³⁰⁵ Used in various ways onstage, the metaphor of the rose visually symbolizes the opera's main theme, found in the text of La Jeune's chanson: that beauty and desire bring the bloom of passion, but when twisted, that passion corrupts, leeching life, bringing death.

The Place of the Frankfurt *Luci*

The discussion up to this point has illustrated that Sciarrino's orchestral music in *Luci mie traditrici* raises analytical issues related to the subject of place through its reliance on unusual atmospheric sounds that project the sonic context of the dramatic narrative. Yet the matters of place in the 2011 Oper Frankfurt production of this opera extend beyond the musical score. An examination of the physical issues related to matters of staging and acoustics in the *Luci* production as performed in the Bockenheimer Depot reveals the significant impact that performance venue can have upon artistic aspects of the production. As already concluded in theoretical discussions presented earlier, the theatrical place of a production affects physical maneuvering as well as sounds and silences, along with the interpretive perspectives gathered by the audience who experience the production in that location. Perhaps most obviously, as Andrew Filmer has illustrated, the theatrical place that houses a piece affects movement, and like his work, *Luci mie traditrici* serves as a useful illustration of how the movements of actors and onstage elements are influenced by the place(s) of their creation and performance.

³⁰⁵ The production features only four props. In addition to the rose, the Duke carries on a hand-held dagger in Act I. The couple also holds matching fans (red and black), which they use as part of a highly gestural courting dance in Scene I. Finally, the Duke also has a sword in the style of a samurai warrior, with which the duchess is eventually killed. Since much of the opera proceeds without props, any prop that does appear relays a heightened, symbolic meaning.

The performance space of this particular production is configured simply, with the stage placed at the front. The audience area extends deep towards the front entrance and utilizes 2/3 of the Depot's longest dimension. The public faces one side of the stage, set to mimic the form of a conventional theater. The constructed stage area also seems to simulate a traditional hall, as it is rectangular in form, in shape and size nearly identical to the minuscule stage of the Teatro Poliziano in Montepulciano where it was first created and performed.³⁰⁶ Like that Italian stage, the Frankfurt playing space is shallow in both dimensions: the space that remains for movement is no more than eight paces wide by six steps deep. With such narrow proportions, onstage maneuvers are limited. Accordingly, the blocking design of the staging is extraordinarily condensed, although that factor also seems to be motivated by artistic considerations—the static approach to physical motion seems to mirror the suspended atmospheres Sciarrino's music. Christian Pade has the singers move sparingly, primarily in gestures and symbolic poses. As a result, when the actors do move, the change is forceful, and demands attention.

The beginning of Scene III illustrates how this minimalist approach to movement underscores the plot and the development of the fundamental theme. The lighting comes up after the Intermezzo to reveal the Duchess and the Guest standing together, facing the audience at a 45-degree angle, one behind the other. They are excruciatingly close, but unable to look each other in the eye. The only onstage motion immediately draws the visual focus: the Duchess's red fan flutters in panicked, pulsing movements, and his similarly fluttering hands mirror hers from behind. Their identical gestures, panicked and desperate in speed, mimic their overlapping

³⁰⁶ Montepulciano's *Teatro Poliziano* features ornate Italian Romantic architecture, built in 1796. The minuscule theater accommodates fewer than 400 spectators. Images and history are available at <http://www.comune.montepulciano.siena.it/on-line/Home/Strutturecomunali/TeatroPoliziano.html>

voices. Unlike the earlier love duet between Duke and Duchess (scene II), the romantic confessions of the Guest and Duchess blend together musically as the timbre and ranges of their countertenor and mezzo-soprano voices work together with overlapping vocal to make their sonic differentiation nearly impossible; this communicates aurally the power of their connection. Underscoring this point, movement in the scene is minimal: They stand together on the verge of touching, the beating of the Duchess's red fan the only movement until they turn to face each other. The physical tension is maintained until the transition to Scene IV, which finally offers movement to contrast the nine feverishly posed minutes of the prior scene (11:45 – 20:25.)³⁰⁷ As the romantic urges of the pair grow desperate, their movements quicken, eventually including large paces across the stage space as they wring their hands. As the Duchess swears faithfulness to her lover, she takes several quick strides towards him, and in the stationary environment, her steps strike with the force of a cross stage run (21:30 – 21:38). Like the *forte* instrumental sound effects that rupture Sciarrino's *piano* sonic atmospheres, the sudden movements onstage staging seem to explode within this context, emphasizing the danger and chaos of the onstage passion.

This terse and symbolic approach to movement parallels Andrew Lintl's similarly sparse set design. Demarcating the restricted acting space is a triangle of three tall wooden cages, rectangular pieces that comprise the set as they border the Stage Right, Stage Left, and Upstage Center stage margins. These slatted boxes revolve individually, and they can be entered and exited at will through one side, as one of the narrow sides of the rectangular box is left open. Shadows from the slats of the longer, narrowly arranged side cast an eerie light, and they enable both the onstage Servant and the offstage audience to spy on the center stage action, only

³⁰⁷ Timings given here for visual and sonic analysis of the staging refer to the commercially available Montepulciano recording, as it is more widely available for comparison.

partially obscuring vision. As these pieces revolve with each new scene, they vary the shape of the surroundings to imply differences that may suggest a garden, or the walls of a parlor, or the intimacy of a bedchamber. Yet nothing in Andrew Lintl's design makes literal reference to the rooms; we grasp the location only through the libretto, with the support of the varied orchestral atmospheres of each scene. Highly abstract, the design is flexibly suggestive, regardless of whether the piece is played on the Montepulciano stage or in Frankfurt's Bockenheimer Depot.

Nonetheless, the buildings of the two performance spaces contrast significantly in both size and design, despite the similarities of the stage dimensions used in both locations. Their physical differences affect the implications of the onstage choreography and design. While the Italian theater was a 19th-century theater building, with an ornate frame to mark its margins, the vaulted ceiling of the Bockenheimer Depot and its lack of a permanent proscenium leave the upper visual boundary of the stage area extraordinarily high. Despite the limited stage space for movement and the sparse blocking, the Depot's massive height visually accentuates the open environment surrounding the performance area. The physical context intensifies the restriction of the onstage movements precisely because they are unnecessary in this extremely spacious theatrical context. As Christian Pade has explained, his directorial *Konzept* is based on Sciarrino's "concentration of the essentials... not an epic breadth, but a compression, like a laboratory experiment." Reduced to their most compact, powerful form, "these essences, which are added together, produce an explosion."³⁰⁸ Within the tiny Teatro Poliziano, by contrast, the

³⁰⁸ "Konzentration auf das Wesentliche...nicht auf eine epische Breite, sondern eine Verdichtung, ja, fast wie ein Laborversuch... man hat die Essenzen, die man zusammenfügt, dann gibt's eine heftige Reaktion." Translation mine. Interview with Christian Pade, "Bonus feature," *Luci mie traditrici*, DVD, 20:30 - 20:54.

minimalist blocking within the frame carries less weight; its interpretive importance is much less evident as the limited motion seems motivated by the dimensions of the smaller hall.

Furthermore, the localization of the stage space within the Depot accentuates the rough but sleek elements of the stage design. In this atypical contemporary theater space, the design loses its timelessness, becoming modern. It finds parallels of design in the simplicity of the brick walls and the wooden doors at the front of the house, as if the whole building had been intentionally designed to correspond to the sparse set. Rather than projecting the timeless context, as the Montepulciano version conveyed, the minimalist set becomes an element of *contemporary* design against the backdrop of the Bockenheimer Depot, set within the aged warehouse-like hull of exposed brick. Sciarrino's score, which has been shown to integrate new and early musical material, finds its visual parallel in the dualistic design of this theatrical place. Just as the music juxtaposes musical periods in its interlocking construction, the Bockenheimer Depot theater space accentuates the dichotomy of the design elements. Furthermore, the production echoes the dualities of the score and the venue's design; period costumes that recall the formalities of late Renaissance tradition are thrust into onto a modern set design comprised of three abstract geometric rectangles constructed of simple wooden slats. With that, performances of the production at the Depot reinforce the structural dualities of Sciarrino's score, and intensify the opera's creation of meaning through stylistic opposition. The mechanisms that drive the opera are heightened by this theatrical place.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ Given that the same production was jointly produced and performed by the Oper Frankfurt and the Montepulciano festival, this observation is a particularly interesting one. As will be discussed more thoroughly related to acoustics, the performance venue in Montepulciano features a theatrical design quite unlike the Bockenheimer Depot.

Just as this theatrical place underscores the dualisms in the score and in the production design, the Bockenheimer Depot affects the sound of the production. Its impact is felt most keenly in matters of acoustics. Recordings of the two productions exhibit extreme differences in resonance in echo, and the manner in which sounds carry. The dissimilar acoustics are due to the physical differences in the two halls. The theater in Montepulciano contains the typical seats, velvet, and carpeting of a traditional opera theater, and the four seating levels feature a total of 74 boxes that frame the hall in a U-shape, and therefore add numerous structural barriers that mute vocal and instrumental resonance. By contrast, the Bockenheimer Depot space is extraordinarily live; its open design is uninhibited by walls, carpeting, and insulation to absorb sound (see again Figure G). Comparisons of the first lines of the video recordings made in Montepulciano and Frankfurt illustrate the difference.³¹⁰ While the same mezzo-soprano sings in both performances, her voice on the Montepulciano recording is much more voluptuous and resonant in the context of the Bockenheimer Depot, amplified by the dimensions and materials of the extraordinarily live hall. The sonic difference is extreme, more than can simply be attributed

³¹⁰ The opening lines of the Montepulciano performance can be viewed on *Sciarrino: Luci Mie Traditrici*, dir. and prod. Giancarlo Matcovich, (2011; Berlin: Euro Arts Music International, 2012), DVD, 0:01- 1:52. The Frankfurt recording has not been released for public viewing, but is available for review by permission of the administration: *Luci mie traditrici*, Videoaufzeichnung der Premiere, 14.5.2011. Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt Videoarchiv; DVD, 1:55 - 4:03.

to being sung on a different evening.³¹¹ The vast emptiness of the high ceiling space and a lack of architectural interference allows Nina Tarandek's voice to rebound, which produces an effect that resembles a subtler version of late 20th-century phasing techniques. Constructed naturally by the physical space, the sounds of late (post)modernity are interpolated into the presentation of Le Jeune's Renaissance chanson. Despite its unaltered quotation in the opening scene, in this sonic context, the song takes on a contemporary slant.

Finally, the sonic context of the Depot also foregrounds the unusual effects found in Sciarrino's atmospheric music. As the garden buzzes in Scene III, the instrumental sounds of the production emerge more clearly in the Frankfurt than in Montepulciano; the varied effects from the orchestra are much more sonically resonant within the hall. (Compare Montepulciano video, 11:49 – 12:25; Frankfurt video, 14:22 – 14:53.) The difference stems both from the orchestra's placement and from the theater's construction. In the Depot, which lacks a submerged orchestra pit, the instrumental players occupy the floor area between the audience and the stage. Without masking from a proscenium and orchestra pit, the sound effects that mimic twittering birds, rushing breezes, and the buzzing of insects are crisp and distinct. In Montepulciano, the sonic atmosphere of this scene is only faintly heard, the orchestra fails to provide the same convincing depiction of the buzzing sounds of life that make this lush garden scene so seductive.

Furthermore, that background is heard clearly over the melding vocal duet between the Duchess

³¹¹ While the Montepulciano video is a commercially available recording recorded by an outside contractor, the Bockenheimer Depot recording was create in-house; the recordings were not performed by the same technicians, nor by the same equipment. Certainly, some of the differences in Nina Tarandek's voice may stem from recording issues. Nonetheless, the presence of the Depot's extremely distinctive echo, which I also noticed live—is clearly audible on the Frankfurt recording, and not on the Montepulciano DVD. Furthermore, the presence of the echo in the German theater and its absence in the Italian theater concurs with the differences in design and physical construction of those two highly disparate spaces.

and the Guest. As their voices echo within the larger space, forming an indistinguishable layer, the multiple textures and colorful sonic contrasts emerge more noticeably from the orchestra. Like the postmodern enhancements supplied to Tarandek's vocality by the Depot's acoustics, the situation of the orchestral performance area bolsters the resonance of the sound effects so integral to the multilayered texture of Sciarrino's writing.

Audiences and Producers

The prior section has illustrated how the Bockenheimer Depot performance location has affected both the force and the implications of several aspects of the Frankfurt *Luci mie traditrici*. The presentation of Sciarrino's score, Pade's staging, Lintl's design, and matters of acoustics and resonance are all affected by the place of the theater. It should be noted that such discussions address how the theatrical context affects a production from a phenomenological standpoint; analysis of this sort requires the awareness that the production has been experienced within that theater. A fundamental assumption of this analysis is the awareness that matters of place are experienced bodily, by a willing audience. To truly engage analytically with the question of how the place of an opera production affects the resonance and impact of the work, it is also critical to consider the audience that perceives it.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Paul Chaikin's study, bolstered by theoretical foundations taken from Benjamin and Bourdieu, indicates how historical and present-day opera audiences participate in operatic events as part of an innately conservative social ritual that maintains class divisions and reinforce Romantic definitions of aesthetics. Yet the readiness of Depot audiences to engage with such an avant-garde opera text—and furthermore, their

willingness to experience this unusually minimalist production in such a nontraditional operatic context—seems to contradict that point. Unfortunately, no demographic studies exist that address the makeup of Frankfurt audiences, nor are there in-house reports addressing the audience to which I have access. Another demographic report of Berlin audiences does shed some light on the contrasts between audiences at venues parallel to the Bockenheimer Depot and the Oper Frankfurt mainstage, however, in so far as it can be presumed that there are some shared characteristics of between audiences in these two German cities.³¹² That report indicates that there are certain uniformities among those who attend the same cultural events, all of whom “have made the same choice for that segment of the offerings in musical events.”³¹³ Neuhoff’s report discusses the Berlin Biennale, a new music event, as well as opera audiences and those of the city’s symphony, the Berliner Philharmonic. Although opera audiences are grouped together with “classical music” audiences in the study, and not differentiated by house or production style, the “new music” public is examined separately from “opera and classical” audiences, and there are visible distinctions.³¹⁴ As might be expected for a study that address all sorts of concert events, many audience similarities exist between these groups, especially when they are juxtaposed with “Rock/Pop/Dance” audiences and “Volksmusik” audiences: both “classical” and “new music” audiences are comprised of people in well-earning professions (or artists), nearly all of whom have at least the elite High School diploma known as the *Abitur*, and most of whom

³¹² Hans Neuhoff, *Konzertpublika: Sozialstruktur, Mentalitäten, Geschmacksprofile*. Deutscher Musikrat gGmbH Deutsches Musikinformationszentrum, 2008.

³¹³ Neuhoff, 1. [“...haben auf dem Sektor des musikalischen Veranstaltungsangebots dieselbe Wahl getroffen...” translation mine.

³¹⁴ For an overview of the observations I summarize here, see Neuhoff, 4–9.

have also completed university degrees. Both groups include a diverse assortment of ages, by comparison to most other audiences, but importantly, one of Neuhoff's summary graphics meant to offer an overview of the statistical similarities or differences of all of the concert audiences prompted him to observe about the positioning of the two audiences, "extremely lovely (significant) is new music, extremely separated from the classic group, but still in their quadrant."³¹⁵ Although he does not detail which elements prompt the new music group's extreme left position within the classical quadrant, he does later claim to have identified a significant contrast in the gender balance between the two groups, with men comprising more new music audiences, and women more frequently taking part in the traditional classical audiences.

Neuhoff's study implies that in terms of the most general demographic markers noted in studies of his Berlin audiences, the audience for more "experimental" music in the classical/opera category and the audience for standard classical music and opera are largely the same. Where Frankfurt is concerned, based purely on my own observations, I would concur this is largely true, although the Depot audiences are smaller (due to the space, first and foremost), and slightly younger. Perhaps that is not surprising, given the theater's central location within the University neighborhood of Bockenheimer. However, it may also be the case that two audiences simply share a very similar demographic makeup, with little differentiation. As Neuhoff's study implies, although some fine differentiations exist between the more traditionally minded and experimental-minded classical/opera audiences, attendees are largely members of the same social class and share the same education level.

³¹⁵ Neuhoff, 4. ["Eine Feinheit ist die Positionierung des House-Publikums... Sehr schön auch hier die Positionierung der Neuen Musik: extrem, losgelöst von der Klassik- Gruppe, aber doch in deren Quadranten."] Translation mine.

However, perhaps differences in audience demographics of the Depot and the Oper Frankfurt mainstage theaters are somewhat beside the point. A thought-provoking 2014 article in Germany's leading newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, indicates that audience preferences are not largely responsible for the recent trends in contemporary performances; rather, it frames German theater, opera, museums, and public academic lectures quite differently with its assertion that theater in Germany is actually being produced by a younger generation, and within a different social framework than performances of the mid 20th-century. According to the article, the current drive towards theatrical experimentation, which its (primarily young) creators pose as educational, must be at least partially attributed to those creating the artwork. As the article explains,

“the numbers don't support the notion that the traditional institutions of *Bildung* (cultural education) are going to deteriorate... young people are lining up for professions in the areas of the arts and culture. They don't count among the recipients of culture, but are the organizers or producers, instead... Up until the latter third of the 20th century, culture was a status symbol that divided the classes, connected the upper classes, and excluded the lower classes. Today it is a form of entertainment that occupies the minds, differently according to age. These individuals make out of the arts a profession whose assignment consists of leading, or educating, the others.”³¹⁶

Although such an argument might seem foreign and implausible in countries outside Germany that do not have the benefit of extensive financial support funding experimental theater in the

³¹⁶ http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/demographie-kultur-wird-zur-altenbespassung-12871537.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2 [“Die Zahlen sprechen nicht dafür, dass die traditionellen Einrichtungen der Bildung untergehen werden... Für den Kunstgenuss also stehen junge Leute an ... für einen Beruf in den Bereichen von Kunst und Kultur. Sie gehören nicht zu den Rezipienten der Kultur, sie sind ihre Organisatoren oder Produzenten... Bis ins zweite Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts war Kultur ein Statussymbol, das die Klassen trennte, die Oberschicht verband, die Unterschicht ausschloss. Heute ist sie eine Unterhaltung, die die Gemüter, je nach Alter, unterschiedlich beschäftigt. Die einen machen aus der Kultur einen Beruf, dessen Aufgabe darin besteht, die anderen zu führen, zu belehren.”] Translation mine.

form of hefty public subsidies, within Germany, this is a matter of cultural priority, as I will explore further in Chapter Six. If this article is to be believed, in the German context, it may very well be that the growth in experimental programming in venues like the Bockenheimer Depot is not only due to the supportive audiences, but also due to its advancement by young directors and arts administrators who consider the arts an important vehicle for cultural progress, education, and development. That factor seems to combine with the support of Germany's large contingent of regular patrons of theater and opera, who also attend and support such radical productions as part of an unspoken cultural priority for such work:

The recipients of culture anticipate each instance of provocation with a friendly willingness. Their understanding for the newest directions of art, and also for the 20th-century avant-garde, is unshakable: (There are) no more concerts that fail to end with music by Schönberg or Lachenmann or Rihm, nor that aren't celebrated by this conservative-of-heart public.³¹⁷

An Operatic Split?

The high demand for Depot productions such as *Luci* seems to conflict with Bourdieu's notion that operatic audiences are inherently conservative. While both my own observations and the Neuhoff study would indicate that Depot audiences, like mainstage Oper Frankfurt audiences, are indeed largely comprised of members of the social elite, at least one matter remains unresolved: the extent to which Depot attendees belong to the same pool as more

³¹⁷ ["Die Rezipienten der Kultur aber kommen jeglicher Provokation durch freundliche Bereitwilligkeit zuvor. Ihr Verständnis für die neuesten Richtungen der Kunst, aber auch für die Avantgarde des 20. Jahrhunderts ist unerschütterlich: Kein Konzert mehr, das nicht mit einer Musik von Schönberg bis Lachenmann oder Rihm endete und von einem im Herzen konservativen Publikum bejubelt wird."] Translation mine.

traditional operagoers, and if they share the same cultural priorities.³¹⁸ The cultural press on the Depot productions is replete with accounts of overwhelming audience enthusiasm, but also with critique; an abundance of these reports indicate the extent to which audiences hold divided perspectives on the style of opera staging presented there. One such review from an early Depot production in 2005 illustrates well the extreme differences of opinion: columnist Michael Dellith has indicated that “the audience at the premiere jubilated,” on the one hand, but he also argues on behalf of another opposing response: “It (ceaseless twitching and fidgeting, hip-shaking and posing) may be inspiring for the video-clip generation, but it distracts from the musical event.” It is clear that two distinctly different attitudes exist towards this context, and indeed, that there may even be two different audience subsets for opera in Frankfurt. Certainly, the coexistence of such differentiations of taste within the city’s opera-going populace can be understood in the context of the aforementioned theoretical arguments by Habermas. According to his theories, such nuances of audience taste prompt the conclusion that those who have cultivated a taste for more avant-garde theatrical techniques and operas outside the traditional canon have been shaped by other social experiences and motivators than those who patronize traditional opera. Not only do their artistic interests seem to have developed within a less socially conservative environment, but they may also reflect a more intellectually-motivated set of criteria than audiences that prefer

³¹⁸ Michael Dellith, “Heino bewacht die Unterwelt: Top oder Flop? David Hermanns Frankfurter Inszenierung von Monteverdis ‘L’Orfeo’ im Bockenheimer Depot hinterlässt einen zwiespältigen Eindruck,” *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, (Frankfurt am Main, Germany), Mar. 15, 2005. [“Das (unablässiges Zucken und Zappeln, Hüftschwingen und Posieren) mag für die Videoclip-Generation erbaulich sein, vom musikalischen Geschehen aber lenkt es ab.”]

the more common venue of the main opera house—people for whom Chaikin has argued that the social event of an opera ball marks a highlight of the cultural calendar.³¹⁹

Certainly, the Depot audience has demonstrated support for the musically and stylistically broadened material offered in the smaller theater as well as the decision to schedule such productions in a setting that casts an aura antagonistic to that of a traditional opera house. Yet it is creators and artistic administrators who have designed the season programming, not the audience. By scheduling a production like the 2011 *Luci mie traditrici*—and furthermore, by setting it within the performance space of the Bockenheimer Depot, which has already been shown to heighten the most nontraditional elements of the work—the Oper Frankfurt has created a context in which avant-garde opera will be well received, at least by a certain audience with a differentiated set of artistic priorities for the operatic art form. With such choices, the company’s artistic administration has taken a bold step in support of theatrical “experimentation” within opera; as the administration dedicates itself to the creation of innovative productions, they demonstrate their attention to the continued development of opera as art.

By moving certain productions to the Bockenheimer Depot, the Oper Frankfurt utilizes the nontraditional elements of this secondary theatrical space in combination with strictly divided programming to promote new types of opera. In this way, the incorporation of this new performance space uses theatrical place to artistic advantage. As the company expands its repertoire with previously unknown texts, in this unusual venue, they also broaden the expectancies for how opera can be staged; they offer audiences unconventional production styles that approach presentational and interpretative matters in a manner akin to modern theater.

³¹⁹ Chaikin, 109- 110.

Productions at the Depot are able to interact with the audience and physical space in ways difficult to achieve within traditional opera houses. With the advancement of experimental work in a setting that encourages its cultural acceptance, the definition of what can be called “opera” can gradually widen. For this reason, the regular integration of the Bockenheimer Depot venue into the primary season of a leading international opera house, and the current approach to programming opera within that theater, indicates a commitment to the development of a broader definition of opera as a cultural form. Regular use of the Bockenheimer Depot demonstrates an administrative willingness to transform the definition of what the operatic genre can include.

Such an attempt at artistic redefinition by means of an alternative presentational context is not without predecessors. A number of opera and theater companies throughout Germany—and indeed, worldwide—have attempted the integration of a second venue in the last decades. A 2012 article in the Bavarian newspaper the *Main Post* presents comments by Würzburg Theater’s intendant, Hermann Schneider, who explains a newspaper article about the Frankenhalle, a similar secondary theater space opened in that Bavarian city:

‘Theater can not and should not be allowed to ignore the changes in society, and must entice young audiences.’ Schneider compares the theater to a radio station, who attempts to reach a different listening audience with its diverse specialized programs. ‘We don’t have just one audience.’ ... Schneider knows from other cities that such models work...it is similar with the Bockenheimer Depot in Frankfurt.’³²⁰

³²⁰Karl-Georg Rötter, Frankenhalle: Eine Spielstätte nicht nur für Avantgarde,” *Main Post*, July 3, 2012. <http://www.mainpost.de/regional/wuerzburg/Ballett-Rockmusical-Theaterchefs-Theaterintendanten;art735,6878069>. [“Theater kann und darf die Veränderungen in der Gesellschaft nicht ignorieren und muss junges Publikum anlocken Schneider...vergleicht das Theater mit einem Radiosender, der mit seinen unterschiedlichen Spartenprogrammen verschiedene Hörergruppen zu erreichen versucht. ... ‘Wir haben nicht nur ein Publikum.’ ... Dass solche Modelle funktionieren, weiß Schneider aus anderen Städten. ... Ähnlich sei es mit dem Bockenheimer Depot in Frankfurt.” Translation mine.

Examples such as the Würzburg theater illustrate an obviously parallel adoption of a contrasting theatrical space with the purpose of incorporating a wider array of theatrical styles, and to reach a broader audience.

Particularly in Frankfurt, the contrasts between the opera's two spatially disparate performance venues illuminate the existence of two strains of opera production one more traditionally minded, and another more experimental. As the division of the repertoire at the Oper Frankfurt intimates, a split has become increasingly evident in opera production globally since the late 1970s between productions that are "outrageously" updated, and those that are more traditionally or historically-minded, as Harry Haskell, Roger Savage, and Phillip Gossett have all discussed.³²¹

So the 1970s and '80s saw (among others) authentick (sic) Monteverdi in Italy, Rameau in England, Handel in the USA... However, faithfulness of this particular sort to the text's instructions and intentions has not been universally accepted by late 20th-century directors. Under another banner there are those who believe that a modern audience... needs a more searching and radical approach to their realization."³²²

The existence of these contrasts in artistic/philosophical attitudes to staging is made extraordinarily visible within opera company due to the physical division of its repertoire along similar lines; pieces within its repertoire are funneled to one location or the other on the basis of

³²¹ See Harry Haskell, "Staging a Comeback," in *The Early Music Revival: A History*. (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996), 131 – 160, and Phillip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 443 - 489.

³²² Roger Savage, "The Staging of Opera," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001,) 407, 411.

style.³²³ Furthermore, the material differences between the company's two venues underscore the divergent theatrical approaches and musical content featured in each space. In the case of Frankfurt, (which roughly aligns with the distinctions made by Savage et al), the conflict between the two camps seems to revolve around differences of stylistic approach to staging opera. The crux of the matter revolves around the question of whether productions should be staged in a way consistent with opera's historical conventions, which would maintain the art form's status as "high art," or via more experimental methods, which would propel the art form in new directions. Specifically for Frankfurt, the matter of which works to program also plays a role in that discussion: this involves the question of the extent to which the performance repertoire should consist of canonized pieces from the most well-known 18th and 19th century composers, or if it can be expanded to include early and new opera texts. With the addition of a complementary, contrasting theater space alongside a traditional opera house, Oper Frankfurt's two-tiered approach to programming marks an interestingly dualistic attempt to bridge this artistic divide.

As has been demonstrated in this chapter's analysis of the 2011 *Luci mie traditrici*, the Bockenheimer Depot's obvious differences in construction and history allow the company increased freedom to mount productions of a more avant-garde nature in that theater space. On the one hand, the alternate setting allows for intensified public support of productions that expand the definition of opera: it creates a complementary space for an audience subset with

³²³ It should be noted, however, that even productions of a more traditional nature staged at the Oper Frankfurt are much less fastidious than many of the most extremely historically-minded productions mentioned by Haskell. Despite local differences in the ways opera is produced at the two Frankfurt venues, the company actually takes a rather innovative approach to producing opera at both sites, a fact that I will discuss further in Chapter Six.

nuanced artistic tastes and a slightly different cultural agenda than that of the main opera house, and it also places opera in an unusual context, which enables such an audience to grow in numbers and develop an expanded artistic palate. On the other hand, the company can simultaneously continue to offer opera in a more conventional format on the mainstage. The musico-theatrical disparities underscored by the theater spaces reflect differences between the audiences and artistic philosophies associated with the productions mounted at the two Oper Frankfurt theaters. Furthermore, the philosophical and stylistic contrasts between these two approaches lies at the heart of the polemical debates in the last several decades about *Regietheater*. As I conclude my dissertation in the next chapter, I will address that debate in further detail in an effort to consider the situation of avant-garde *Musiktheater* within today's opera field.

Chapter Six: Beyond *Regietheater*: The Broadening Shape of 21st Century Opera

...the general public will hardly need to hear an opera sung and acted any more, unless a new path is found.

- Arnold Schoenberg, "The Future of Opera," 1927.³²⁴

The preceding chapters of this dissertation have presented a detailed, analytical study of the Oper Frankfurt in two different eras of recent history. I began with a contextual analysis of exemplary productions from the "Gielen Era," the oft-discussed period during the 1980s during which Frankfurt productions demonstrated radical, critical approaches to staging, a context that has frequently been credited as the birth of operatic *Regietheater*. Later chapters examined works produced in the current administration, led by Bernd Loebe; those discussions addressed how and where experimental approaches to opera are visible in Frankfurt stagings of the last decade. After such a close examination of the work at the house since 1979, it has become clear that in a variety of ways, the Oper Frankfurt can be considered an important site of avant-garde opera in the late 20th-century, and that the company has been an influential one in the recent field.

With that work as a backdrop, I would like to use this concluding chapter as a chance to step back and address matters that have been left unaddressed or unresolved in earlier segments of this dissertation. An important first task will be take a broader, more inclusive view of the

³²⁴ Carnegie, 241.

house's repertoire, which will allow me to tie together several the unresolved threads from earlier analyses (and particularly those of Chapters Four and Five) as I draw large-scale conclusions about the present-day company. Next, I would also like to further explore some of the most fundamental ideas on which the work of prior chapters has been based in order to eventually draw conclusions that apply beyond the house; critical evaluation of key concepts should allow me to extract broader relevance from the patterns revealed in Frankfurt productions. More specifically, I will consider the ways that an opera production can be considered avant-garde or experimental, then examine the historical origins of the German preoccupation with opera, music and theater that exhibits such attitudes. Finally, I will discuss the relationship that the topic of experimentation has to the contemporary discourse on operatic *Regietheater*, a topic which I believe has come to limit productive discussion about contemporary opera. As most commonly applied, this polemical term has become laden with simplistic, even erroneous implications, including the notion that a willful star director is the authorial party responsible for the drastically revised productions most often associated with the word. Yet as the detailed contextual analyses of Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five have already made clear, one of the most vital characteristics of experimental opera productions is an intensely collaborative approach to producing opera—a feature that seems to contradict *Regietheater*'s most fundamental association.

Production in Frankfurt: The Divided Contemporary Landscape

The conclusion of Chapter Five identified an interesting pattern that demands further exploration. In order to arrive at convincing conclusions about how opera productions are

organized and produced in Frankfurt today, it is important to extend that conversation further, taking a broader overview of the Oper Frankfurt repertoire as a whole in both houses. It has already been made clear that the company has begun to separate its repertoire for performance at two geographically disparate venues within the city; my observations about the 2011 production of Salvatore Sciarrino's *Luci mie traditrici*, staged in the Bockenheimer Depot theater, indicate that the current administration of the company seems to be taking a twofold stylistic approach to opera production, funneling a handful of each season's premieres into the company's secondary performance space on the basis of theatrical style. Oper Frankfurt intendant Berndt Loebe has declared in a video interview hosted on the company's website that the Bockenheimer Depot is reserved for what he terms the "specialties" of contemporary and early opera—he stresses differences of musical style. At least initially, that claim seems to be true; furthermore, it seems ostensibly compatible with my analysis in Chapter Five.

The company's premiere lists for each of the past several years feature several Bockenheimer Depot productions each season that support Loebe's assertion: that musical style provides the basis for the geographical division of the repertoire. For example, a quick scan of the premiere schedule for 2014/15 reveals three premieres scheduled for that venue that can be characterized as "early opera" or "new opera": Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, first performed in 1643; Lior Novak's *An unserem Fluss (By our River)*, a world premiere in 2014; and a program of three one-act operas by the Neoclassicist Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů: the 1928 *Messertränen*, the 1935 *Zweimal Alexander*, and the 1937 *Komödie auf der Brücke*.³²⁵ Indeed, since 2003/2004, the Depot season schedules all reflect Loebe's statement; each new

³²⁵ The 2014/15 premiere list, which also indicates each opera's performance location, is archived on the Oper Frankfurt website: <http://www.oper-frankfurt.de/de/page1221.cfm>

staging scheduled for that space does, indeed, fall into one of the categories he mentions.

Yet, where the collection of pieces programmed for the company's main opera house are concerned, the same 2014/15 season program seems to contradict Loebe's pronouncement. The premieres scheduled that same year for performance in the larger theater at Willy Brandt Platz suggest that the era of the opera's composition is not the sole factor in the assignment of the theatrical setting, despite Loebe's characterization of that aspect as the deciding characteristic. The season featured another a full-length piece by Martinů at the main opera house, the 1938 *Julietta*, along with Mieczyslaw Weinberg's 1968 opera, *Die Passagierin*, as well as the world premiere of a new opera by Rolf Riehm, *Sirenen – Bilder des Begehrens und des Vernichtens*. The prior year's schedule, too, reveals the same incongruence. The 2013/14 season also offered a significant number of early and contemporary operas on the mainstage, including Gluck's *Ezio*, a rarely staged opera seria first staged in 1750, George Enescu's 1931 *Oedipe*, Aribert Reimann's 1983 *Die Gespenstersonate*, and Frederick Delius's 1907 *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe* (*A Village Romeo and Juliet*).³²⁶

Indeed, the pieces programmed for the mainstage suggest that the assignment of theatrical venue is based on factors more nuanced than Loebe has claimed. "Early opera" and "new opera" are staged in both locations. Yet another difference between the two theaters can be observed more consistently. As demonstrated in the prior chapter, distinct differences of aura and production style are apparent, and I contend that it is actually on the basis of these factors that the repertoire is divided and assigned a certain performance venue. Regardless of musical style

³²⁶ A list of all premieres at Oper Frankfurt since 1945 is also available in the company's public online archived historical information: http://www.oper-frankfurt.de/fileupload/dateien/Sonstige_Dateien/Historie_Premieren_chronologisch_6_15.pdf

or period of composition, the performances mounted at the Depot all take advantage of the unusually intimate and contemporary design of that performance space as they present opera stagings that make use of the theater, itself, in ways atypical for opera.³²⁷ With this approach, productions at the Depot engage the audience in ways impractical or impossible for a conventional opera house.

Apart from *Luci mie traditrici*, abundant examples support this observation. For example, in the 2011 production of Cavalli's *La Calisto*, spectators were seated separately by gender and asked to participate in the performance: they received key fobs upon entry to the theater and were assigned the task of switching them on at a particular moment in order to illuminate overhead constellations. A similar transcendence of conventional performance boundaries is exhibited by the 2014 world premiere production of Peter Eötvös's *Der Goldene Drache*, a modern-day narrative about a Chinese Restaurant told in 21 pictorial scenes. Not only does the composer borrow performance traditions from Chinese opera, the production makes use of the Bockenheimer Depot's unusual spatial features as the instrumentalists, all members of Frankfurt's Ensemble Modern, physically weave in and out of the stage space, becoming part of the scenic action as they make music with kitchen utensils. The unconventional features of such stagings would be nearly impossible to imagine set on the Oper Frankfurt mainstage, as each requires a theater space compatible with the production's conceptual design. The consistent

³²⁷ The observation that the design of the Bockenheimer Depot allows for a nontraditional use of performance space applies in a few ways. Sometimes the matter is as simple as the integration of a stage configuration other than the typical proscenium configuration; the performance space is frequently arranged to be "¾ round," or lacks distinct boundaries between the audience and performer areas. These variations on the constellation of space in the hall often have the effect of diminishing the boundary between audience and performers. Some stagings push this effect even further, eradicating the boundary by requesting audience participation.

display of experimental, provocative, or otherwise innovative performance styles at the Depot indicates that it would be more appropriate to understand the sorting of the Oper Frankfurt repertory to be based on the theatrical aura: Productions that feature a staging style that aligns with a conventional performance paradigm (and traditional operatic aura) are set in the main house, while more radical stagings—which often feature a spatial configuration that diminishes boundaries between spectators and performers, often encouraging their interaction—are reserved for the Bockenheimer Depot.

When the consistency of this pattern is viewed in tandem with the analysis of the recent Nemirova *Ring* tetralogy found in Chapter Four, it might seem logical to simply suppose that the Bockenheimer Depot space is used for experimental stagings, while the mainstage is reserved for more traditional opera performances. Yet to definitively draw a conclusion so contingent on the juxtaposition of those two labels would be premature at this point. First, it is important to assess whether or not productions mounted on the mainstage might also be considered experimental, innovative, or avant-garde in some way. Relatedly, it is also crucial to consider the concrete implications of these terms for an opera production, as they have yet to be clearly defined.

An Expanded Repertoire—On Both Stages

The recent Oper Frankfurt's premiere schedules just presented have revealed that operatic works beyond the traditional canon are presented in both the Bockenheimer Depot and the Oper Frankfurt's mainstage theater. The most surprising aspect of that observation is the fact that the mainstage theater is also frequently used as a performance venue for new productions of Renaissance and Baroque operas as well as pieces by 20th and 21st century composers, despite

claims that such pieces are reserved for the more intimate venue of the Bockenheimer Depot. The distinction is hardly nominal: Since the 2010-11 season, at least three of the premieres on the mainstage have fallen into one of the two categories. And with both “new” and “early” opera featured in both locations, the company’s commitment to an expanded repertory is clear. Regardless of venue, the number of non-canonized productions offered by Oper Frankfurt is unusually high.

The choice to program Baroque opera is no longer rare in the 21st century. On the contrary, the trend has become increasingly common in the last four decades. After the virtual omission of operas by composers like Handel and Cavalli from the repertoire in the 19th century, new productions of early operas have become frequent fare at the world’s leading opera houses and festivals since the 1980s.³²⁸ Beginning with early initiatives by conductors Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Raymond Leppard, who were deeply committed to their revival, Baroque texts have been programmed with increasing frequency since the latter decades of the 20th-century. This subfield of production has also experienced particular rejuvenation by figures like conductor William Christie, who founded the French ensemble *Les Arts Florissants* in 1979, have also played a major role in this revival with lively stagings of forgotten operas by composers such as Couperin, Monteverdi, or Rameau. Christie’s ensemble began to draw international attention with the dynamic 1986 production of Lully’s *Atys*, produced by the Parisian Opéra-Comique, and the ensemble has performed internationally since then at venues that tend to feature stagings in more innovative styles, including most recently the 2016 staging

³²⁸ For more information on the history of Baroque opera production in the 20th century, see Harry Haskell, “Staging a Comeback,” in *The Early Music Revival: A History*. (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996), 131 – 160.

of *Les Fêtes Vénitienes* (André Campra) at New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music.³²⁹

Seventeenth and eighteenth-century operas have emerged as a particularly flexible vehicle for novel approaches to staging in recent decades, as Shulamit Kleinerman illustrated a decade ago in a collection of stimulating interviews with Baroque opera stage directors.³³⁰ Baroque opera performance today incorporates gesture and dance in ways that produce rich and varied approaches to stage movement, by comparison with the treatment of those elements in 19th- and 20th-century operas; the broadened options for staging gesture and action occur quite naturally as a result of the works, themselves, since early operas originally integrated movement in ways quite different than works from their later counterparts. The work of Baroque dancers like Catherine Turocy, who founded the New York Baroque Dance Company in 1976, has also been an integral part of staging Baroque operas since the late 20th-century, as the revivals of Baroque opera and dance happened in tandem, and the fields have jointly influenced each other.³³¹ Also useful where theatrical innovation is concerned is that the early opera repertoire is plagued by

³²⁹ Geoffrey Burgess, "Revisiting *Atys*: Reflections on Les Arts Florissants' production of *Atys*," in *Early Music* 34, no. 3 (August 2006): 465-478. Heidi Waleson, "William Christie and the Baroque Opera Boom," *Early Music America*, 2 (Fall 1996): 19-23.

³³⁰ Shulamit Kleinerman. "Making it real: Baroque opera stage directors discuss their craft." *Early Music America* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 27-34. David Levin has also begun to address the complicated and intriguing relationship between *Regieoper* and dance, as discussed in an unpublished paper delivered at the 2011 meeting of the American Musicological Society. That presentation addressed productions staged by Trisha Brown, Sasha Waltz, and Pina Bausch that feature singers doubled by, creating an effect that he has called the *apart-kunstwerk* due to the "atomization of singing and dancing bodies" that occur in those productions.

³³¹ Kleinermann, 28-29.

fewer expectations about performance conventions than pieces composed in the 19th-century.³³²

Furthermore, Baroque opera's design is in some ways more conducive to methods of staging that defy the traditional (19th-century) relationship between audience and performers, in which spectators typically assume a voyeuristic role. The differentiation has been articulated well by Marshall Pynkoski, director of the Toronto-based Baroque company Opera Atelier:

The job of the pre-Romantic actor is not to feel something on the stage themselves, but to make us feel what they describe. In a Baroque theater, the lights stay up. We all accept the artifice, and so we have an active experience of the actors relating with us, saying, 'I know you're out there, and I'm talking to you.' Romantic opera exists to turn the audience into voyeurs; Baroque opera exists to turn the audience into participants.³³³

In light of Pynkoski's characterization of Baroque opera, the Oper Frankfurt's choice to utilize the Bockenheimer Depot location for productions of operas like *La Calisto*, which engages the audience in the performance in an interactive manner, demonstrates that the company has taken a thoughtful approach to how the theatrical venue can highlight the distinctive performance possibilities offered by early operas. In so doing, the company is able to incorporate more productions into its repertoire that use space in ways that vary from the 19th-century voyeuristic mold as they engage the audience in nontraditional ways. Furthermore, the frequent inclusion of Baroque operas within the Oper Frankfurt's repertoire indicates the

³³² Slowly dissected, reconstructed, and sometimes even updated (in contrasting ways) by the likes of Oskar Hagen in the 1920s, Nikolas Harnoncourt in the 1950s, and Raymond Leppard in the late 1960s-70s, Baroque opera is still "in the period of experimentation," and therefore less hampered by strict expectations about their performance, Haskell, 152. Another vivid account of the recent influx in "fanciful stagings" of Handel operas can be found in Phillip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 485. "Who would have imagined that in the past few years delighted audiences in major opera houses from Chicago to Houston to New York would vigorously applaud essentially complete performances of *Partenope*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Agrippina*, *Xerxes*, and *Alcina*?"

³³³ Quoted in Kleinerman, 33-34.

company's progressive mindset about the types of operas that should be programmed by an opera house in the international spotlight. In addition, with its regular incorporation of 17th- and 18th-century opera texts and an overwhelming commitment to include new opera texts and 20th-century works, as demonstrated in the opening section of this dissertation, the company has chosen to incorporate an extraordinarily wide array of pieces. Each season's program features a balance of familiar operas, neglected rarities, and new works.³³⁴ With a repertoire that transcends a fixed, repetitive set of frequently performed works, the company demonstrates its willingness to bring new and unfamiliar texts to its audiences. By reaching beyond the operatic canon in these ways, both the Bockenheimer Depot and the Oper Frankfurt's mainstage can be considered progressively minded venues.³³⁵

Defining “Experimentalism”: Exploring the Implications

Programming operas from a wider array of musical periods and composers is certainly one way in which the work of an opera company might qualify as nontraditional or “experimental.” But consideration of such labels foregrounds the need to question the meanings that underlie them. Although this dissertation has taken provocative, experimental, or avant-garde opera productions as its primary subject matter in both of the periods examined, the

³³⁴ A survey of the season programs of the last two decades reveals a significant increase in both Baroque and late 20th- and 21st-century operas beginning in the 2005/6 seasons. It is reasonable to presume that Bernd Loebe's arrival in 2002 was among the causes for the change, as well as the acquisition of the Bockenheimer Depot in 2004, since seasons are programmed at least 3-4 years in advance.

³³⁵ An excellent discussion of canonization can be found in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*, ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip Bohlmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

definition of that nontraditional ethos has been left vague until now. Yet any characterization of an opera production as “experimental,” “innovative,” “progressive³³⁶” or “avant-garde” could stem from a variety of features, which I will explore in the following paragraphs.

Previous chapters have considered ways in which various elements of musico-theatrical presentation can contribute to the understanding of a piece as an experimental—sometimes even controversial—production. Yet such labels could just as easily be attributed on the basis of the operatic text as from its theatrical presentation. Where a particular work is concerned, several factors could contribute to such a label. First, the presence or exclusion of the work within the traditional operatic canon is an important matter. Secondly, musical aspects can play a role, such as the opera’s reliance on a distinctive compositional style or avant-garde musical techniques. Thirdly, such a label could stem from the dramatic subject matter, from a central topic perceived to be risqué, taboo, or politicized. Any of these factors could cause an opera to be considered provocative or experimental, since all represent approaches to the operatic craft that exceed traditional, naturalist bounds.

The Oper Frankfurt premiere schedules of the last decade already mentioned demonstrate that where the first two of these three possible factors are concerned, productions performed on the mainstage can certainly also be considered “experimental.” Most apparently, the company regularly programs non-canonized works in the primary opera house. Relatedly, Oper Frankfurt’s mainstage productions also feature operas that utilize radical musical styles, or works

³³⁶ Each of these adjectives carries a fair degree of baggage—perhaps none more than “progressive.” My use of that particular word is meant to emphasize “progress” in the Modernist sense, an indication of the desire for art to stay current, to grow and change in accordance with other contemporary cultural and/or philosophical developments. It is not, however, meant in a teleological sense, with an implication of a particular end goal.

by composers with a distinctive compositional idiom.³³⁷ Consider the 2014 world premiere production of Rolf Riehm's *Sirenen – Bilder des Begehrens und des Vernichtens*, which features an “uncompromising, advanced sonic language.”³³⁸ Yet the third category of potentially “experimental” work remains to be assessed. Operatic works that feature risqué or politicized themes also provide a highly impactful sort of provocation, as the topics themselves create a version of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, distancing the audience.³³⁹ In such pieces, the risqué or politically charged subject matter prevents the audience from becoming engrossed in the narrative and the predicaments of the characters as simple entertainment. As such operas are added into the repertoire, they prompt reflection through the (usually uncomfortable) reactions that they evoke in spectators.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, when works with controversial themes are presented within the high-art context of the opera house, the customary cultural function of the operatic genre is defied; such work contests the complacent cultural inscription that authors like

³³⁷ This second element certainly overlaps the matter of programming non-canonized works, although the element that causes the perception of the production as “radical” or “avant-garde” is different—here focus is placed upon the score.

³³⁸ Dirk Wieschollek, *Fono Forum*, 08.2002 [“kompromisslos avancierten Klangsprache”] According to journalist Berndt Leukert, Riehm composes in “explosiven Konglomeraten” (explosive conglomerates) not set in a “politisch korrekt“ (politically correct) fashion. <http://faustkultur.de/2065-0-Rolf-Riehm.html#.VrvCVvF WcmR>. Translation mine.

³³⁹ An opera's subject is not the only factor to potentially contribute to a *Verfremdungseffekt*; many directors have used unconventional staging techniques from Brechtian models to effectively bring the provocative themes within a piece to the audience's attention. Although this section's discussion revolves primarily around programming works with such risqué content, related exploration of how Brechtian techniques influence the audience has been undertaken in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five.

³⁴⁰ The *Verfremdungseffekt* is one of a number of techniques developed by Brecht for work in his own pieces and productions. Since Brecht's time, such techniques and approaches have been applied more broadly within theater, opera, and dance, not just to Brecht's own pieces.

Bourdieu have claimed is etched upon on its subjects by the artistic text, which reflects the “social relationship... both disguised and transfigured within it.”³⁴¹

Operas that can be understood as “experimental” according to this third definition also appear on the Frankfurt mainstage. An important recent example is the 2015 production of Mieczysław Weinberg’s 1968 opera, *Passagierin*, a work that was largely unknown until its world premiere at the Bregenzer Festspiele in 2010. The libretto is based on the novel by the Polish concentration camp survivor Zofia Posmysz, and whose text reflects her own experiences in Auschwitz. Far from a simple autobiography, however, the opera revolves around two characters: The plot begins with Lisa, a German woman aboard a ship bound for Brazil just after World War II with her husband, a West German diplomat. She had formerly worked as a guard in Auschwitz, a fact that emerges as she encounters a woman on the ship who resembles a prisoner named Marta whom she had tortured and killed. The eight scenes of the opera narrate scenes from the ship as she interacts with the passenger, punctuated by Lisa’s memories of exchanges with Marta and depictions of their lives within the camp.

The subject matter of the Holocaust still holds intense cultural relevance in the 21st century, particularly for modern Germans, who continue to work through that dark chapter of history on the country’s stages.³⁴² A jarring feature of this particular musical drama is the

³⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 494.

³⁴² An important aspect of the theatrical presentation of the Holocaust in German (and Austrian) theater, has been studied as “...the public response demonstrated the importance of offering the average spectator the opportunity to identify with individual characters.” This work has also been linked *Regietheater*, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. See further discussion in Hans-Peter Beyerdörfer, “George Tabori’s Return to the Danube,” in *The Great Tradition and Its Legacy: The Evolution of Dramatic and Musical Theater in Austria and Central Europe*, ed. Michael Cherlin, Halina Falipowicz, and Richard Rudolph, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 97 – 111. The passage at the start of this note traces to page 102 and footnote 18. More

familiar discomfort felt by ethnically German audiences as they experience the story through the perspective of the former Auschwitz worker; her guilt is clear, and is undoubtedly felt keenly and personally by many spectators as they follow the story through her eyes; the audience's perception of Lisa is fraught with twinges of the guilt to which Germans are already quite accustomed. Like many other stage pieces that address the Holocaust, Weinberg's opera offers "the average spectator the opportunity to identify" with both Lisa and Marta, a theatrical tactic which Hans-Peter Beverdörfer has identified as a crucial element of the German theatrical approach to the subject. The personal and difficult nature of the subject for German audiences makes the choice of story both relevant and provocative, as the topic remains a tense one. Reviewer Natascha Pflaumbaum articulates the reaction well, as well as the social value of staging the opera:

One is deeply moved, also because the call not to forget the many victims is vehemently sounded once more at the end. This Frankfurt opera production is also one-of-a-kind for that reason, because it is societally relevant, because it thematizes something that must be talked about. It is good that Frankfurt's opera intendant, Bernd Loebe, who has been bringing outstanding singers and clever directors to the house for years, and is responsible for many exemplary productions, is setting the societal meaning of opera in his sights. Many opera

useful information on this topic can be found in the essay collection *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance*, ed. Claude Schumacher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

houses have ‘Quality’ and a status of ‘Excellent.’ ‘Societal Relevance’—with that, Frankfurt could really win in the long run.³⁴³

This review provides an indication of the recurrent cultural need in present-day German opera—also paralleled in theater, film, and literature—to memorialize the tragedies of the National Socialist era and to acknowledge cultural responsibility for the atrocities enacted by that generation.³⁴⁴ Oper Frankfurt’s staging of this work is an important choice due to the persistent political relevance of the topic to contemporary German (and indeed, most European and American) audiences, who react to the text on a highly personal level.

It is neither the “newness” nor the rarity of Weinberg’s opera that makes its presence in the 2014-15 season most noteworthy, nor is it merely an interesting addition to the repertoire due to its appealing pastiche of familiar, symbolically constructed music.³⁴⁵ Rather, the challenging

³⁴³ Natascha Pflaumbaum, “Ein Meisterwerk, das zu Tränen rührt,” Deutschland Radiokultur, Mar. 3, 2015. http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/oper-die-passagierin-ein-meisterwerk-das-zu-traenen-ruehrt.1013.de.html?dram:article_id=313040. [“Man ist zutiefst berührt, auch weil sich der Ruf, die vielen Opfer nicht zu vergessen, am Ende noch einmal so vehement verbreitet. Diese Frankfurter Opernproduktion ist auch deshalb einzigartig, weil sie gesellschaftlich relevant ist, weil sie etwas thematisiert, über das man reden muss. Es ist gut, dass Frankfurts Operntendant Bernd Loebe, der seit Jahren hervorragende Sänger und kluge Regisseure an das Haus holt und viele Glanz-produktionen zu verantworten hat, die gesellschaftliche Bedeutung von Oper jetzt stärker in den Blick nimmt. “Qualität” und “Niveau” haben viele Opernhäuser. Gesellschaftliche Relevanz—damit könnte Frankfurt auf lange Sicht wirklich trumpfen.”] Translation mine.

³⁴⁴ Abundant scholarship has discussed this matter with respect to German film, and also to a lesser degree about theater, although the same principles can be observed to operate across these cultural forms. See Michael Elm, “The Making of Holocaust Trauma in German Memory,” in *Being Jewish in 21st Century Germany*, ed. Olaf Glöckner & Haim Fireberg, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015), 31 – 45; Bärbel Göbel, *German Cinema and the Nation's Past: Contemporary German Film and Its Treatment of National History*, (VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2007); Sonja M. Schultz, *Der Nationalsozialismus im Film: von “Triumph des Willens” bis “Inglourious Basterds.”* (Berlin: Berz + Fischer, 2012).

³⁴⁵ Pflaumbaum, March 2, 2015. [“Weinberg’s music is suggestive, quotes, parodies Mahler, Beethoven, sets the luxury yacht sideways with Shostakovich’s waltzes... and brings in

subject matter makes *Passagierin* stand out as a provocative repertoire choice, particularly given that the largest audience constituency of opera in Germany consists of well-educated, upper-middle class Germans.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, as the above quotation from Pflaumbaum has articulated, the inclusion of this opera makes the Oper Frankfurt “societally relevant.” Unlike Sciarrino’s opera and other productions mounted at the Bockenheimer Depot, whose impact derives at least in part from the presentational environment, the essentially traditional performance context of *Passagierin* does not detract from its radical impact. This production should be considered a provocative piece, but for different reasons than the Depot stagings.

The example of the 2014 *Passagierin* demonstrates how the incorporation of operas that feature politicized and emotional topics is indicative of a more critical mindset about opera’s social function. Works like *Passagierin* alter the cultural impact of the operatic craft as they transform the opera from a tool for cultural re-inscription (borrowing the arguments by Bourdieu) to an artistic vehicle of socio-political commentary and critique. As described by the Frankfurt School’s Marcuse and clarified by Habermas, cultural expression of the latter sort takes a “counterposed” approach as it creates “politicized art.”³⁴⁷ For pieces like *Passagierin*, the

color with Russian folklore, jazz, and German folk music, and songs from Edith Piaf... and through Bach’s famous Chaconne from the D Minor Partita. The music is polyglot, like the story, and the topic of Auschwitz, is also polyglot.”] Translation mine.

³⁴⁶ This observation is based on my own observations of Oper Frankfurt audiences, who are largely comprised of cosmopolitan, upper-middle class Germans, as well as the demographic study about German opera mentioned in Chapter Five. (As mentioned in Chapter Five, there are no available demographic studies of Frankfurt audiences, in particular.) Hans Neuhoff, *Konzertpublika: Sozialstruktur, Mentalitäten, Geschmacksprofile*. (Deutscher Musikrat GmbH Deutsches Musikinformationszentrum, 2008), 5 & 22-23.

³⁴⁷ This repeats arguments made in Chapter Five based on Bourdieu’s critique of “aesthetic autonomy” in *Distinction*, p. 485–500. By contrast, art with a socially critical purpose has been theorized extensively by Marcuse. See Habermas’s clarification of Marcuse’s two types

subject matter of the work brings about the change in social function between the two contrasting artistic approaches, which Marcuse has characterized as “affirmative” versus “critical.”³⁴⁸ Yet in this case, it does not stem from a radical presentational context in the same way as productions featured at the Depot.³⁴⁹ Nonetheless, an “experimental” or “progressive” feeling permeates the productions of both theaters; it is clear that both venues can construct meaning in ways that transcend traditional operatic confines, despite the fact that the origin of that characterization is derived differently. In the case of *Luci*, the company’s secondary performance space projects text and music in a highly effective ways impossible within the framework of the opera house. In the case of *Passagierin*, the politicized subject matter is the source of impact, and in so doing, the work of the opera takes on an active social function, moving beyond re-inscription of the social framework.

This discussion of the ways in which opera production presented today on Oper Frankfurt’s mainstage might also be considered provocative or avant-garde has made clear that

of art (“affirmative culture” and “politicized art” in “Consciousness-raising or Redemptive Criticism: The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin.” Tr. Philip Brewster, *New German Critique* 17, 1979. (Duke Univ. Press): 30–59.

³⁴⁸ Habermas’s understandings of Marcuse’s concept of critical art are drawn from Marcuse’s *An Essay on Liberation*, Chapter II, p .30, (Boston, 1969), as well as from the earlier philosopher’s further developed perspectives in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, 1972), Ch. 2: “Art and Revolution,” pp. 79-128.

³⁴⁹ Provocative operas have transformed dominant operatic traditions since the genre’s inception due to their subject matter, although it is only in the 20th century that critical, socially relevant productions have become common. Music history is littered with examples of operas with radical thematic content. One example is Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Da Ponte based his libretto on a play by Beaumarchais that had caused uproar in Paris and been banned in Vienna—the controversy stemmed from the presentation of servants who make fools of their master. Nonetheless, once Da Ponte diluted the text, Joseph II approved the opera. Julian Rushton, “Nozze di Figaro, Le.” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, acc. Feb. 11, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusic.com/online.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003136>.

stagings can be considered “progressive” or “experimental” on the basis of multiple factors. Admittedly, such a label applies to most mainstage productions to a different—and perhaps lesser—extent than to the experimental productions presented at the Bockenheimer Depot. Productions at the secondary theater not only broaden the repertoire, but they also rely on innovative staging techniques and use theatrical space in radical ways, projecting an aura obviously distanced from naturalist, uncritical productions that maintain the traditionalist operatic aesthetics and style. Furthermore, sometimes Depot productions feature a text with provocative subject matter in addition to their experimental tone of the staging. With this combination of features, performances offered at the Bockenheimer Depot do seem to be “experimental” on more levels than the mainstage productions already discussed. Together, however, both of the Oper Frankfurt venues create a broadened conception of what opera can be, with respect to both content and context.³⁵⁰ Productions in both locations offer “innovative” approaches to staging opera, progressive repertory, and radical content—if also in different ways. Both on the Frankfurt mainstage and in the Bockenheimer Depot, the work of this opera

³⁵⁰ My point is that such labels vary in the strength of their implications. Some productions cross the boundaries of the customary operatic framework in more radical ways than others, and indeed, some changes may even be quite *uncontroversial*. Drastic revisions to the presentational format or cultural work of opera, as often occur at the Depot, are more likely to seem “radical” than the simple act of integrating a non-canonized work by a Baroque composer, for example, although both expand boundaries of the genre to some extent. The matter is not black-and-white, as mainstage work can also cause controversy. A good example is the Oper Frankfurt premiere of Reimann’s *Lear* in October 2008. The opera, which has garnered significant attention since its 1978 premiere, drew a flurry of both positive and negative press, the controversy often based on the fact that “the score reflects an exceedingly complex, hard, predominantly dark sonic language” [Die Partitur spiegelt eine äußerst komplexe, harte, überwiegend dunkle Klang-sprache]. Negative reviews foregrounded the composer’s dissonant style, even in Frankfurt, where a significant number of musically complex 20th- and 21st-century works are programmed each season. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/kultur/lear-in-der-oper-frankfurt-der-kopf-ersetzt-die-dritte-hand-1695589.html>

house utilizes theatrical approaches not always associated with the genre and features a broader range of content, often on subjects highly relevant to contemporary audiences. As a result, stagings premiered in both locations contribute to a broadened, critically-minded, even “progressive” conceptualization of the operatic genre.

The Prioritization of Theatrical Innovation, Present and Past

Based on the discussions of work at both of the Oper Frankfurt venues, it is clear that the company prioritizes operatic innovation. The approaches to staging implemented by the company’s creative personnel and the programming choices made by the company’s artistic administration consistently work to critically expand the genre in new directions. The performance options for opera have been particularly broadened by the addition of the Bockenheimer Depot, as that flexible building allows for radical approaches to staging, provides a drastically different performance context and projects a theatrical aura that contrasts that of the main theater. Interestingly, the adoption of a second performance space to be used for more radical productions has also been taken on by many other opera houses within roughly the past decade, and it seems plausible to assert that a similarly progressive mindset can also be found at other houses that exhibit parallel approaches to production and programming, especially those that incorporate a contrasting secondary theater space.³⁵¹ Numerous examples exist of houses that have chosen to embrace the varied staging options that can be provided by adding a secondary venue with contemporary design. An excellent example outside of Germany can be

³⁵¹ Countless examples of companies with such secondary spaces exist across the globe, including companies as prominent as the Royal Opera (the secondary space is the Linbury Studio Theater) and as small as the Detroit Opera (whose secondary space is the Daimler Chrysler Black Box Theater.)

seen at the Oslo Opera, whose website mentions the frequency of this organizational pattern:

In both older and newer opera houses it has become customary to build smaller secondary halls, often based on a black box design (basically a simple, right-angled flexible hall). Oslo Opera House also has two smaller halls, where the stage solutions and audience placing are changeable.³⁵²

The observation that similarly “experimental” approaches are becoming increasingly common throughout the opera industry begs the question of its origin: what might be the source of this increasingly visible experimental drive? I argue that obvious historical precursors to the prioritization of experimentation and innovation that can be observed in many present-day opera companies can be traced to a few pivotal historical periods. Indeed, at crucial moments of German history, the notion of cultural betterment through a critical and interventionist approach to theater and opera can be observed. The next two sections will consider the influence of two pivotal epochs: Perhaps most obvious are the Modernist German theatrical developments of the early 20th century, but even much earlier, 18th German projects that dedicated the arts to *Bildung* and the betterment of society are also related. First and foremost, contemporary spaces like the Bockenheimer Depot venue, which support radical, reconceptualized approaches to opera production, can be considered contemporary cases that belong to the stream of radical theatrical developments in the last century.³⁵³ Likewise, experimental productions and provocative new works presented in conventional opera houses like the Oper Frankfurt mainstage also exhibit links to that string of attempts to transform the operatic craft that began in earnest with the Modernist wave in the early 20th century.

³⁵² <http://operaen.no/en/Learn-more/About-the-Opera-House/#section6841739>

³⁵³ For more on this history, see Clemens Risi, “Shedding light on the audience,” in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2002), 207, and Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theater, 1900 – 1933* (London: Routledge, 1981), 88-90.

Precursors in Modernist Theater and Opera

Chapter Three has already discussed the obvious influence of Bertolt Brecht at length, and a number of other early 20th century figures and institutions can also be seen as important influences on the modern-day approaches to operatic experimentalism. The Berliner Ensemble was an important site dedicated to the Modernist theatrical approaches in the early 20th-century, and the director has been credited by leading German theater historians as among the “initiators of the so-called *Regietheater*,” who also include Leopold Jessner and Max Reinhardt.³⁵⁴ As musicologist Joy Calico has suggested, pieces like Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*, which quintessentially demonstrate Brecht’s “epic theater,” are essentially works of music theater; Calico leads us to the conclusion that the theatrical avant-garde (which she later links to contemporary *Regietheater*) can essentially be traced back to opera, where music is required “to concretize the lesson.”³⁵⁵ Although I will not reprise my earlier discussion of Brechtian theater here in its entirety, it is important to recall that his approach deters the audience from an uncomplicated identification with characters and encourages them to be critically aware of the constructed nature of acts taking place on stage, instead. This approach to stagecraft, termed both “epic theater” and “dialectic theater,” emphasized the utilization of the so-called *Verfremdungseffekt*, a practice produced by the careful construction of three elements: *Gestus*, physical gestures that reveals each character’s individual concerns; *Haltung*, the attitudes of characters towards one another,

³⁵⁴ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Kurze Geschichte des deutschen Theaters*, (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1993), 471, endnote 19. [...“sondern auch von den Initiatoren des sog. Regietheaters wie Craig, Meyerhold, Jessner, Brecht, u.a....”] Günther Rühle *Anarchie in der Regie? Theater in unserer Zeit*, v.2. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982,) 100-101.

³⁵⁵ Calico, 3 & 34.

revealed in body language and posture; and *Arrangement*, the relational array of all the onstage relationships, as expressed in stage constellations of placement and blocking. I repeat these elements again here in order to emphasize the importance of understanding Brechtian theater not just as a direct influence on Berghaus's work, as was asserted in Chapter Three, but because Brechtian techniques should be understood as an early 20th-century Modernist example of theater designed to counter the naturalist style of drama that was dominant before the beginnings of the theatrical avant-garde, in which the audience identifies with characters and finds resolution at the conclusion. Through those techniques, it aims to "criticize constructively from a social point of view."³⁵⁶ Like the *Regietheater* examples of the Gielen Era Oper Frankfurt, Brechtian dialectic theater avoids catharsis and provokes audiences into action.

Brecht's approach was extraordinarily influential within German theater, and indeed, to global practices of 20th-century stagecraft.³⁵⁷ Yet the contributions of Brecht and his colleagues were hardly the only instances of radical transformations within early 20th-century theater that share similarities with the experimental opera productions of the last thirty years. Indeed, as part of the Modernist surge within with arts in the early decades of the century, many cultural

³⁵⁶ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theater*, tr. J. Willett, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), 125.

³⁵⁷ Contemporary theater histories uniformly credit Brecht with the transformation of stagecraft in the early 20th century: "It can be argued that Brecht is the most influential artist in the Modern theater. Today we frequently employ the term 'Brechtian' to denote a particular style ... found in both Western (*Angels in America*) and non-Western (*Woza! Albert*) dramas, music theater (e.g. *Cabaret*), and even opera (e.g. *Nixon in China*.)" For a summary of Brecht's contributions to contemporary stage practice, see "Brecht, Bertolt," in *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, ed. Colin Chambers (London: Continuum, 2002), 105-109. 1998. For a study of Brechtian principles applied in late 20th-century theater, see John Willett, *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches*. Rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1998.) For an important recent study on Brechtian influence in opera, see Joy H. Calico, "Brecht's Legacy for Opera: Estrangement and the Canon," in *Brecht at the Opera*. Vol. 9. (Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008,) 140 – 163.

institutions and individuals exhibited a similar drive towards progress and development, including a few opera companies.³⁵⁸ Among them is the foremost institutional forerunner of the progressive recent developments that have come to permeate opera since the 1980s: Berlin's Kroll Oper of late Weimar. This groundbreaking opera company was organized by Leo Kestenberg, the Prussian Ministry of Culture's unabashedly Modernist-inspired music adviser.³⁵⁹ Under the leadership of conductor Otto Klemperer and dramaturg Hans Curjel from 1927 to 1931, the house

drew in many who had lost interest in opera or who were antagonistic to everything it had come to stand for—its moribund theatricality and its comfortable public. The Kroll's supporters included composers like Weill, Hanns Eisler, Schoenberg, Hindemith, Milhaud, Prokofiev and Roger Sessions; actors, dramatists, and theatre directors and critics like Paul Wegener, Brecht, Piscator and Alfred Kerr; the artists of the Bauhaus; literati like T.W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch and Thomas Mann.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ A number of sources link important figures in Modernist art, literature, theater, and music to the radical operatic experiments of the 1920s. Patrick Carnegy provides an excellent history of several operatic figures during that decade who exhibited a Modernist spirit. He emphasizes the Kroll Oper as the most concentrated site of such activity, but also profiles others. Among the Modernist-minded individuals he profiles is Ludwig Sievert, who led Frankfurt's Statische Bühnen (the local umbrella company that still runs the Oper Frankfurt and the Schauspiel Frankfurt today) from 1918 – 1937. "At Frankfurt, in response to the expressionist demands of works like Hindemith's *Mörder, Höffnung der Frauen*, and *Sancta Susanna* (both 1922) ...and Křenek's *Der Sprung über den Schatten* (1924), Sievert made striking use of strong colours, abstract forms and symbolism to make visible the turbulent emotional core of the music." See Patrick Carnegy, "Travail and Truth: Klemperer and the Kroll Opera," in *Wagner and the Art of the Theater*, 244 – 260.

³⁵⁹For more on Kestenberg, who wanted to "make workers to appreciate great art, and more controversially, great Modernist art," see Rockwell, "Idealism and Innocence" in *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, Ed. Karen Painter, Thomas E. Crow, 189. For a basic history of the Kroll opera from the perspective of Curjel, himself, see Hans Curjel, *Experiment Krolloper: 1927 – 1931*. (Munich: Presten Verlag, 1975). See also Rachel Emily Nussbaum, "The Kroll Opera and the Politics of Cultural Reform in the Weimar Republic." PhD diss., Cornell University, 2005.

³⁶⁰ Carnegy, 254.

The company cultivated a novel approach that used radical applications of *mise-en-scène* within canonized operas, beginning with *Fidelio*. Additionally, Klemperer also exhibited an early commitment to the expansion of the repertory by programming works by contemporary composers, although new music was offered more frequently in concerts by the Kroll orchestra than in staged *Musiktheater* productions. Several opera historians have made note of internal disputes over repertoire by the company's key players; musicologist Rachel Nussbaum has claimed that the disagreements stemmed partially from the need to placate the growing National Socialist political powers, but also from philosophical differences between the radical Curjel and Klemperer, who was more concerned with the populist notion of bringing great art to the people.³⁶¹ Nonetheless, in its short-lived era, the Kroll offered notable productions that exposed themes deeply embedded in the operatic work while they also simultaneously offered innovative approaches to staging.³⁶² The directors of the Kroll presented opera in ways that countered and antagonized the dominant operatic aesthetics and performance traditions of the day, although their approaches can also be seen as an extension of attempts at similar work in the city by Max Reinhardt and Leopold Jessner in Berlin's Deutsches Theater and Staatstheater, as well as that of

³⁶¹ Carnegie calls Klemperer's repertory at the Kroll as "a cross-section of works old and new," (Carnegie, 254.) On the complexity of the repertoire, see Rockwell, 194-195, and for a full list of Kroll productions, see Curjel, 8. More detailed analytical discussion occurs in Nussbaum, Chapters 3 & 4, 83-125 & 126-152. Importantly, she differentiates the approaches taken to repertoire by Otto Klemperer and the Kroll's second intendant, Ernst Legal, who took over in 1928 when Klemperer scaled back his work commitments, retaining only his position as conductor due to health problems. "Contrary to the usual view of Klemperer as an arch-modernist, ... his main interest was in "rediscoveries," older but neglected operas. It was Legal who selected more new operas." Nussbaum, 130-131.

³⁶²Jennifer A. Low, "How Modernism Played in Berlin: Moholy-Nagy's Hoffmann at the Kroll Opera House," in *Dramatic Spaces: Scenography and Spectatorial Perceptions*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), 105.

likeminded director-choreographers like Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard, who were influenced by *Ausdruckstanz*, a Modernist style of expressive dance and movement developed by Mary Wigman and Rudolph Laban.³⁶³

Ticket sales at the Kroll were generally poor and the company took a political battering before its closure under the growing influence of the National Socialists. Nonetheless, the house is a pointed example of an opera company dedicated to Modernist-inspired theatrical experimentation. Like the various approaches to experimental opera and the genre's expansion already discussed with respect to both of the Oper Frankfurt venues, the Kroll Opera premiered new operatic texts such as Paul Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage*, revived long-forgotten operas such as Gounod's 1858 *Der Arzt wider Willen (Le médecin malgré lui)*, prompted controversy with its choice of Modernist operatic and concert repertoire, which featured Schoenberg, Krenek, and Stravinsky, and offered novel scenic interpretations of canonized operas that many considered blasphemous-- this last point is well demonstrated by a version of Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer* that enraged the right with its simplified staging, which cast the characters

³⁶³ Reinhardt, Jessner, and Niedecken-Gebhard were likeminded colleagues, and their Modernist theatrical circle was concerned with both repertory expansion as well as avant-garde, anti-naturalist stage techniques in the 1910s and 1920s. Reinhardt led the Deutsches Theater from 1905–1930, and introduced a number of staging techniques, some borrowed from other styles of world drama; one example is the hanamichi, a catwalk from Japanese kabuki that joins the stage with the audience, and allows the performers to break the “fourth wall” and interact with spectators. Similarly motivated inventions included the “Jessner steps” (*Jessnertreppen*), designed for a production of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* in 1919. The oft-imitated formation provided an abstract set with several platform levels; it owed influences to sketches by designers Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. Similar sets appeared at the Kroll. Niedecken-Gebhard, a choreographer, was involved with Oskar Hagen's Händel revivals, and he staged Hindemith's *Cardillac* at the Kroll in 1928. See Clemens Risi, “Shedding light on the audience,” 207; and Carnegie, 237-238 & 247 – 248.

as working-class seamen and eradicated all of the accumulated gestures and mannerisms that had by that point come to be associated with Wagner's opera.³⁶⁴

Enlightenment Influences and German Cultural Identity

The Kroll Opera can be seen as the most direct historical precursor of an operatic institution taking a decidedly progressive approach production within the last hundred years, yet the instances of experimental attitudes in theater can actually be observed as early as the Enlightenment. Important early indicators of the German prioritization of theatrical innovation, reform and growth can be found much earlier than the 20th-century in the example of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. These late 18th-century texts illustrate similarly progressive and experimental attitudes to staging theater, and importantly, such reforms were approached by the conscious injection of textual criticism into the theatrical process.³⁶⁵ Compiled from notes collected between 1767 and 1769 by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, these writings consist of his observations on the plays presented by Hamburg's National Theater, where he had been hired to observe and provide feedback.

The founders of the first German National Theatre invited Lessing to Hamburg because they saw in him a man uniquely qualified to help advance an ambitious programme of theatrical reform... As an outspoken critic of Germany's contemporary dramatic literature and a renowned literary controversialist, Lessing's participation in the new venture was conceived as a vital component of

³⁶⁴ Rockwell, 195.

³⁶⁵ An excellent overview of the importance of the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* to the development of theatrical innovation and critical dramatic practice, see Mary Luckhurst, "Gotthold Lessing & the Hamburg Dramaturgy," in *Dramaturgy: a Revolution in Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.)

a radical pedagogic and aesthetic agenda to lead Germany into a new era of theatrical innovation.³⁶⁶

The characterization above makes clear that the theater's goal in hiring Lessing was to enable innovation and reform as part of a pedagogic cultural agenda for the theater—precisely the same terms that would later be used to characterize the work of Brecht, or the Berghaus productions, for example, in the Gielen Era.

Furthermore, Lessing's radical perspectives and the controversy his work had evoked were deemed welcome in this process—in fact, they played a role in his selection for this job. His former background as a critic led to his being brought to Hamburg to take on a fully unprecedented position, one responsible for injecting criticism and reflection into the creative process. That background is also of utmost significance to understanding the constellation of players habitually involved in the creation of German theater since that time; indeed, Lessing can be understood as the first example of the modern dramaturg, a role dedicated to the notion that theater can be improved by injecting criticism into the creative process.

Lessing became the cultural intermediary between the National Theater and its audiences, critiquing its work both practically and theoretically, an arbiter of artistic quality and managerial decision-making. [Lessing's work] was an attempt to teach those in the industry and those outside how to be informed critics. It was an experiment that saw in theater a potential for broad cultural reform. Most importantly it was a venture which insisted that theory and practice are not separate disciplines, but rather inform one another constantly, and that vital progressive theater-making must make room for maximum cross-fertilisation. ... German theatre practitioners immediately understood the pragmatics of yoking together theory and practice, and the dramaturg has been an integral part of their theatre-making ever since.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Luckhurst, 25.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 29.

The example of Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy* demonstrates how Enlightenment thinking valued the critical nature of *Bildung* (which roughly translates to "educational development") to civic life, and the matter certainly seems to have played a role in the development of the German taste for theatrical experimentation.³⁶⁸ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter have identified the German preoccupation with such development as a dominant concept within cultural life since the late 1700s; their work indicates that the concept itself has significantly influenced the development of German cultural identity.³⁶⁹ They assert that the concept of music as both *Bildung* (educational development) and *Ausbildung* (shaping or training) became a popular cultural trope during the late 18th century, the concept advanced by figures such as the late 18th-century popular authors Friedrich Rochlitz, a magazine editor in Leipzig, and J.N. Forkel, the author of a popular Bach biography from 1802.³⁷⁰ The concept of Germans as the "people of music" was well established by the early 19th century and continued to grow throughout the 1800s. Although such a notion might at first essentially seem committed to the establishment of a German musical canon, later programming choices made by festival

³⁶⁸ Paul Chaikin's dissertation on opera in Berlin also suggests the influences of Enlightenment thinking and events on the development of the German taste for experimental taste in cultural programming. Chaikin, 139.

³⁶⁹ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, "Germans as the 'People of Music': Genealogy of an Identity," in *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1-35. Their claims echo Mary Sue Morrow on the establishment of German identity in "Building a National Identity with Music: A Story from the Eighteenth Century," in *Searching for Common Ground: Diskurse zur deutschen Identität 1750 – 1871*, ed. Nicholas Vasonzi (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000,) 255 – 269.

³⁷⁰ Applegate and Potter provide a translation of Rochlitz that discusses music's function of providing for general educational development (*Bildung*), as well as more specific training (they use the word "shaping" for *Ausbildung*) of cultural attitudes. In my mind, "training" provides a better understanding of "Ausbildung." Applegate & Potter, 4.

directors like Mendelssohn further ingrained the notion of Germany's musical importance as they also served to expand the musical canon. A useful illustration can be seen in the 1829 Berlin performance of Bach's (at that time long forgotten) oratorio, *St. Matthew Passion*:

The Bach revival involved much more than performing unfamiliar works for skeptical audiences. It was something of a national movement. Large constituencies of the culture-consuming, taste-making classes were drawn into an affirmation of their German identity through attendance at and amateur participation in Bach's works.³⁷¹

In addition to its demonstration of how German musical audiences became educated on an important, little known musician through reflective, *Bildung*-minded concert programming, this example also provides an early example that links unconventional repertoire to the task of building national identity. Although this example concerns concert programming, and not the repertoire of an opera house, it addresses programming choices within the German concert music tradition, a field that has obvious parallels to the operatic and theatrical cases already discussed. Like those others, this example foregrounds public attitudes that value provocative artistic choices as a source of cultural critique and growth, and it also provides a historical justification for the ongoing support of progressively minded theater and opera in contemporary Germany.

The attitudes of historical forerunners from the Modernist period and the Enlightenment are both manifest in the Oper Frankfurt of the 1980s. As discussed in the last two sections, the Frankfurt drive towards an expanded, nontraditional conception of opera exhibits similarities to the approaches taken by the company's prominent Modernist precursors from the early 20th century. The most important examples can be considered the Kroll Oper, who exhibited inventive approaches to staging and a commitment to a broadened repertoire, and the Berliner

³⁷¹ Ibid, 10.

Ensemble of Bertolt Brecht, which propagated the dramatist's radical style of dialectic theater: both were dedicated to interventionist, critical productions that defied naturalist styles of acting, movement, and stage design. Likewise, the prioritization of theatrical experimentalism and the progressive approach to the creation of opera that has been increasingly apparent in the industry since the 1970s can be considered to be contemporary instances of a longstanding tradition of critical artistic approaches that dates to the Enlightenment, as illustrated by Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy*.

The productions profiled in Chapters Two and Three exhibit similar motivations to these earlier historical examples. Lessing's concern with criticism is visible in the interview with Neuenfels and Zehelein on the 1981 *Aida*, discussed at length in Chapter Two.³⁷² Likewise, Klemperer and Curjel's attention to novel staging techniques and progressive repertory—the latter a factor also emphasized by Mendelssohn nearly a century prior—finds parallels in the similarly motivated programming decisions of the Gielen Era. Similarities to the Kroll are quickly evident in Hans Dieter Schaal's abstract, architectural stage designs in *Les Troyens*, as well as in the integration of Absurdist techniques and symbolic, gestural movement and design in the Berghaus *Ring*.³⁷³ To a lesser extent, the commitment to an expanded repertory is also visible in the 1980s in stagings of new and late-20th century operas, such as John Cage's *Europeras* or Hans Zender's *Stephen Climax*, as well as revivals of forgotten operas such as Albert Lortzing's

³⁷² See Chapter Two, p. 58- 68 for discussion of the interview, ““Das Ägyptische ist die Sehnsucht! ...,” 2.

³⁷³ See my discussions of Hans-Dieter Schaal's astonishing designs for *Les Troyens* in Chapter Two, p.74-76, as well as my discussions of gestural movement in the Berghaus *Ring* in Chapter Three, p. 88-92.

1848 *Der Wildschütz* and Berlioz's 1831 *Lélio*.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Three, Berghaus's *Ring* relied heavily on Brecht's dialectical stagecraft techniques, which circumvented the naturalist Wagnerian aesthetic as it politicized textual themes. Productions directed by Neuenfels, too, owe a great debt to Brecht, particularly with respect to the contemporary director's provocative use of the chorus. That point is well illustrated by the notorious 1981 *Aida*, whose audience experienced a *Verfremdungseffekt* when faced with its own 19th-century mirror image, portrayed by the opera chorus in the Act II, scene ii, "Triumph March."³⁷⁵

Frankfurt: A Nexus of Experimental Attitudes in the 1980s

Chapters Two and Three have made clear that the productions of Oper Frankfurt in the 1980s were dedicated to a theatrically innovative approach to staging opera. It has also been argued that the house's approach during the Gielen Era exhibits philosophical motivations that parallel Modernist artistic movements that encouraged novelty and the transformation of various cultural aspects of society. Furthermore, as a result of productions like the 1981 *Aida*, the 1983 *Les Troyens*, and the 1985 – 1987 *Ring des Nibelungen*, the Oper Frankfurt of that period has been characterized by theater historians like Erika Fischer-Lichte as a *locus classicus* of the provocative theatrical approach often called *Regietheater*, the most critical site for the further development and establishment of this theatrical movement. Customarily translated as "director's theater," that term has permeated discussions of contemporary opera productions

³⁷⁴ This expansion of the repertory, however, is much more evident under the contemporary administration. During the Gielen Era, novel and provocative productions of canonized works were foregrounded to a much greater extent.

³⁷⁵ A more detailed description of this event is provided in Chapter 2, p.63-67.

since the 1970s in both the scholarly lexicon and the popular media.³⁷⁶ Yet the polemical nature of this label warrants its exploration, and I will devote a later section of this chapter to that task. Despite the thorny nature of the term, its most basic meaning with respect to opera is fundamentally clear: The word *Regietheater* (or sometimes *Regieoper*) is consistently used to refer to new stagings of operatic works that reject established performance conventions and longstanding interpretations of that text in favor of an altered, updated reading or presentational format—sometimes to the point of inciting controversy.³⁷⁷ With this definition in mind, the productions analyses featured in the first half of this dissertation seem to justify Oper Frankfurt's association with *Regietheater*, and more specifically with the provocative style that it connotes.

Since the label does appear to be justified, another question arises: Why did Frankfurt am Main prove such fertile terrain for the radical artistic attitudes of the 1970s and '80s and the growth of *Regietheater*, as has been claimed? As briefly discussed in Chapter Two, the city of Frankfurt was ripe for artistic and cultural experimentation in several ways. First, its status as a moneyed West German city is important. Not only did the city have the financial means to support a wider array of artistic and cultural endeavors than many other locations, but as a city in the FDR, Frankfurt was also uncensored by the governmental restrictions on opera that existed in

³⁷⁶ Fischer-Lichte, "The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive," 557 – 567. See also Günther Rühle, *Anarchie in der Regie? Theater in unserer Zeit*, v.2. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 100-101; and Nora Eckert, *Das Bühnenbild im 20. Jahrhundert*. (Berlin: Henschel, 1998), 169-171.

³⁷⁷ Recall, for example, the numerous reviews and news reports mentioned in Chapter Two that indicated controversial reception of the 1981 Neuenfels *Aida*, including the critic's column in *Allgemeine Zeitung Mainz*, in *Musiktheater Hinweise: Informationen der Frankfurter Oper*, 11. [Wütende Proteste und Gegenreaktionen ("Fahrt doch nach Verona") gefährdeten die Aufführungen stellenweise... Ein Buh-Sturm antwortete ihm und seinem Dramaturgen Zehelein—sowie Gielen als Mitverantwortlichem..."]

the East. As indicated in interviews with dramaturg Malte Krasting, Germany's constitution, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) guarantees fundamental protection and support for the free, uncensored expression of artistic perspectives, a charge that is taken quite seriously.³⁷⁸ Although a review of the document itself reveals no explicitly worded protection for unrestricted artistic practice, the freedom of art is asserted in Article Five.³⁷⁹ Furthermore, Germany's federal supreme court, the *Bundesfassungsgericht*, issued a decision on March 5, 1974 that interpreted Article Five to contain

the right to freedom for all working artists and all involved in the presentation and dissemination of artworks, which protects them from interventions of public violence... As an objective decision of value for the freedom of art, the modern state (which takes itself to be a 'cultural state' as a governmental goal) simultaneously charges itself with responsibility to attain and support free artistic life.³⁸⁰

This interpretation is particularly timely with respect to the artistic changes that would follow in Frankfurt just a few short years later, as the statement was immediately understood to provide wide and unrestricted protections on artistic expression. With such protections in place, opera companies in the West, who were aware of the contrasting conditions and restrictions upon

³⁷⁸ See Appendix A. Malte Krasting Interview #2, p.301-302.

³⁷⁹ Article Five of the (at the time, West) German Basic Law states "Kunst und Wissenschaft, Forschung und Lehre sind frei" [Art and science, research and teaching are free.] The article is freely available for reference online: http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/art_5.html.

³⁸⁰ BVerfG, Urteil vom 5. März 1974, Az. 1 BvR 712/68, BVerfGE 36, 321, 331 - Schallplatten. ["(Artikel 5 enthalte) ein Freiheitsrecht für alle Kunstschaffenden und alle an der Darbietung und Verbreitung von Kunstwerken Beteiligten, das sie vor Eingriffen der öffentlichen Gewalt in den künstlerischen Bereich schützt. Die Verfassungsnorm hat aber nicht nur diese negative Bedeutung. Als objektive Wertentscheidung für die Freiheit der Kunst stellt sie dem modernen Staat, der sich im Sinne einer Staatszielbestimmung auch als Kulturstaat versteht, zugleich die Aufgabe, ein freiheitliches Kunstleben zu erhalten und zu fördern."] Translation mine.

making theater (and other forms of cultural production) in the separate Germanies, began to intentionally hire directors from the GDR, such as Friedrich, Kupfer and Berghaus. According to the German theater historian Günther Rühle, “the exodus of theater artists began in 1976,” just two short years after this ruling.³⁸¹ At least in part, the recruitment of artists seems to have been done to highlight the troublesome artistic (and political) situation in East Germany; as Patrick Carnegy has argued, such choices by a few houses in the West would “exploit the frisson associated with the wrong side of the Iron Curtain.”³⁸² Oper Frankfurt supported the political rebelliousness of East German artists out of solidarity, and they took advantage of the FDR’s lack of censure as they simultaneously drew attention to the artistic restrictions in the GDR.³⁸³ As historian Mary Fulbrook has argued, the political dissent of the early 1980s was widespread, and present on both sides of the border, not just in the East.³⁸⁴ In echo of that assertion, historian

³⁸¹ Günther Rühle, *Anarchie in der Theater?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 251. [“Der Exodus der Theaterleute begann in 1976.”] Translation mine.

³⁸² Carnegy, 343.

³⁸³ The divergent responses to Ruth Berghaus’s opera stagings in the FDR and GDR provide a strong example of this contrast. Consider her discontinued East German *Ring*, the remainder of the cycle was cut after the first installment in *Rheingold*) while public appetite and support clearly for her work increased in the West, as evidenced by her multiple contracts—which included the full *Ring* tetralogy, in Frankfurt. See Johanna Frances Yunker, “Socialism and Feminism in East German Opera: The Cases of Director Ruth Berghaus and Composer Ruth Zechlein,” (PhD diss., Stanford, 2012), 89-114.

³⁸⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *History of Germany, 1918-2000: The Divided Nation*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 214-234, & 259. In the East, Fulbrook attributes the growth of dissent to the GDR’s 1978 decision to allow a separate-but-equal partnership with the church to develop, and in that context, dissent was allowed, restricted within certain bounds. “...the fostering of a muted dissent under the wing of the church spread beyond the bounds which the church could control. More specialized groups developed.” Attention to such issues took not only the form of “direct” activism, but also became manifest in East German art.

Patrick Carnegy has claimed that despite the prosperous capitalist economy in the West, for FDR scholars and artists,

Marxism was still esteemed as a powerful explanatory tool. ... When student dissatisfaction with materialism and ... authority erupted in 1968-9, its discontents were also echoed in the theatres, notably in repertory and styles of production that were critical of bourgeois values and the status quo. Hence the interest in the socialist interpretative slant of the East.³⁸⁵

Such an observation might seem out of place in Frankfurt, which is arguably the economic capital of Germany (and perhaps of Europe), and a city that had long featured artistic institutions under rather conservative bourgeois control (consider the tradition-conscious

Museumsgesellschaft discussed in Chapter Two, as well as the city's main theater and opera.)

Nonetheless, Frankfurt's cultural institutions had also reflected the artistic convictions of the local populace since the late 1700s, and in the 1970s, the tone of theater, art, and opera in the region changed in accordance with the significant transformations in the cultural attitudes of Frankfurters. In fact, the central presence of Western Marxist-inspired thought in the 1960s famously had its hub in the city; known as the "Frankfurt School," the philosophical circle was located within the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University, and most notably included Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse in its first generation, and later Jürgen Habermas.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Carnegy, 343.

³⁸⁶ The *Frankfurter Schule* was founded in 1923 by Carl Grünberg, a Marxist legal professor, although Max Horkheimer had taken over its leadership by 1930. In the 1930s the school was largely concerned with reinterpreting Freud and Marx in order to create a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis, and the school relocated to escape the National Socialists, first to Geneva and then to New York. In 1951 the group was invited back to Frankfurt, and the school's interests turned to Aesthetics and Critical Theory, championed by Adorno, who had taken over leadership. Habermas began to be involved with the school at this time as an assistant for Adorno, and in 1961 he published *Students and Politics. He became involved with German socialist student groups and "contributed to the critical self-awareness of the SDS,"* the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund. A second phase of the school began under Habermas's*

Although the work of the Frankfurt School is partially derived from Marxist ideas of materialism and dialectics, these theorists were by no means “pure” Marxists. Rather, they were initially concerned with the revision and alternative interpretations of Marxist ideas, a project that spawned Critical Theory, the discipline for which they would eventually best be known.³⁸⁷ Encouraged by the open Frankfurt intellectual and political environment, the city’s stages also began to incorporate the ideas of Marxist directors from Brecht’s lineage. Notable examples included Berghaus’s productions at the opera as well as plays by Heiner Müller at the neighboring *Schauspiel*, such as the world premiere of *Leben Gundlings Friedrich von Preußen Lessings Schlaf Traum Schrei* in 1979.³⁸⁸

Yet the fertile ground for operatic experimentation in Frankfurt did not solely stem from its status as a Western foil to the strictures of the East, nor was it wholly due to the intellectual community’s gravitation towards Marxist concepts. Indeed, a number of related factors

leadership in 1981, when he returned to Frankfurt after a period of work in Munich, and during this period, the school’s work would “bridge the continental and analytical traditions, integrating prospects belonging to American Pragmatism, Anthropology and Semiotics with Marxism and Critical Social Theory.” "The Frankfurter School and Critical Theory," by Claudio Corradetti, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161- 0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/frankfur/>, accessed Feb, 14, 2016. See also Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 92, and Rolf Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 555.

³⁸⁷ David Held, “Introduction,” in *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 13-28

³⁸⁸ Müller’s play influences by Müller’s Marxist-influenced view of history, but his growing skepticism with “sacrificing humans to ideology.” The conflicted undercurrent of this piece seems to echo Carnegie’s observation about Western houses being willing to exploit tensions with the situation in the East. See Julie Klases, “The Rebellion of the Body against the Effect of the Ideas: Heiner Müller’s Concept of Tragedy,” in *Essays on Twentieth-Century German Drama and Theater: An American Reception, 1977 – 1999*, ed. Hellmut H. Rennert. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 279.

coalesced in Frankfurt to encourage the development of this flourishing avant-garde: the Frankfurt School's preoccupation with critical theory, the substantial presence of the 1968 student movement in the city, and sympathetic politicians in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) all contributed to the progressive cultural environment within the Rhein-Main metropolis. The legacy of the Frankfurter School "lent a strong intellectual context and content to the left-wing politics of the late 1960s" and continued to loom large within the city's artists and intellectuals through the 1980s, especially due to the influence of Habermas, who studied in Frankfurt under Adorno and Horkheimer in the 1950s and returned in the early '80s as a tenured professor.³⁸⁹ The chief social theories of the circle asserted that "society is made by people and can be altered by people," and their ideas inspired the youth-driven movement of 1968 (*68er Bewegung*,) which reflected tensions and conflicting social and philosophical perspectives between those who had experienced World War II and the postwar generation.

The movement inspired the election of a left-leaning cultural chancellor, Hilmar Hoffmann, in 1970. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Hoffmann had been affiliated with the artistic side of the *68er Bewegung* as a proponent of New German Film, and was himself greatly influenced by Marx and Critical Theory. As he stepped into politics, his views influenced city policies, and he gradually populated the administration of Frankfurt's assorted cultural institutions with likeminded figures, including Michael Gielen. Another appointee of the period was the American choreographer William Forsythe, who Hoffmann brought from Stuttgart to

³⁸⁹ Fulbrook, 227. Habermas returned to Frankfurt in late 1981, and received tenure as the new chair of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in 1984.

lead the Frankfurt Ballet, a position he would hold from 1984 to 2004.³⁹⁰ Like the Schauspiel Frankfurt and the Oper Frankfurt, the Ballett Frankfurt was housed in the large theater complex on Willy Brandt Platz, and the city's three major artistic companies frequently shared space, resources, and ideas.

In these ways, shifts in Frankfurt's cultural attitudes over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s set the stage for the artistic changes that would take hold in the city during the late 1970s and '80s, shifts which are evident in the productions of the Oper Frankfurt as well as at the *Schauspiel* and the *Ballett*. Indeed, an avant-garde artistic tone permeated all of the region's major artistic institutions in that period. As Ann Midgette summarizes,

avant-garde productions coursed through the city... and from 1984 on, William Forsythe redefined the concept of a city ballet company... In his work, Forsythe has continually challenged conventional boundaries: the limits of what can be done in a ballet, the limits of what a dancer can do, the limits imposed by music, costumes, sets.³⁹¹

Furthermore, Frankfurt's cultural institutions are not only radical with respect to the artistic content of their productions. In the case of both the Forsythe company and the Schauspiel (theater), there is a similarly radical emphasis on the collective, collaborative, nature of theatrical and performance work. Midgette continues,

³⁹⁰ <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/rhein-main/frankfurt/theater-herausragender-forsythe-wird-ehrenmitglied-der-staedtischen-buehnen-1159501.html>

³⁹¹ Ann Midgette, "Forsythe in Frankfurt: A Documentation in Three Movements," in *Choreography and Dance*, v.5 part 3 - "William Forsythe," ed Senta Driver, (Oxon: OPA/Routledge, 2000), 14, 21. For more on Forsythe's radical work at the *Ballett Frankfurt*, which relied on the deconstruction of narrative, a highly collaborative process of composition, the integration of ideas inspired by critical theory, and interdisciplinarity, see Stephen Spier, "Engendering and Composing Movement: William Forsythe and the Ballett Frankfurt," *Journal of Architecture* 3 (Summer 1998): 135 – 146.

The term ‘a Forsythe ballet’ may have become something of a misnomer, insofar as the Ballett Frankfurt’s repertory increasingly involves choreographic input from other members of the company...collaboration, the juxtaposition of voices, is clearly inherently interesting to Forsythe...³⁹²

Furthermore, the intensity of this avant-garde spirit in the city’s performance institutions—which was manifest in the creative process as well as the artistic product—became so entrenched that it still colors Frankfurt’s present-day cultural industry. Certainly, the Oper Frankfurt’s administration has been restructured more than once in the past three decades, as I have discussed in the Interlude. Yet the stagings analyzed in the latter half of this dissertation have demonstrated that innovative, critically inspired, avant-garde opera productions still take place in the city’s artistic institutions—albeit in different ways than the approaches of the Gielen administration. As is also true of the Forsythe Dance Company the private enterprise coordinated by the former director of the *Ballett Frankfurt* after the close of the city’s company, opera and theater in Frankfurt today continue to be vibrant and experimental, influenced by the same mindset—and many of the same individuals—that propelled the city’s artistic transformation during the 1980s. Despite changes to administrative leadership and internal organization, Frankfurt’s artistic institutions still prioritize innovative, experimental productions, and collaboratively devised work.

Expanding Horizons: Frankfurt and Beyond in the 21st Century

Little doubt can remain that Oper Frankfurt productions of the Gielen Era can be linked to the stream of Modernist theatrical developments of the early 20th century, and even the cultural emphasis on the arts as *Bildung* in the Enlightenment. Looking beyond Frankfurt in the

³⁹² Midgette, 16-17

1980s, numerous examples reveal that these threads have spread well beyond Frankfurt in the years since. The historical current of nontraditional productions that was able to thrive at this company at that time has come to permeate today's opera industry more broadly—it is no longer confined to isolated examples. By now, many houses across the globe exhibit a similar prioritization of production features and ideals from that period, such as innovative stagecraft and design, the expansion of the repertory, or the incorporation of productions that feature the critical or even politicized presentations of operatic texts. As Paul Chaikin has also claimed of opera production in Germany since the mid 1970s, “in both East and West, opera directors would take cues from avant-garde theater directors (e.g. Peter Zadek, Claus Peymann, Peter Stein) and playwrights (e.g. Peter Handke, Heiner Müller).³⁹³ Although the Oper Frankfurt was not the only company staging opera in radical ways in the 1980s, it should be understood as a hub of extraordinary, influential activity. In the decades that followed, similarly motivated productions would become increasingly visible far beyond Frankfurt, throughout the global opera industry. Furthermore, either directly or in spirit, many of the most notable stagings in the years since the end of Gielen Era can be linked to figures that had been affiliated with the Oper Frankfurt in that period.

First, productions mounted at the Oper Frankfurt under Berndt Loebe's administration continue to reveal a number of priorities that parallel those that can be claimed of the company in the Gielen Era. This claim finds support in the production examples featured in the latter half of this dissertation. Perhaps to an even greater degree than in the 1980s, productions such as the

³⁹³ Chaikin, 149. “Peter Stein would attempt a *Ring* cycle for the Paris Opera in 1976 (cancelled after *Die Walküre*) as well as *Parsifal* for the Salzburg Easter Festival in 2002; Heiner Müller directs *Tristan und Isolde* at Bayreuth in 1993.”

2011 *Luci mie traditrici*, the 2015 *Der Goldene Drache*, and the 2015 *Passagierin*, all relatively new operas composed since the late 1960s, illustrate the clear pattern of effort to expand the traditional repertoire beyond canonized works since the Loebe administration, as do the statistics on the recent preponderance of new music non-canonized productions noted at the beginning of the chapter. The two Depot productions also feature novel musical aspects, and they utilize the performance space and theatrical elements in a way that transcends traditional operatic aesthetics; consider, for example, the intentional use of the theater building's rough design for the construction of symbolic meaning in *Luci*, and the transcendence of normal stage divisions between audience, orchestra, and performers in *Goldene Drache*; during the overture, for example, "all of the participating vocalist and instrumentalists find themselves onstage and improvise with woks, wooden spoons, pots, mixing bowls, ladles, and other kitchen tools."³⁹⁴

Yet the modern-day Frankfurt is hardly the only site where the influence of the company in the Gielen Era can be observed. Indeed, many other important operatic centers across the globe have also exhibited progressive approaches to opera that serve the expansion of the operatic genre in similar ways to the patterns already identified in this chapter. The widespread presence of opera productions that exhibit similar features and creative inspiration to the work of 1980s Frankfurt quickly becomes apparent by tracing the careers of several important figures from those years beyond Frankfurt. Pamela Rosenberg, for instance, took her skills gained in organizational leadership during the Gielen Era to her subsequent post in Stuttgart and San Francisco. Each of these companies would serve as a strong post-Frankfurt example of

³⁹⁴<http://www.omm.de/veranstaltungen/musiktheater20132014/F-der-goldene-drache.html> ["Zur Ouvertüre finden sich alle Beteiligten, Gesangs- und Instrumentalsolisten auf dem Bühnenpodest ein und improvisieren mit Wok, Holzlöffel, Topf, Rührschüssel, Suppenkelle und anderen Küchenwerkzeugen."] Translation mine.

progressive approaches to opera production that prioritize experimental theater and stagecraft, the incorporation of criticism and the politicization of texts, and the expansion of the repertory. In Stuttgart, Rosenberg worked with Klaus Zehelein, who had also come from the Oper Frankfurt; the two served as co-intendants from 1991 – 2000 and continued to create productions modeled on their work in Frankfurt. Particularly interesting during their joint tenure were their fruitful efforts to recruit young singers to form a collaborative and energetic young ensemble.³⁹⁵ By bringing on flexible, open-minded singers, Rosenberg and Zehelein situated the company well to continue to innovate staging by directors like Ruth Berghaus, Christoph Nel, Hans Neuenfels, Peter Konwitschny; all of these directors associated with *Regietheater* staged productions during the Rosenberg-Zehelein years.

After nearly a decade in Stuttgart, Rosenberg left to serve as general director of the San Francisco Opera. From 2001 – 2005, Rosenberg he overhauled the American company's former production style as she hired dramaturgs and extended rehearsal periods, and she advanced the contemporary repertoire by programming the "Seminal Works of Modern Times" series. "The long years that Pamela Rosenberg spent on European stages seemed to have an effect, whereby

³⁹⁵ One notable new singer was Eva-Maria Westbroek, a theatrical young Dutch soprano who would later develop a high-profile international career. Westbroek would take on the controversial title role in Mark-Anthony Turnage's opera *Anna Nicole* at Covent Garden in 2011, directed by Richard Jones. (The provocative nature of that London production should be apparent from the title's allusion to Anna Nicole Smith.) Westbroek would also portray *Brünnhilde* in the Nemirova *Walküre* production analyzed in Chapter Four.

above all, the European impact is visible in the design of the season program.”³⁹⁶ Similarly, the 2004 stagings of Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen* and Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, as well as and the 2005 world premiere of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* demonstrate the international spread of the critical, innovative production style from Germany. Consider the comments of critic Mark Swed:

San Francisco really isn't like the rest of America, where opera as ideas, let alone as window on inner anguish and frank sexuality, is significantly less welcome than in Europe. Not for nothing has Rosenberg, an American who headed the bold Stuttgart Opera in Germany for many years, been accused of promoting Eurotrash. ... "Vixen" and "Faust" do, indeed, come elaborately dressed in trendy overseas trappings. In San Francisco, Leos Janáček's amoral, pantheistic vision of the animal kingdom is far removed from the cartoonish productions that attempt to turn it into children's opera (in hopes that parents won't notice the critters' unblushing lovemaking). Ferruccio Busoni's mystical masterpiece, which questions the very nature of knowability, is shockingly presented as a single, draining descent into degradation and self-destruction.³⁹⁷

Neuenfels's Berlin productions have continued to elicit attention on a similar level, and to continue as provocatively as his stagings in Frankfurt. The 2000 Deutsche Oper production of *Nabucco* provides a clear example. Audiences flocked to the production, which included a collection of mismatched, provocative images, including a swarm of bees with phallic stingers. Like the Frankfurt staging of *Passagierin*, Neuenfels critically reworked the opera to reference the controversial subject of the Holocaust as it featured orthodox Jews headed to the gas chamber. As Gundula Kreuzer has interpreted, “the company's new *Nabucco* did not conceal

³⁹⁶ Steffan Höhne, Raoul-Philip Schmidt, & Oliver Wittmann, “Zwischen Kunst und Kommerz”–Fallstudien zur Institution Oper in den USA: Repertoire, Strukturen, Finanzierung und aktuelle Entwicklungen,” in “Amerika, Du hast es besser”?: Kulturpolitik und Kulturförderung in *kontrastiver Perspektive*, v. 1, ed. Steffan Höhne. (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2005), 159 – 204, p. 189. [“Die langen Jahre, die Pamela Rosenberg an europäischen Bühnen brachten, scheinen sich... auszuwirken, wobei vor allem bei der Spielplangestaltung ein europäische Einschlag bemerkbar ist.”]

³⁹⁷ <http://articles.latimes.com/2004/jun/23/entertainment/et-swed23>

Germany's Nazi past ...director Hans Neuenfels staged Verdi's work as a lesson in the formation of historical consciousness."³⁹⁸ Yet Neuenfels is only one of a host of directors working in this style in Berlin; similarly innovative, controversial figures include Calixto Bieito, Achim Freyer, Peter Konwitschky, and David and Christopher Alden. As Paul Chaikin's recent dissertation also indicates, Berlin productions stand at the helm of experimental opera today.³⁹⁹ Yet by 2016, productions in similar styles have permeated the globe, as the productions in London, San Francisco, and countless other examples illustrate.

***Regietheater*: Productive or Polemic?**

Discussions of opera from the last half century have repeatedly focused on directors like Berghaus and Neuenfels as the figures responsible for the innovative, sometimes provocative operatic readings that have become increasingly common in recent decades. The topic has become a dominant one in both popular and scholarly discourses on contemporary opera, and innovative, controversial productions have habitually come to be called *Regietheater*. This provocative term is usually translated as "director's theater," although a translation as "the theater of directing" would be more linguistically appropriate.⁴⁰⁰ In its current usage, the term immediately brings the shadow of the director into any consideration of the production, often with the implication that this strong-willed figure is bent on imposing an unusual interpretive

³⁹⁸ Gundula Kreuzer, "Epilogue", in *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich*, 245.

³⁹⁹ Chaikin, 13.

⁴⁰⁰ "Theater of directing" may also be a better translation if consideration is given to the analyses in earlier chapters that stress the collaborative nature of preparing a production.

agenda upon a classic opera text. The term is undeniably polemical and has drawn heated reactions from stylistic opponents and enthusiasts. Despite its ubiquity, however, it is rarely defined with any precision. Paul Chaikin, whose study of recent opera productions at Berlin's Staatsoper I have discussed extensively in Chapter Five, is also concerned with the lack of a concrete definition for the term, and he explores it extensively. He eventually provides his own definition: "a way of characterizing theater productions that foreground the role of the stage director." Essentially, I agree that this is the sense of the contemporary usage, and I concur that the term habitually is used to refer to productions of "a radical interpretation, in contrast to some notion of conventional staging."⁴⁰¹

Chaikin himself embraces a relatively positive understanding of the term: "Regietheater privileges the vision of a director, though not necessarily to the detriment of the work as written. ... (It can) lead the audience to a deeper understanding of the original work, or it might lead the audience astray into a funhouse of superficial provocations."⁴⁰² The ethnomusicologist is not alone in that perspective, as a number of critics and scholars deliver a similarly positive spin on *Regietheater*. From the more positive voices, which stem from both scholars and critics, an essential assertion is that the approach makes old opera modern:

The basic premise is that "Regietheater is a living art; that it can have a theatrical immediacy and a contemporary relevance; and that it doesn't have to be preserved in the same, unchanging state in order to maintain its validity."⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Chaikin, 135.

⁴⁰² Chaikin, 136.

⁴⁰³ Anne Midgette, "The Age of the Director (V): Bring On the Eurotrash!" <http://www.andante.com/article/article.cfm?id=19168>.

Despite the presence of such positive voices, a substantial portion of English-speaking operagoers and fans are highly critical of *Regietheater*, as is clear from fan comments about provocative contemporary productions on popular opera blogs like *Parterre-Box*. Consider the following two posts from 2012 and 2016, respectively:

It's a common truism among opera fans that Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* cannot be ruined by singers, conductors, or directors. The humanity of Mozart's music and the wit of Da Ponte's libretto are in theory able to override a less than ideal cast or even the most outlandish 'Eurotrash' director.⁴⁰⁴

...This safety-net production invited me to peer back through time to an age of opera performance unthreatened by the vulgarity of *Regietheater*.⁴⁰⁵

The oppositional attitudes of these commentators are evident from the authors' usage of terms like "Eurotrash" and "vulgarity" when discussing *Regietheater*. Such views are still common, especially in the United States, where productions that feature novel interpretations, unconventional theatricality, or that a critical approach are still a very recent cultural development, and usually viewed as an odd, foreign approach that besmirches the value of opera's great works through its defiance of tradition.

Within the academy, the term has gradually entered into the parlance of opera and music scholars since the late 1970s, although its usage does not emerge as commonplace until the late 1990s and 2000s. Since that time, specialists have also addressed the topic directly, with similarly varied reactions. David Levin's 2006 monograph, *Unsettling Opera*, is essentially dedicated to the topic, although he is more concerned with demonstrating the value of analyzing

⁴⁰⁴ Can this "marriage" be saved?" by Poison Ivy | 2:35 pm | Oct 27, 2012; Parterre Box: <http://parterre.com/2012/10/27/can-this-marriage-be-saved/#more-26957>

⁴⁰⁵ "Tosca" at the Séance," Patrick Clement James | 12:53 pm | Jan 21, 2016. Parterre Box: <http://parterre.com/2016/01/21/tosca-at-the-seance/#more-43693>

“performance texts.” All of the productions he analyzed can be counted as *Regietheater*, and he certainly emphasizes the value of staging critical operatic readings, although he rarely uses the term directly. Offering a contrasting perspective from within American musicology is the outspoken and seemingly traditional perspective of Philip Gossett, whose book *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*, foregrounds the subjects “arrival” within mainstream opera scholarship. Gossett provides a brief definition of *Regietheater* and mentions Felsenstein, Kupfer, Friedrich, Neuenfels, and Berghaus by name, also giving a nod to the Frankfurt opera of the Gielen Era as an important site of the trend. Nonetheless, it is clear that Gossett’s chief scholarly concern remains ‘the spirit of why Verdi created his operas;’ and he continues to prioritize the matter of compositional intent over the utility and validity of alternative readings.⁴⁰⁶

By contrast, Levin focuses on several *Regietheater* productions as part of his discussions of “performance texts”, and he largely espouses a supportive slant towards recent stagings—or at least to the ones analyzed in his book, productions that he claims have largely “illuminated and clarified the piece’s dramaturgical stakes” as they critically foreground thematic elements of the original works through novel conceptual apparatus and atypical production values.⁴⁰⁷ *Unsettling Opera* has clearly established support for novel re-readings of canonized opera texts and has stimulated the lively scholarly dialogue about critical contemporary approaches to opera production (although this still primarily concerns German stagings.) His view has come to be an authoritative voice on the subject within opera studies, and other scholars have fallen his lead. For example, Ulrich Müller’s 2014 article on *Regietheater* for the *Oxford History of Opera*

⁴⁰⁶ Gossett, 480 & 483.

⁴⁰⁷ Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, xii

defines *Regietheater* as “reinterpretations, reconstructions, and stagings of subtexts by directors of the last few decades.”⁴⁰⁸ As Müller concludes his discussion, he quotes an observation made a decade prior by Levin that highlights the complexities of considering contemporary productions with controversial production values, which Müller equates with the term *Regietheater*: “Productions that look new are not necessarily strong; a traditional-looking production is not necessarily reactionary.”⁴⁰⁹

In Germany, by contrast, the presence of *Regietheater* in opera is taken less controversially. As Paul Chaikin has explained of the Berlin’s Staatsoper, “experimental productions are common, conventional *mise en scène* is rare, and the audience is acclimated to this arrangement.”⁴¹⁰ Yet responses to experimental approaches are still sometimes mixed, a point that finds support in a demographic study of audiences at Berlin’s Staatsoper, as explained by Chaikin:

The audience is also divided about qualities that might connote avant-garde production values. The words “surprising” and “adventurous” [experimentierfreudig] generate lukewarm responses, while “contemporary” and “modern” garner equal amounts of enthusiasm, ambivalence and disapproval.⁴¹¹

The essential distinction between the contrasting reception of *Regietheater* by German- and English-speaking audiences stems from its simple acceptance in Germany as a cultural given. As Jürgen Schläder has characterized, “For twenty years, advanced *Regietheater* has

⁴⁰⁸ Ulrich Müller, “Regietheater/Director’s Theater,” in *Oxford Handbook of Opera*, edited by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 592.

⁴⁰⁹ Levin, “Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading,” 52. Quoted in Müller, 593.

⁴¹⁰ Chaikin, 113. Original demographic study: Jürgen Tauchnitz, et al., “Publikum im Rampenlicht” (2005).

⁴¹¹ Chaikin, 112.

staged interpretive accents, above all through the visual clarifications of musical dramas.⁴¹² Yet the deep penetration of the concept in German discourse is best observed in more oblique references, which pervasively allude to the director-driven style as a simple matter of fact.

Consider Carl Dahlhaus's reference to the *Regietheater* when discussing Wagner:

Wagner...proposed that the theatrical event was not merely a means of presenting a work of art whose substance resides in a musico-literary text, but itself constituted the work of art, with literature and music serving as handmaidens. This claim entailed nothing less than an aesthetic revolution... Wagner was able to persuade an audience that took its cues from the cultured classes to identify drama—the highest species of art following the demise of the verse epic—with a transitory theatrical event, so that “appearance” was declared to be “essence.” The impact of this historical process can scarcely be overestimated. (One of its upshots in our century is *Regietheater*, or “stage director’s theater,” even if the proponents of this principle show little awareness that it originated with Wagner.)⁴¹³

Despite the presence of *Regietheater* as a given—indeed, even a contemporary norm—for German opera production of the late 20th century, as the above quotation indicates, scholars like Stephan Mösch still assert that “the unfortunately named ‘Regietheater’ takes on a central role in the endless discussion of tradition and renewal in *Musiktheater*,” in ways that reveal anxiety and tension over the potential destruction of the canon.⁴¹⁴ Indeed, the copious discussion of the topic that permeates the discourse on opera in both German and English-speaking spheres is consistently laced with a subtle thread of tension. That fact is also clear from an interesting

⁴¹² Jürgen Schläder, “Vorwort” in *Oper Macht Theater Bilder: Neue Wirklichkeiten des Regietheaters*. (Berlin: Henschel, 2006), 8. [Seit 20 Jahren setzt das avancierte Regietheater interpretatorische Akzente vor allem durch visuelle Deutungen der musikalischen Dramen.] Translation mine.

⁴¹³ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, translated by J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 196

⁴¹⁴ Mösch, 218. [Das unglücklicherweise so genannte Regietheater nimmt in der Dauerdiskussion um Tradition und Erneuerung im Musiktheater eine zentrale Rolle ein.] Translation mine.

contribution that has been widely read in German scholarly and opera-industry circles, as well as in English-language opera studies: Barbara Beyer's *Warum Oper?*⁴¹⁵ This collection of interviews with prominent contemporary (and many controversial) directors associated with *Regietheater*, such as Calixto Bieito, Hans Neuenfels, and Peter Konwitschny, was undertaken with the goal of "illuminating the way to a novel, current decoding of opera from multiple perspectives, off the well-beaten path of reception."⁴¹⁶ Beyer's interviews, and her goals and the perspectives of various directors, as well, have influenced understandings of *Regietheater* significantly on both sides of the Atlantic; not only has the collection has been widely disseminated in both German scholarly and industry circles that concern themselves with opera, but translated excerpts from this important collection of interviews were also published in the *Opera Quarterly* in 2011.

In Albrecht Puhmann's introduction to Beyer's interviews, he echoes a sentiment that has been proposed by Beyer and several others: that the 1975 publication of a history of the Kroll Oper by Hans Curjel, *Experiment Krolloper, 1927- 1931*, served as a call-to-arms to renew operas quest against what Germans call the "culinary narcotic" (of conventional and complacent art), echoed loudly by the Marxist political philosopher Ernst Bloch, and *Zeit* critic Hans-Josef Herbort. Puhmann continues to explain that the Oper Frankfurt's Michael Gielen and Klaus

⁴¹⁵ Barbara Beyer, *Warum Oper?: Gespräche mit Opernregisseuren* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2005). Excerpts from this collection can be found in „Interviews with Contemporary Opera Directors, Selected from Barbara Beyer's *Warum Oper? Gespräche mit Opernregisseuren* (2005),” Barbara Beyer, Gundula Kreuzer, Paul Chaikin, *The Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2-3, (Spring-Summer 2011), :307-317.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid,16. [Dieses Buch beleuchtet aus vielen unterschiedlichen Blickwinkeln die Frage nach den Wegen zu einer neuen, aktuellen Dechiffrierung der Oper, jenseits der ausgetretenen Pfade der Rezeption.] Translation mine.

Zehelein finally brought the aims of the Kroll to fruition. Furthermore, he makes an extraordinarily grand claim: that “the history of opera became their interpretation,” and it included “an almost mystical belief in innovation... Not only the (artwork) itself is original, but also the manner of reading that brought about the performance.”⁴¹⁷ With this succinct explanation, Puhmann not swiftly and directly attributes the origin of today’s *Regietheater* to the Oper Frankfurt of the Gielen Era, as is customarily done within German musicology customarily, but he also provides an excellent summation of the features most typically attributed to *Regietheater*.

As definitive and useful as Puhmann’s comments are, Stephen Mösch’s earlier observations hint at the tensions that many so-called *Regietheater* productions continue to raise in modern Germany, despite the fact that the style is reasonably well accepted. Furthermore, Mösch’s commentary continues on to provide an even more revealing perspective, and another that has also been acknowledged within the German discourse on *Regietheater*: “At the present time, [*Regietheater*] presents itself in extremely different manifestations that make it nearly impossible to generalize about it.”⁴¹⁸

Conclusion: Beyond “*Regietheater*”

Despite the vagaries of the term, references to *Regietheater* have become extraordinarily pervasive in the modern discourses on opera, to the extent that the term usually appears without further qualification. Hardly a conversation about contemporary opera production takes place

⁴¹⁷ Puhmann, “Vorwart,” in *Warum Oper?*, 8

⁴¹⁸ Mösch, 218. [Es präsentiert sich derzeit in extreme unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen, die es nahezu unmöglich machen, darüber allgemein zu sprechen.] Translation mine.

that does not invoke the term. Despite its widespread usage, however, the term is plagued by imprecise connotations and enlisted polemically. Furthermore, I believe that the lack of uniformity (and sometimes blatant disagreement) in applications of the term and the passions aroused by its mention inhibit the discussion of issues that would prove more fruitful to gaining an understanding of the present-day opera industry.

Indeed, the more I consider *Regietheater*, the more troublesome the term becomes. Each chapter of this dissertation has been left with some hesitancy about the term's applicability to the production featured there; the analyses have all cast doubt on the usefulness of the term for discussion of the most interesting factors about each of those readings. Perhaps there term would be less problematic if the connotation of *Regietheater* was more linguistically accurate, with emphasis on "Regie" (direction), rather than the "Regisseur/in" (director.) But definitions are stubborn and ingrained, and the term is used so pervasively that it seems unlikely that the connotation can be changed. Moreover, based on the observations and conclusions about the productions studied in this dissertation, it seems that ongoing exploration and study of opera production in the 21st century would simply be better served by pursuing subjects beyond *Regietheater*.

Some of the most intriguing questions raised by the "experimental" operas analyzed in this dissertation concern the growing presence of unconventionally configured performance spaces and nontraditional venues, and the multiple ways in which the operatic repertory is being expanded. The second half of this dissertation has demonstrated the recurrent presence of these elements in 21st century productions—and yet their discussion has no clear links to the discourse on *Regietheater* so prevalent in scholarship and the critical media. I believe that these questions

are far more useful to consider, and that their exploration has the potential to reveal intriguing patterns in the contemporary industry. Other significant observations about contemporary productions have been raised in this dissertation, as well, including the matter of collective authorship of performance texts in the extraordinarily collaborative cultural form that is opera. Yet this idea seems inherently paradoxical to the most fundamental assumption about *Regietheater*, the primacy of the director's authorial role, and with that discourse so dominant, consideration of that collaborative process is all but precluded. And a handful of other observations elicited from the analyses of this dissertation also beg further explorations: the destabilization and reorganization of the traditional performance contexts and styles is another absorbing subject, as are stagings that meld old and new musical styles and performance techniques. I believe it is these sorts of questions that demand scholarly investigation, and this dissertation is a call for scholarship to move beyond discussions of *Regietheater* to address these intriguing, relevant topics. Far afield from the fixation on the director so often exhibited in contemporary discourses about opera, these topics have potential to reveal important observations about opera production in the 21st century.

The priority of these issues over a simplistic preoccupation with the subject of *Regietheater* has emerged simply from the analyses I have undertaken in this dissertation: a detailed case study of the Oper Frankfurt from behind the scenes since 1979. In the preceding chapters, this company has been shown to be a nexus of an experimental and innovative approach to staging opera in the 1980s, and the house's work in the 21st century has also demonstrated a similar commitment to creating progressive, critical, and sometimes provocative productions today. Through this detailed case study, I have demonstrated the value in analyzing

opera productions in a way that attends to creative and administrative matters as much as the eventual artistic elements experienced by audiences who view the piece. By considering the idiosyncrasies of their creative and performance contexts, a number of new and exciting questions have been uncovered for further investigation. Furthermore, the chance to examine the growth and changes between two different recent eras at the Oper Frankfurt has provided the chance to consider the larger changes in the global opera industry in the early years of the 21st century. With luck, these observations will advance further dialogue on contemporary opera beyond *Regietheater* as future scholarship explores the noteworthy patterns beginning to emerge in 21st century opera production.

**Appendix A:
Malte Krasting Interviews
Interview #1, June 14, 2010**

(conversation about equipment setup)

MK: So, the questions was...
are there a set number of pieces per year?

CEC: Yes, like, a fixed number?

MK: Currently it's eight premieres in the main theater.

CEC: Mm-hm?

MK: Usually one of which is a co-production
with various different other theaters in the league of Madrid...
what else, Amsterdam... major opera houses of the world.

CEC: And in that case,
the co-production would play both here and there?

MK: Mm-huh (*yes. swallows.*)
And it varies sometimes,
the premiere takes place at the co-producing theater, or here.

CEC: Ok.

MK: In the case of *Medea*, the premiere has been in Vienna, at the state opera,
it's going to be presented here at the beginning of next season,
and it's been the other way around more often than this.
It's more often that we try to be the *prima noctis* for the new stagings.
So that's the eight premieres on the main stage,
then we have three productions on the Bockenheimer Depot.

CEC: Ok, hm.
How long has that space been there,
being used by the company?

MK: As far as I know, about fifteen years. Ten years, fifteen years?
I'm not very sure.

CEC: It's ok, approximately.

It doesn't need to be exact.
I'm just getting a general sense.

MK: There are two concertanti performances.

CEC: Mm hmm?

MK: Usually played twice each. In the Alte Oper.

CEC: Ah, ok.

We'll come back to this at some point.
Later I'd love for you to tell me more about the relationship
between what happens at the Alte Oper and here,
but we'll come back to that.

MK: Ok. So and then, there are some children's operas,
as you know, and most of the seasons,
there's one or two smaller scale projects, like this *Pimpinone*.
This new space has just been opened by the *Schauspielhaus* (Theater building.)
They use it quite often, this little stage, and it's a first for us to be there.

CEC: Yes, it's a nice kind of
contained space, and for...

MK: And we've been lacking that sort of studio atmosphere.
because the Depot itself is quite huge.
About 400 people, and you need something between the foyer and the Depot.
And this fits the space completely.

CEC: Yes, it allows access, it
seems to me, to different sorts of pieces,
or different sorts of treatment, anyway.

MK: And the acoustics are great!

CEC: Yes, yes!

MK: I was so surprised.

CEC: Yes, I mean, apart
from my own language skills,
I could understand everything today! (*laughs*)
But I didn't have trouble! So it was ok.
Great, so... em, oh
I wanted to ask about *Wiederaufnahme* (repeat productions).
How many are happening roughly,
and also, how is it decided, which ones, um, are coming back?

MK: If I'm not mistaken,
it's like sixteen, so a little more than the premieres.

CEC: No, that's about double, eh?
Well, I guess,
not quite with the concertanti.

MK: Or just about...
a little less than fifteen, maybe. I should have counted.

CEC: Approximately, that's ok.

MK: How is it decided?
It's... if people are still coming, we try to play it again?

CEC: So something to do with ticket sales?

MK: It has to do with ticket sales, it has to do with...
it rarely happens that we only play a production for one series.
even with the rarities like *L'Oracolo / Le Villi*,
there's a *Wiederaufnahme* scheduled, and that won't be sold out, that we know already,
but we still do it, because, it's a valued production, we want to show again...

CEC: do you always have the same performers
coming back?

MK: No, no, that's another point.
There's also a financial risk, and an artistic decision,
if you have guest singers in the first series,
we try to replace them with ensemble singers for the *Wiederaufnahme*,
which has a double advantage, because we save money, and the singers have the opportunity to
sing great roles.
And Loebe always tries to give every singer in the ensemble the opportunity to try something
out, to sing their first Fiordiligi...
The downside is, of course, you have to be careful, about the integrity of the production. Most
directors work specifically for a specific cast.

CEC: Ah, mmm-hm.

MK: And it inevitable loses some sort of quality,
it may gain, but uh, you don't know that.

CEC: Right, or, some aspect
is, at least... changed.

MK: Yes.

CEC: Because of what the different
performers bring.

MK: Like, um, say, Christoph Loy,

CEC: Mm-hm?

MK: He depends upon the... the body language of his performers,
and to, um, it's an evolution between him and the singers,
and... (if) someone has to reproduce that,
it's not going to be quite as organic and natural.
And that's up to the assistant director just to find the best way.

CEC: So when the directors
re-stage the piece—
presumably it's not the same director again?
it's an assistant or something like that?

MK: Almost always! An assistant.

CEC: Right. And then it's—
would you say that the process is then
somehow less creative than the original,
that it's a re-mapping of the original piece?

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: Ok.

MK: It depends on the creativity of the director, of the assistant,
to create an atmosphere like it were all new, but everybody knows it's not.
So, you've got the video, you've got all notes, and... you have a lot less time.
You have about ten days, two weeks maximum,
for a production, like say, *Billy Budd*.
That was a very... that was not usual.

CEC: And it still seemed to me,
from watching the process,
I could see how much tighter it was, in rehearsals,
in how fast it went, through the (production) stages.
(pause)

Can you think—ahem, this is interesting to me—can you
think of any specific examples
where you saw both the premiere and then a restaging,
and you can think of a particular way, or a particular example, maybe with a certain singer or
person in the production
where you... you could describe that different sort of process happening?
(laughs.)

That was a fuzzy question, sorry!

MK: Due to time restrictions, and stuff,
I don't... don't attend those sort of rehearsals as much.

CEC: Too much, ok.

MK: But... (waits, thinks)
I know that in *Cosi fan Tutte*,
it seemed to me almost impossible to do it with a different cast,
and ... Christoph Loy felt the same way.
And he had a conversation with Bernd Loebe
when he learned that in the first *Wiederaufnahme* series was supposed to be three new singers
and only three left from the original cast,
and he then **renegotiated** that... (laughs)

CEC: (*laughs*) So you did have more returners, ok.

MK: There were only two new in the first series... but when it was last shown here, I think it was only two left, and it has lost a lot, it has lost a lot, for instance, the “Don Alfonso” was Johannes Martin Kränzle, I don’t know if you’ve seen him,

CEC: Yes.

MK: He’s tall, slender

CEC: Yes, I think I’m visualizing the right person-

MK: Was wearing a rather silly white suit yesterday,

CEC: Mm-hm! Yes. (*laugh*)

MK: He has grey curly hair, he has a very sharp, very mysterious feel as “Don Alfonso”. And in the *Wiederaufnahme* we had Simon Bailey, and he is an athlete, he is strong, he is much shorter, um, and there was no way to tell Simon to do what Martin had done! So he had to be a different Alfonso, and it changed the whole web of relations, and I couldn’t really... (pause) it was, it was not right. It was not right to do that, that’s what I feel... but you have to compromise.

CEC: Well, and, it becomes a different piece, then? It does become a different piece.

That’s interesting.

it’s helpful for me, also, to know, what these people look like, and I do. And I can imagine, it would be differently played, they are **so** physically different.

MK: If this Kränzle “Alfonso”, who has a lot of, subcutaneous erotic desires and there’s some tension between him and “Despina,” of course, and there’s... you haven’t seen it?

CEC: No, no. I haven’t.

MK: There’s a white space, just from here to there.

(*Motions approximately nine feet to the wall*)

There’s a wall, all white, and um, the side walls could move, so that instead of one room there could be two rooms, or even three rooms, onstage. Anyway, in a duet with Despina, he sits on the floor, or slowly (*motions*).

CEC: He slides down the wall.

MK: Yes, goes down, and tries to play with her with his foot, if he... he barely can hold himself back, and that's, that's Martin Kränzle, he's eh...
And if Simon does it, it's so much more physical!
he could just grab her, and do with her whatever he wants.

CEC: Right, right.

MK: And Martin Kränzle's "Alfonso"
simply wouldn't do that.

CEC: He'd do something different.

MK: So that changed the color and the temperature of the scene.

CEC: Mm-hm.

MK: Other recasts, in the first *Wiederaufnahme*, who's a brilliant, brilliant singer. (*pause*) Much better tenor than the first one....
and in the end he did quite a good job, but...
up to the dress rehearsal, I was mortified, he just jokes around, he does not remember... the cues.

CEC: Ah! Ok...

MK: Just jokes around in rehearsals, isn't focused, is only focused on singing, and only on singing, and only on his role.... he's a nice guy!
He's a composer as well! He's studying the trombone, he's brilliant pianist, but he's that sort of singer who only knows his part!
and is surprised when he learns how the piece actually ends, because he wasn't aware of that, he had only remembered his last encounter with that specific...
in *Clemenza di Tito*... he thought up till the end that he would marry "Servilia"!

CEC: (*giggle*)

MK: (*laughs too*). So it escaped him, this tension.

CEC: Wow, whoops! Yes.

MK: What other productions? have you seen the *Don Carlo*?

CEC: Yes, I saw the *Don Carlo*.

MK: Oh I have very mixed feelings about that! I was...

CEC: Oh?

MK: Anyway, I think I'm a little...
(*gestures to question list*)

CEC: Yes, yes, thank you.

We did get a little off, but this is all really helpful actually...
the more I understand how things work,
and having some clear examples of what you mean,
the better I can situate everything in my mind...
and if we don't finish today, we don't finish today!

MK: We won't! (*laughing*)

CEC: (*agreeing*) I know, we won't! (*laughs*)

MK: But in *Don Carlo* there were some parts,
Carlo himself, was, almost only the basic blocking was left,
and the rest is ... whatever it is...
I like the guy, but this production leaves so much space
for the singers to do everything that's awful, that's bad tradition,
um, things that were painful for me to see.
The "Philip", the king, is the same as in the premiere, and he's a miracle, for me.

CEC: Uh-huh.

You said, there's so much room for the singers...
I don't remember exactly how you just worded it...
but you mean, because it's not so strictly defined,
that's what you mean?

MK: It never was, really.
A thorough staging for the persons, for the characters.
It's not a staging, it's an arrangement, I think.
Very effective in many ways, but David McVicar wasn't in good shape, I think.
He spent so much time organizing his bloody guards.

CEC: that he didn't attend to main characters?

MK: That he lost what it's about really...
It's not about marching in the same direction.

CEC: Mm-hmm.

(MK *nods, finished*)

(*pause*)

CEC: Ok, then we'll move on from there!

MK: Who makes the decisions?

CEC: So, we're still on programming, and planning!

MK: Mm-hm.

CEC: Who would you say is making the bulk of these decisions. You can give me names, or job descriptions.

MK: It's Bernd Loebe bottom line.

In this house, it's Bernd Loebe (*spells out*)

(*pause*) Of course, he has some people who help him plan it, and tell him if it's not possible, but he's been long enough in the business, so that would be the next person he speaks with is Almut Hein (*spells out*)

CEC: Mm-hhm. (*writing*)

Ok. And how far in advance is this taking place?

MK: The new productions, I would say, four years, (*pause*.)

The *Wiederaufnahme* is two years or shorter.

CEC: Two years or shorter.

Um, ok. so, in your opinion,

em, and from what you see and what you hear discussed why is OperFrankfurt a repertoire house?

Because I know that's gone back and forth a couple of times in the last few decades.

MK: Once.

CEC: In the nineties.

Why was that change made?

And why was it made back? That's part A.

And part B: What do you personally think are the advantages?

MK: It's been a repertoire house because that was... just the way it was!

And you can achieve a much higher quality both musically and scenically if you play a production in a row, like every other or every third night, the same piece.

And in between, time to rest, or the next piece is being prepared.

so the quality can be higher. (*silence*)

But on the other hand, the audience has more choice if you do a repertoire system, you have three different pieces each week, you can make a more economic use of the hired people.

CEC: Through all departments?
or do you just mean singers?

MK: In all departments! Also the orchestra. And choir!

If you play... a Mozart opera for three weeks,

almost half of the orchestra is walking around.

That's also a reason why we don't have fixed... casting?

Do you say "casting" for an orchestra?

CEC: I think I would say "fixed seating?"

MK: Fixed seating.

CEC: Positions?

MK: Positions,
but also the position may change, so we have ten violins.

CEC: Yes.

MK: And they rotate.

CEC: Ok, so fixed seat assignments, I would say,
for the orchestra

MK: Ok. we don't have that,
because we want to use everyone equally,
and you couldn't do that if you had fixed assignment,
those musicians would be absorbed by one production and couldn't be used by another, because
they only have ten duties per week.

CEC: Mm-hm. Duties. Or "calls," maybe.
Do you happen to know the history, of why the
change was made? to do a season-style house for a while?

MK: I think that was Paolo Carignani's wish.
To achieve that equality and thus attract maybe an audience.
Not only from audience, but also internationally, but it didn't work!
I think the low point was 120 performances a year.
And we have at least doubled it again.

CEC: Yes?

MK: Sorry... you can only play a much lesser evening,
and you have less variety, and you lose a lot of money.
Of course, to strike down and rebuild the stagings also takes a lot of time and manpower,
but we have those people anyway, so we can use them.
Rather than let them go and hire them only for one production.

CEC: Well, some houses do operate that way.
I mean, some of the questions in my mind,
when I have sung in houses in the United States, it's been in the *Stagione* system.
And so, for me, as I understand how contracting usually works,
as I've experienced it, it's in a very different sort of arrangement
than I think you must have here.

But it sounds like what you're saying is, this arrangement allows you to make more economical
use of the people that you have? Yes?

MK: Mm. Yes. (*nodding*)

CEC: They're doing more work on a more regular basis,
is that what you're saying? Yes?

MK: Mm-hm.
Of course, if you closed Oper Frankfurt and opened a new one,
without permanent orchestra and stuff,
you could do it the American way, the *stagione* way,

which is of course ... it's "leaner"...

CEC: oh, I'm not arguing for it!
I'm just curious.

MK: The change in the nineties was half-baked.

CEC: Ha! (*laughing*)

MK: You cannot turn the OF into a *stagione* house
without having like decades of transitional phases.

CEC: Right, because the whole
house is set up...

MK: The orchestra, you cannot fire anyone from the orchestra,
they have permanent contracts for life!

CEC: Ok, hang on!
This is good.

I want to turn my page because I think we're actually getting onto another topic
that I really want to talk about, this is some of how ...
let me see if I can find it...
(*pause, turning pages.*)

CEC: Well, it's kind-of under singers.
Well, it's scattered. Let's go back to "Employees,"
which is on the bottom of the first page.

MK: Ok! (*turning pages.*)

CEC: So, you were just telling me about the orchestra.
Tell me more about hiring the orchestra, and what they're doing.

MK: If a position opens up, someone retires or leaves
for another orchestra or to become a professor,
which has happened a lot, with a very young woodwind players
—actually, a clarinet player and the principal oboe player, both are now professors—
so...a position opens up, it will be advertised in the usual magazine, *Das Orchester*,
people send in applications, there is the orchestra director,
and members of the orchestra who make a first choice,
then invite a number of people to play...some ... *Vorspiel*?

CEC: *Ja, klar.* (Yes, of course) "Audition."

MK: Audition. um I think there are up to three rounds,
first would be probably classical concert ... I mean, you know how this operates.

CEC: Yes, I know how this works.
This is fine, you don't have to tell me that.

MK: But this is interesting.
You decide to take someone, then a one-year trial starts.
Then after this year, the whole orchestra votes yes or no.

CEC: Wow. (*deep breath in.*)
How, um, community oriented.

MK: They do so, because, if it's yes, it means,
this person will be there for the rest of his or her life,
and you have to cope with him or her.
So you have to know.... that ... it works.

CEC: That there's a good dynamic, of course!
It's an ensemble.

MK: so this year is a lot of stress, but orchestra playing is always stress,
and you have to... (*dismisses it with his hand.*) It's similar in the chorus...

CEC: Ok, let's pause that just a second.
That's great, I want to ask you more question about the orchestra,
then we'll come back to the chorus.
And I'm going to slow down! Sorry, I talk fast. (*laughing!*)

MK: No, no!

CEC: Thank you, by the way, for doing this with me in English.
Um, so, with the orchestra, um, I
think that I read, so, this is the *Museumorchester*, right?

MK: Yes, that's a strange thing.

CEC: Are they shared with someone else?

MK: We're very sorry about this confusing... um...
about like, 200 years ago, some Frankfurt citizens
formed a society to promote culture, the art,
and they called themselves the *Museumsgesellschaft*.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And not museum because of museum as in the current day sense of museum,
but because of the muses, so the **original** meaning.

CEC: Aha! so "museum,"
clear, ok!

MK: So they started organizing concerts,
and invited chamber musicians, even orchestras,
and at some point, an opera was formed,
and they were shared in a way

CEC: Are they working for anyone else today,
other than OF?

MK: No.

The collaboration is such that the *Museumsgesellschaft* still exists,
and organizes symphony concerts and chamber music as well,

but that's um...what's between us. Those symphony concerts are called the *Museumskonzerte* (museum concerts), still, and they hire our orchestra for a very reduced price, and I think it's ten concerts per season, and it was still called **Museumsorchester** until the last year, because of this tradition.

CEC: Oh, only this year, it's not called this anymore?

MK: it's just been renamed to "Frankfurter Opern und Museums Orchester"
Even more complicated,
but important to point out
that this is mainly the "Opernorchester" (Opera Orchestra)

CEC: But the name somehow gives continuity with the past and that's valued. it seems?

MK: Yes. we've sometimes...
think about organizing our series of symphony concerts,
which would be better for the integrity of the Oper Frankfurt's offering.

CEC: Do you...?

MK: Because we have restricted access to the concert planning of the *Museumsgesellschaft*.
Of course, (conductor) Sebastian Weigle shares the general post as music director or *Kunstlerische Leiter* (artistic director) of the *Museumsgesellschaft*.
Nothing will be decided against his expressed wish, but we cannot like, what we're trying with the chamber music, to make tight connections between the opera performances and the rest of the problem, that's the role of the chamber music series.
it's getting better, I think, or it's getting more interesting..

CEC: What is? I'm sorry, what aspect?

MK: The cooperation, in planning,

CEC: aha, ok.

MK: Like, you could do a Berlioz concert.
Accompanying the Berlioz premiere.

CEC: Oh, right.

(pause)

CEC: Ok, good.

So...then let's flip to the chorus, since you made that comparison a little while back, from how the orchestra is hired to the chorus is working, so they're also a permanent ensemble? Approximately how many?

Can you give me the basic overview,
how many in each voice part, are they **all** permanent,
are there extras?

MK: I think it's roughly eighty.

CEC: Ok, so about twenty (per part).
And they're lifetime?
And they also have this one year trial?

MK: Yes, yes. (*pause.*)
I'm pretty sure about that, but I should check.

CEC: Ok,
since we have a chance to follow up, that would be great.
You can let me know later.

MK: Can I borrow your pen?

CEC: Yes, sure, just twist... there you go.
And do you sometimes hire extra chorus, if you need more choristers?
And you also have um, what are they called here? I can't remember.
Supernumeraries, we call them, extras.

MK: *Statisten!* (*laughs*) "numbers."

CEC: *Statisten!* number! (*laughs*) exactly.
Well, supernumerary is the same thing,
so it's a horrible word... (*laugh.*)

MK: There are, both in the orchestra and in the chorus,
we have one year contracts, *Praktitantenstellen*.

CEC: Uh-huh. ok!

MK: Parental leave placements? (*questioning*)

CEC: Ja, that would be called
"Maternity leave" placements.
Except that's a difference between the US and Germany,
in the US, usually women only get it, mostly.

MK: Ha.

CEC: Politics.

MK: Yes, always, some!
The extras are always hired for a specific production.
There's a list, that Herr Schaffler is organizing,
then there's an audition for the director, then you go ahead.

CEC: Is there a set audition time
every year for choristers?
Well, actually, wait, I guess not, since I guess they're permanent,
so you don't have a whole lot of places open up too frequently.
Again, this is the difference between what I'm used to with *Stagione*...

MK: Mm-hm.

CEC: And actually, in my experience,
we're always hired in a show-by-show basis,
um, for Comprimario and Chorus.
Does "comprimario" as a term get used here?

MK: It's not used, but people would know...

CEC: So, smaller roles done by members of the company.

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: So, members of the company, the singers.
Of course, there's the chorus, and then,
is there, is it considered a separate ensemble,
the people that are doing the lead roles, that are not hired from outside,
like Frau (Alice) Coote (*laugh*)

MK: Mm-hm.

CEC: Who comes in, people who are appearing?

MK: The people from the company who sing lead roles,
or the people who sing smaller roles?

CEC: Well, how about you tell me about what's here, both.
Let's start with that!

MK: There's no formal distinction. But of course there is.

CEC: But there is an ensemble, and a chorus,
and they are treated as two separate...

MK: Oh, yes, that! No, no,
the soloist ensemble is completely different from the chorus ensemble.
Even if the chorus singers sometimes sing small parts.

CEC: Ok. these are the comprimario roles,
you're talking about.

MK: No, I understand, I thought you meant...

CEC: It's ok, it's my fault,
I kind of asked you two questions at the same time.

MK: They would then
conduct separate auditions for those parts,

CEC: Right. even from within the group that already
exists...they would?

MK: I don't think there is a group inside the chorus...
I think, if a role opens up, the chorus director would say.....

CEC: Would say, we're having auditions?

MK: Yes, maybe would ask some singer specifically,
or just hold an audition, for anyone who wants to try it.

CEC: And in that case,
is there an additional contract?

MK: Yes. Some additional fee.

CEC: But then there is probably
some additional paperwork drawn up
for that production then...

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: Ok, yes.

What I'm trying to organize in my mind is,
who's in a sort of constant state of one-sort of employment, all the time,
and then what's revolving, production to production to production.
So, we'll use Frau Coote as an example, since she's here...

MK: Yes.

CEC: She has a distinct contract for a period of time
to come do a certain number of performances of this piece.
She is not a member of the ensemble.

MK: Yes.

CEC: And then some people have a
contract as an ensemble soloist,
and then some people have a contract as a chorister,
and then on a production-by-production basis,
they could get an additional short-term addition of some sort.

MK: yes, that's the basic three groups.
But the basic soloist group is also, is much more,
phhh. How do I say that? But the soloist group is not as easy as that.
Because on paper they're all equal,
but, as we say, "some are more equal than others"

CEC: "... than others"
(laughs)
you've read *Animal Farm*!

(both speak at the same time)

MK: (laughs) Yes! but it's sunk into German, too... (pause)
Because some of those soloists do have, you could have a contract just as a tenor,
and technically, we could cast him as any tenor role there is.
Or it could say, "tenore buffo" or *Heldentenor*.

CEC: Mm. Clear.

MK: But if you use Mr. whoever as the *Heldentenor*,
then you couldn't use him as the servant,
when you need a tenor servant, and you have him at hand.

You could also put specific dates or parts or productions in these contracts. So that an ensemble member, like Michael Norge, knows he has two months at the beginning of the season, then he has sung two months in Oslo, and “Escamillo” in Baden-Baden, and “Count Luna” in Munich, and he’s been away for almost half a year.

CEC: Yes, ok.

MK: And... (pause)

CEC: and that’s clearly allowed, with the ensemble members?

MK: That’s allowed, but that has to be negotiated, beforehand.

CEC: Ah, ok.

MK: And that is... he’s one of the very equal ones..

CEC: (*laughing*)

MK: No, he’s a great talent, and Loebe wanted to keep him for at least one more season, but could only do so with allowing him those absences.

CEC: This is making more sense, thank you. I don’t know what your time schedule is like tonight, but we’re at about ten minutes before seven.
(*pause*)

I’d say, shall we wrap up soon?

MK: Yes, let’s wrap up soon, I have to find my mother and take her upstairs...

CEC: oh, lovely that your mother’s here
(*pause*)

My goodness, we really only talked about singers in that category tonight. But maybe you could relate that system to the other creative departments?
So, stagecraft,

MK: Yes, stage design, and costume design.

CEC: Oh, and even, makeup, I didn’t include that on the list.

MK: No... makeup artists are permanent employees, as well as the stagecraft.

CEC: (*writing*) I’m sorry, and... what did you say about costume?

MK: Designers are guest artists, but everything below that—the assistant level, and the actual tailors—are permanent members.

CEC: Ok, good. So we’ve talked about... (*searching*).. quite a lot

MK: Dramaturgy, stage direction...

CEC: I think I already have a sense of dramaturgy at this point, from working with you all,

MK: Good. you know, formally we have the same contracts as the singers, which involves those kind of silly rules that we have to apply for a holiday or even if we want to leave the city.

CEC: Really, ok...?

MK: The singers are not allowed to leave the city without written consent.

CEC: Do you know why that is?

MK: Yes, I know! In the early days, of German repertory system, you would have an ensemble cast, and they would be much more flexible in planning, so they could change tomorrow's performance.

CEC: so suddenly, tomorrow, Despina is Zerlina and rather than hiring an understudy for her, somebody else from the company knows the role and sings it.

MK: Exactly.

CEC: understood, ok.

MK: Or in the case of sickness, or just the one piece doesn't sell,

CEC: so we throw her onstage, because she made more money last week

MK: There. And we don't plan like that anymore, but the rule still exists...and we have that contract it doesn't make sense for dramaturgs, but it's just that one contract.

CEC: Tradition, too?

MK: Yes, definitely. *(pause)*
Bühnenbild (stage designers) are usually guest artists as well,

CEC: Oh, ok... *(writing)*

MK: You could add Light Design,

CEC: Aah, I forgot that, thank you!
Also guest?

MK: Yes, but we rarely hire guest light designers because we have, our technical director is a light designer himself, and we have some masters, so we... so Loebe doesn't want to pay money for something he has somewhere else.

CEC: Ok, I see. Good. *(pause)*

In terms of other administrative staff that exists,
I'm trying to get out on the table who else there is. We've talked about directors.
I guess there's also *Betriebsbüro*? (business office)

And I, that's more of a,
just direct administrative capacity. Or, what are they doing?

MK: the *Betriebsbüro*?

they plan everything. The schedule. Rehearsing spaces. They plan where the artists have to be at one time. And of course there's also personnel, and financial administration, on a different floor.

CEC: Of course.

MK: stage managers, *Inspizienten* (stage managers)

(pause)

CEC: *Titeln*

MK: *Übertiteln!* That is being handled by the assistant of the, oh, what's his post? He organizes the children's chorus, and children extras and he also manages the titling, in conjunction with us (*Dramaturgy*)

CEC: Where do the titles come from? They're self made?

MK: We make them, dramaturgy is in charge of preparing them.

CEC: And is there one person?

MK: No, everyone, for his own show.

CEC: Ok. Why don't we stop there, this seems like a good stopping place?

MK: Ja, I think so. and we'll continue.

End of Interview 1

Malte Krasting, Interview #2 June 24, 2010

CEC: So, when last we spoke, let's see, where were we?

Oh, there was a follow-up question, did you have a chance to check on that?

MK: No, I'm sorry, I haven't done that yet.

CEC: Ok, no worries, we still have more time.

I'd love to start off with talking about production planning.
because we haven't done too much of that yet.
What can you tell me about, um, who's involved with that process,
and how decisions are made
for what is programmed each season?

MK: First and foremost, it's the Intendant,
and in this theater especially.

CEC: Is that different than in other places that you've worked?

MK: It's always, a season as a whole is always a sort of compromise of interests.
It could be that the music director is totally influential, and the intendant always tries to engage
good artists, in a way that furthers their interest as well.
For instance he, (Kirill Petrenko) had conducted a Russian opera and there were other pieces he
was interested in, and Tosca was (Petrenko's) suggestion in the first place.
we wouldn't have done a new Tosca so early, if Petrenko hadn't insisted on Tosca

CEC: Ok, I see, so it's a way of
keeping the artists happy in some ways.

MK: In other theaters there might be a more... there might be more discussions.
The dramaturgs could be involved more with the initial ideas.
Here, that would be mostly Mr. Loebe.
The next step which would be to try, if it works out, to think if you have the singers,
and you think about guests, and then to see if it fits in with the...
with the rest of the season. For instance, you cannot do *Meistersinger* well
and other big chorus pieces, you know?

CEC: Because?

MK: Because they would **die!**
or the audience would run away.

CEC: Ah, so it's too much work for the chorus

MK: Yes. It's too much work.
So that's another reason for why we have...
a Baroque opera, or a Mozart piece, something in between...

CEC: I see, so...

MK: So it's not just a stylistic...

CEC: For stylistic variation, but
also, it's about your resources.
Because the style of a Baroque opera
obviously involves so much less personnel?

MK: Right.

CEC: Yes, ok. interesting
I hadn't really thought about it like that before.

but it makes sense.

MK: When it tried to plot my first season,
back in University, someone eventually told me,
ok, you'd be without any audience by the end of the season,
and you would have an orchestra
basically, unable to play an instrument any longer.

CEC: (*laughs*)

MK: One rarity after another! and they were all huge.

CEC: So, it's as much, actually,
what I hear you saying is that
it's as much a practical choice for what can be carried out
with the resources that exist
even more than it's about needing a balance of audiences taste, or ...
(*pause*)

To what extent does that play a role? I'm curious.
The audience's anticipated response.

MK: The first ideas that float around- composers, operas—
might have no connection to what the audience (might) want,
or what (we can) do with our resources.
It's just, what we want to do. I think that is really the first thing.
that leads to, in the end, to the premiere of a certain piece.
and then you try to make it work. to make it interesting.
and you might put as much, as much of your own... interest... into the season

CEC: mm-hm?

MK: As I say, that is the first step.
then, what you have made, maybe you have to water it down a little bit,
but ... (*silence*)

CEC: But that's not a pressing concern, that's coming first,
with your programming, with your artistic...

MK: There is no matrix, which reads:
“big piece without chorus...”

CEC: Ok, there's no template...

MK: Right, you don't just fill it in...
that's not how it works.

CEC: It's more subjective.

MK: Yes. (*pause*) if you want to, for example,
do a *Ring* cycle, then you have... what is it? The first goal already.
And then you can arrange other things, around it.

CEC: Ah, I see.
So you know this one piece is a given, and from, from that,
then you're making artistic choices around that. To balance.

MK: Yes, a couple of things are already set for... 2015.
I mean, just two or three pieces.
And the rest of (the) ideas you have, then, you know,
you can do it in that season, or you have to wait for another one.
Yes? (*looks questioningly*)

CEC: Yes, that's good,
I'm getting a good picture of how that works.

MK: And all those ideas are already connected to...
who would be in charge of the production, or, at least that's the way Mr. Loebe thinks
there are other theaters that um, who think more in a dogmatic way about it,
"this is our program, and then we find the right people to sing."
The good mixture is to know, there is **this** particular singer who can do this role,
like no one else, and this is, we have a time frame, in which we can do it..

CEC: And you're thinking of those singers
mainly from the ensemble, then?

MK: And guests!

CEC: Oh, and guests, as well.

MK: That's why we try to build a relationship...
with prominent guest singers.

CEC: Ok, so they're coming back multiple times
Even if they're not a sort-of permanent member of the ensemble
once you have a relationship with them from one piece,
then that relationship is appreciated,
and it's easier to bring them back

MK: Yes.
And if you... let them be part of the process of choosing, the program!

CEC: That makes 100% sense to me, I even think of...
I think that's relatively common, probably somewhat everywhere,
I think of institutions where I've sung,
and, once I have a relationship with one house, or some concert group,
or director, or something like that,
yes, you do something for them once, and then
something comes up a year later, and they think
"Oh, we already have a relationship with this person, let's ask her."

MK: Yes!

CEC: Makes sense.

MK: I tell you another, ... brick in this wall?...

CEC: Sure, that works! (*smile*)

MK: We have this Liederabend series, that has become a rarity.
very few, I think, music or concert halls,
have a Liederabend series of that scale. Eight big evenings.

CEC: I'm not aware of any others.

MK: We were just talking about it the other day.
Zsolt—my colleague—and I.
I've never been to the Wigmore Hall in London.
It's got a capacity of about 300 people. and we've got a huge hall, which is not full. Loebe uses
that to, to attract very prominent singers.

CEC: Because it gives them an opportunity to concertize.

MK: (*nodding*). and then, you always invite them after the concert for dinner,
and then, he tries to ... (*gestures forward with hand*)...

CEC: Networking!!

MK: Yes! Then you have Anne-Sophie von Otter to sing *Medea* for next season!

CEC: Ah, right!

MK: Which she had recorded and sung, but never, onstage!
aAnd I don't think we could have afforded her as a guest for a (Bockenheimer) Depot
production, but still it's great!

CEC: But she wants to do it!
She's never had that opportunity.

MK: Yes.

CEC: And since you have this relationship with her now,
it's further incentive. Lovely!
How long has this series been active?

MK: He started it
at the beginning of his *Intendanz* (term as Intendant) in 2002.

CEC: Ok.
Was that a conscious choice? at that point in time?
do you know? have you heard?

MK: He found that Lieder needed, ...
more attention. And that this type of music as a form
might be dying away. And he tried to do something.

CEC: So it's a conscious goal, to revitalize the genre.

MK: He wants to—right! right!
He has always been fond of Lieder
and (at) the same time, you know,

he had this background as a music journalist

CEC: Only a little, I know.

MK: Yes, he has done Rundfunk, for the radio, here.
Thousands of singer-portraits, long discussions,
so he knew a lot of very, very good singers, already, personally, as a journalist.
Also from his work in Brussels.

CEC: Yes, yes.

MK: Because always good people came!
And, so, he had a roster of contacts.
Bryn Terfel came, and stuff like that.

CEC: So, it's interesting... this just popped into my head,
from what you said,
but we were also talking last time about the repertoire system a lot
and you just mentioned how he's got this history working in Brussels
with the Stagione system.

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: And bringing in all these very interesting prominent singers,
giving them chances to concertize,
and it strikes me that one of the things that is happening now
even though you have—quite clearly—a repertoire system
is maybe, having harvested some of the benefits of his history in the other system
for a kind of unique combination here.
Because most other repertoire houses maybe don't have this series
don't have so many guest artists
and can't afford to bring them in so much
(pause)
Is that true?

MK: I think he makes the... very best of the money we have.
I think you couldn't produce more at any place in the world with what we have.
I think it's 0 million Euros a year.

CEC: Because of the way he can use these resources?

MK: He uses every person until there's nothing left to use.

CEC: Interesting.

MK: Yes.

CEC: So, I was thinking before...
before today, based on our other interviews, and on things I've read and seen
I was kind of guessing that maybe, you know,
there were certain set patterns
of how things were arranged, based on people's jobs.
so, the intendant does this, the conductor does this, the dramaturg is doing this.
CEC: and that it would be more related to people's...

to their actual title in the process
but from what you're telling me, about...
I'm going to mispronounce his name—Loebe?—
It's sounding to me like...
what's working very well here is leaning on people's personal strengths
as opposed to just working within their job description.
Is that true?

MK: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. (*affirmative, nodding.*)
It's amazingly true. Because that's...that's how he works.

CEC: I was just kind of intuiting that, from what you were saying.

MK: He will actually hire people,
without even knowing what he could use them for.
but just sensing that he could use them.

CEC: This person has a good set of talents... and...

MK: And then after that, describing the actual position.

CEC: Can you think of another instance...
another person that's happened with?

MK: A person... that would behave like that?...

CEC: Or another, another person, other ...that Herr Loebe...

MK: at least two...
two colleagues here that have been hired on a sort of ...personal chemistry...
um, with very good results!
And actually, I did not have a proper job interview.
He had heard me talk, and we had a discussion.
I was interning with several people, and then my job opened up.
He called me, he had me in mind, and said,
“Why don't you come over, and we have a chat?”
And that chat was him telling me for an hour about his plans for the next four or five years. Then
we saw Electra, then we had dinner, and he asked me to stay.

(CEC & MK laughing together)

CEC: How lovely!

MK: And some others have told me... similar stories.

CEC: And that also seems to fit into
something you said to me very early on,
when I first got here, and I kind of asked you about the role of a dramaturg here.
Yes, because, I'm trying to discern the difference sometimes,

between what it is in the United States and what it is here,
CEC: Because it's not very clear to me.
And you said to me at that point, and I don't think this is a bad answer
but you answered me, "I'm not really sure I can tell you,
"Sometimes I'm doing a little of this, sometimes a little of that."
And it sounds to me like, that verbal description—"a little of this, a little of that"—
what's needed, here and there—is the way this company is working right now.
At least with some key players.

MK: In any theater, the role of the dramaturg would be very hard to describe.

CEC: Ok.

MK: But here, it's even more so.

CEC: You worked as a dramaturg before, too,
in Berlin, right?

MK: Yes, in Berlin, at the Komische Oper,
also in Meiningen which is in Thüringen.
but with a very high profile history in theater,
theater and concert, not so much opera.

CEC: If you don't mind...
I hadn't really thought of this ahead of time,
but this is such an interesting comparison,
if that's ok,
would you be willing to tell me a little bit about the differences in your experiences working at
the Komische Oper, and also in Thüringen?
Regarding.. I mean... the things that pop into your mind

MK: In a small theater like Meiningen, the people's..
uh, space, seats...

CEC: Um, the ... the "house?"

MK: It's a smaller company...

CEC: House size.
(*laughing together*) It's ok, really, I understand.

MK: We work(ed) only two years in advance.

CEC: Season programming?

MK: Yes, yes. And here it's five or six.
and there, the *Intendantin* had asked me to sketch a season
write down some pieces, and sit down with the music director
and plan the concerts, basically the two of us, together.
I had much more influence.

CEC: Why?

MK: Because...well there we had an *Intendantin*
who was also a director.
She directed her own pieces in Meiningen, but also...

CEC: A stage director, you mean?

MK: And Mr. Loebe is just a managing director, in a way with his unique combination of...
(chuckling) he can be very rational when it comes to using resources but also, all of his decisions come right from his heart. and some of them you cannot really explain. it's just the way, he feels that way.

CEC: Intuition.

MK: If he likes a person, it's going to work. if not, there's no chance it will ever happen. the Komische Oper has a different thing... it's kind of in the middle of Meinigen and here.

CEC: How so?

MK: It's a little ...the size, money, reputation... the reputation is, I can't really compare it to Frankfurt, because it has a very sharp profile.

CEC: Yes, yes, I understand.

Because in Berlin, you have the three houses, and they each serve a different, niche market, kind of, as I understand it, mostly.

MK: Yes, well, they try to. It's the youngest, started in '47, with a very specific goal. Which has of course changed over the years. And they always, they still try to find their *raison d'être* in this founding by Walter Felsenstein in 1947. We don't have that here. We can have this broad repertoire. a variety.

CEC: (breath) May I pause you?

just one minute, ok, because this is actually another question that I have, and I just want to confirm your answer to it, because I just heard it.

So there is not really a sort-of, what I would call a "mission statement," for this company in terms of it's intended market, or ideas, or programming, or any of those things that could be involved.

MK: (shaking head no.)

CEC: There's not. ok.

we can leave it at that, unless you have more to elaborate.

MK: There has been a study by McKinsey, McKinsey group, in 2005

CEC: Who is McKinsey? I'm sorry, I should probably know this.

MK: Oh, an um, a consulting firm.
They were doing a pro bono consulting, and they found three concepts ...
but it was like “quality, variety, and whatever,”
I mean, it’s useless, it applies to any opera house,
but there’s a folder.

CEC: Oh. May I look at that, at some point?

MK: I think I can, yes....
but that was what they proposed.

CEC: As the unifying...

MK: Yes, the basic statement, the formula.

CEC: It may well not be any different than any other opera house,
but it would be interesting to read what they found.

MK: But this Intendance didn’t start with any goal like that.
Just the wish, to do opera at its best. Whatever.
And the Komische Oper wants to be, very much up to date.
Very much on the forefront of stage direction, um,
they call themselves *Musiktheater*

CEC: Clear.

MK: As opposed to Oper, but you know that.

CEC: Yes, yes.

MK: (*sips*) And the decision process
there was more involved in dramaturgy... much more than here.

CEC: Ok. (*pause*)
How?

MK: We would sit together and think of possible pieces
and then, why we think they are worth it, and...

CEC: And you don’t do that here.

MK: Not so much.

CEC: Ok.

MK: I say that with a little regret,
but I also can’t imagine a more interesting thing, planning.

CEC: Constellation

MK: This (*gestures around him*) is just so amazing
and you have to be happy with that

CEC: Yes, well, I see that you’re very satisfied
with the way the process is working here...
it seems fulfilling and productive.

MK: Yes. (*Nodding.*)

CEC: I just want to gather my thoughts here for a second,
I was having a thought there, while you were speaking...
(*pause*)
Oh, yes. When you were talking about the Komische,

just quickly, I was thinking about something
that is in this list of questions.
I won't bother looking for it right now,
but you were mentioning that the Komische felt,
or feels the need, the desire, the pull, to be at the forefront of
of I guess, new trends, ideas, artistic developments...
with staging?

MK: Mm-hm.

CEC: Would you also say with technology?
Did you also say with technology? With stage technologies?
Turning that question to your experiences here artistically,
how do you feel that the company is... is engaging with new theatrical techniques?
Is that a priority? How much of a priority.

MK: You don't mean, no technology,
no live video, or whatever, you mean artistic?

CEC: Well, that can be an artistic element.
that's not directly what I mean...
(*clatter, gestures, hits cup*) Oops, I talk with my hands!
But it could be any of those things.

MK: I don't think so.
we don't have the desire to be the first to try something out.

CEC: Ok.

MK: We are as a company not a very close friend of deconstructing.

CEC: (*surprised tone*) Ok. (*nodding.*)
you mean in a sort of Brechtian...

MK: Yes, or Sebastian Baumgarten's way of telling.
I think we try to be faithful to the words...
or what we **think** were the intentions of the authors

CEC: Ok.

MK: And... try to balance the recent history of opera staging
with the best of what's (*pause*)

CEC: ...happened recently?

MK: come in the past...

| We had Calixto Bieito um, I haven't seen, I think it was two productions.
Manon, and Verdi, *Macbeth*.

CEC: Mm-hm?

MK: From what I heard,
they weren't his best works yet.
And it's not that what he does is scandalous, that made Mr Loebe not invite him back.
It was that it wasn't artistically satisfying.

CEC: So scandal is ok when it's artistically satisfying.

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: And not, when it's not.

MK: So we didn't have an artistic scandal since I've joined the company.
And Mr. Loebe isn't looking for it

CEC: Doesn't want scandal just for the sake of it.

MK: He doesn't want that sort of propaganda.

CEC: Ok. (*nodding*)

MK: And I wouldn't go so far as to say
that the Komische Oper is looking for a scandal, but they embrace it.

CEC: Yes. Well, it does serve a purpose,
and some people want shock value, sometimes.
Yes, in my personal opinion, the two aren't always mutually exclusive.
You know, it's possible to have really good art and scandal together
sometimes there's very good art that doesn't involve scandal at all
so I hear you saying that **that's** more of the art that's trying to be made here.

MK: Mm-hm. Yes. (*Silence*)
like, using this *Don Carlo* production, which is from a different century
and painful to watch
Also this *Faust*, is also, well, you've seen it.

CEC: It's not bad, it's just a little bland

(*laughing together*)

MK: But what you haven't seen, I think, is *Simon Boccanegra*

CEC: No.

MK: Which is a very, um, *streng* (severe) would be the world in German.

MK: The curtain comes up, and formally.

CEC: With a clear concept?

MK: Very. You see the *Handschrift* (handwriting) of Mr. Loy, Christoph Loy,
and there is nothing that wouldn't fit in stylistically and he builds tension between the characters
on stage very, very carefully.

CEC: Very detailed, it sounds like you're saying,
very constructed and intricate.

MK: Um, yes.... yes.... (*gesturing, reaching*).

CEC: but there's something else, I see?

MK: He tries to control every move,
but to find a way for the actors to move that
leaves out these operatic gestures.
Like in the *Don Carlo* production where everyone does this
(*makes opera singer singing arms*),
which everyone has seen.
I'm not ready for describing that... but...

CEC: Ok, no trouble,
I'm getting a ...yes...

MK: What I wanted to say is that
we have a huge variety of styles, and approaches, but
without the extremes of the avant-garde and the Zeffirelli showpieces.

CEC: Ok.

MK: But in between, everything is possible.

CEC: And artistic balance.

MK: If it's well made and serves the purpose.

CEC: So really the quality... there's a certain quality expectation.

MK: Quality is more important than a certain style.

CEC: And maybe thoroughness, along with the quality.

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: I hear you saying.

MK: Yes, that's what we are looking for. Sounds very good!

CEC: Ok. so... let's leave that for right now,
we can come back to it if it's important later.

Let's see, I just want to look through,
I'm going to take a minute and decide where to go next
Let's, let's move to funding, and money here for a minute.

MK: Whoa!

CEC: Totally other subject! we haven't really talked about this at all.
I'm going to give you a very open-ended question first, which is:
What are the major sources of funding?
you gave me the budget as forty...roughly.

MK: Yes, yes, I have to check that.

CEC: Yes, of course, no trouble.
But where does this money come from?

MK: This money comes from the city of Frankfurt?

CEC: Directly. Period.

MK: The bulk of it.

CEC: Ok.

MK: I would say about 80 percent of it, 85 maybe?

CEC: I read something at some point...
correct me if I'm wrong! that there's also funding coming from,
...generally, in German opera houses...
this is very abstract, right?
from not just the cities, but the *Bundesländer*?
and also the whole *Regierung. Bund.* (federal government)

MK: That would be an exception. Because culture is... (*pause*)

CEC: You're an exception here?

MK: No no, we're not. but the national funding for arts
is um, very rare, because it's a conflict with the *Grundgesetz* (constitution).

CEC: Oh?

MK: the *Grundgesetz* says, very specifically,
where the *Bundesregierung* is in charge.

CEC: Ok! (*surprise*)

MK: And every other field is the
is in the hands of the *Länder* (states) and communities. Communities?

CEC: Communities.

MK: And culture is not. So if the *Bundesregierung* is going to fund culture,
there has to be a really good reason.

CEC: Interesting!!

Ok... this has changed from my old information,
and I'm glad that you're telling me this.

MK: All those houses that call themselves *Staatsoper* or *Staatstheater*
are of the *Bundesländer* (states.)
Like the *Staatsoper Unter den Linden* is funded by the state of Berlin,
which is at the same time the city of Berlin

CEC: Are you aware of how long this has been the case?
I think what I have read is a study of... it's a very funny thing...
it's a study of opera houses in both Germany and in the UK,
because... it's somebody wanting to advocate
for different funding models in the United Kingdom
that want to look at the German system, because it's so different.

And that's where I'm getting this information from
that like a certain percentage is coming from the *Bundesländer*
and a certain percent is coming from the *Bundesregierung*
and... but that was in the early 1990s.
and I wonder if that's different

MK: No, that's...no no, no.

CEC: So that's just wrong, then.

MK: Or a sort of misunderstanding, then.
Because there was a huge conversation in Berlin,
when the *Bundesregierung* (federal government) gave money to the Staatsoper,
and it's actually, a difficult legally... a difficult question.
Because as I say, it conflicts with the *Grundgesetz*.
But there are theaters that are funded by the *Länder* (states),
and ones that are funded by cities, or communities..
And the Oper Frankfurt is municipal theater.

CEC: Yes, yes.

MK: So we don't get, or only a very small percentage
from the Land, Hessen. By far the greatest amount comes from the city.

CEC: Is there... excuse me...
is there an opera house – there's not then?—
in Hessen, that is funded by the *Bundesland*?

MK: Oh yes!

CEC: Oh there is?

MK: Oh, well, a lot, and like with the..
well there's the Statstheater, for instance in Wiesbaden, and in Darmstadt

CEC: And they're also doing opera?

MK: Yes, yes.
And they have a mixed funding, from the cities and from the state.

CEC: So this is ... this is interesting (*smile*)
I'm seeing all sorts of assumptions that I was making (*laugh*)...
which is not good! But we all make assumptions.
From what I see, it seems to me that the Oper Frankfurt is in Hessen,
at least one of the highest profile...

MK: Yes. (*nodding*)

CEC: ...places for opera
and it's interesting to me that you're funded entirely on a municipal level,
and you're not taking any money from the *Bundesland* (state)

MK: Yes, yes, we take a little pride in that. (*smiles*)
And the folks in Wiesbaden don't like it (*laugh*)

CEC: Ah! (*laugh*)

MK: That has historic reasons, of course
and we've always been the biggest opera in Hessen.

CEC: And it doesn't necessarily matter where the money come from.
Just because it comes from a larger geographical organization, government,
doesn't mean it's necessarily in terms of quality
and attendance and season and artistry any better.

MK: Of course we have more money on our hands than Wiesbaden,
so it's no surprise.

CEC: Well you're also in Frankfurt, of course
it's a money place!

MK: But Wiesbaden being the capital of Hessen,
it's just an ok theater. *(laughs)*

CEC: Interesting.
I don't mean to get into the gossip of it, but it's interesting!
(silence)

MK: In Baden-Wurrtenberg, for example,
that theater was originally two *Bundesländer* (states),
when the *Bundesrepublik* (federal republic) was founded in '49.
I think a year or two years later they merged, but then they of course had two capitals competing,
and two state theaters.

CEC: Ok!

MK: And I think they abandoned that rule by now.
But for a while, Karlsruhe was by law, always the same amount of funding as Stuttgart
which always was the higher profile theater of the both
as I said now I think they've deviated from that strict rule, but, eh
that was the heritage of the state system.

CEC: Interesting. So, are there politics involved
with what happens at the Oper Frankfurt?
Or I guess this wouldn't be different than anywhere else in Germany.
Because if all of the money is coming from government agency,
whether city, state, or country,
of course there are
city boards involved, or politicians involved
but do these people ever get involved somehow
with artistic decisions that are happening here?
are there scandals? or critique?

MK: *(laughing.)* well, Herr Loebe is constantly in discussions with the mayor of Frankfurt,
which... she attends many opening nights.

CEC: Yes, I just saw her at the *Faust* premiere!

MK: She would say what she thinks,
but he is free to do whatever he wants with that critique.

CEC: Even though there's money involved, from the city?

MK: He's been appointed Intendant, for a couple of years,
and the only thing she can actually do is not prolong his contract.

CEC: So, he is hired by the city of Frankfurt?

MK: Yes.

CEC: Oh! ok.

MK: He's appointed by a board, and um,
you know we are now a, how do you say, incorporated.

CEC: A corporation.

MK: And there's a board?

CEC: Like a board of directors, or something?

MK: Yes, and the head of the board is the mayor.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And there is an annual meeting,
when Herr Loebe presents his plans for the next season.

CEC: Was that the meeting that I attended, this press conference?

MK: No, no, but um, that meeting precedes that
by only a couple of days, sometimes. so it's kind of a formality!

CEC: And it's private?

MK: Yes. It's sort of a formality, but if he says,
"I want to, uh, do a huge project, and it will produce a loss,
and I will earn that money the following season," they could stop him,
and they could not agree. He never would let it come that far. But he is...
he wouldn't be allowed to hold this press conference without this prior consult of the board. so,
if something would go terribly wrong,
they could stop him at that point.

CEC: But...

MK: but no one is interested in letting it go that far.

CEC: Ok.

But there's really no... I'm so surprised by this as an American! and maybe it has something to
do with um, the way I'm accustomed to people reacting,
but you know... in the United States,
everybody wants their fingers in (gesturing) in the artistic decisions, ...

especially if they've given *money*, they want to say something
and it strikes me that this is different here,
and I don't really understand why.
Can you explain why you think?

MK: Yes, I think... and then I will tell you the exceptions.

CEC: Yes, yes, please!

MK: It has to do with the art history of German speaking countries,
and it has to do with the experience in the 3rd Reich. I think that's the two...
I think the freedom of the arts has always been a concept in German thinking, and the misuse of
arts during the thirties has also influenced the concept of our constitution as it is now. And that
meant that theater would be a corrective, an important element in society, and would have to be
free in what they chose to make.

I think the freest period of German theaters might have been the '70s, '80s.

CEC: In West Germany!

MK: In West Germany, yes! (*both laughing.*)

But if you think Harry Kupfer and Peter Konwichny started their careers during that time
also in the GDR,

CEC: But I have to chime in,
I've been doing some reading recently,
as something kind of in the area surrounding my dissertation,
not my actual dissertation, I've been reading about...
well I guess this was in the '50s, I guess

but attempts at *Sozialist Nationaloper* at the Staatsoper, and very strict, government oversight of
what was allowed to be written and put on stage in the DDR.

So, definitely in the east it was a different picture, especially early on
and that also strikes me as a political misuse... not unlike what was happening
before, under the National Socialists.

Not to cut you off, but that's another example, it strikes me that it was
another misuse.

MK: Of course, it was much more regulated, in the eastern part.

To the extent that they would only allow
a certain number of people to study music, study singing, or dramaturgy, only as many as they
were certain to provide with jobs, later.

CEC: Oh, ok, clear.

MK: So you could be sure you would find a job.

You would be appointed to whatever little city,
in Brandenburg or whatever, but you would have a job.

CEC: But the West avoided that? Kind of in a reactionary sort of way, to the National Socialists, I hear you saying.

MK: That was what I wanted to say, (*smiles*), yes.
So, the governmental agencies would always be aware not to infiltrate, not to regulate, at least not ostensibly...

(*Pause*)

MK: Only in an informal way, two people talking together, like the mayor and the intendant.

CEC: But we are now 50 years later!
is this really, you think, still a concern?
In your experience?

MK: So, what is changing is that private funding is becoming more important.

CEC: Ok. (*pause*) So, there is private funding?

MK: There is private funding, I would say a few percent.

CEC: Coming from individuals, or corporations?

MK: From both. We have this Society of the Friends of the Opera, the *Patronatsverein*, (*pause*) um, something about a million or two million, and then, yes, there are some banks, and some other foundations who give money, the Aventis foundation funds the Bockenheimer depot productions, with a fixed amount every year

CEC: Ok. But, it's still a small percentage?

MK: That is a small percentage....
but THOSE, of course, try, you feel the influence there much stronger

CEC: How? Can you give me an example?

MK: Of course. They can choose WHAT they would like to give money for, certain productions, or we have to find a way.... any company would be interested to sponsor a very specific part. Because they can put their label on that. And if it's successful, they have something they can... if they just say, I give 100 thousand dollars for the Opera Frankfurt, it's a little... it's not very attractive...

CEC: yes, I see, they want their name on it, too, of course like publicity

MK: They sponsor, like, *Faust*, they get their name on the program, and they get... a couple of hundred seats at reduced prices...

CEC: And they get that feel-good feeling, yes, laughs... of helping the arts.

MK: Yes! and ... this is my production, this is what I made possible.

CEC: and they get to say they supported the arts, so it's also good for them, in image

MK: And... most of those foundations of certain companies, um, also have in their rulebook, that they wouldn't influence the art itself, or the artists themselves.

CEC: What rule book? just something mentally?

MK: Like, their constitution or something... like the Deutsche Bank Stiftung...

CEC: So, there's like, a department for Philanthropic giving

MK: Yes.

CEC: And they have a sort of "code of conduct."

MK: Yes! code of conduct.

CEC: Great.

MK: I've ... there was one incident when Calixto Bieito directed *Entführung aus dem Serail* in Berlin, which was a scandalous production.

CEC: Yes.

MK: And the guy from the Mercedes Benz Stiftung left the performance early.

CEC: (gasp)

MK: And ran into the waiting cameras of RTL and gave a statement... how he would discuss this with his colleagues at the Foundation, and... they wouldn't give any more money for crap... like that... and... that was huge in the papers, the day after, in the end... I think he was... em... he got a different job at the company.

CEC: (laughing)
Well, that's interesting!

MK: That was bad publicity for his company, and not for us, in the end.

CEC: That's really interesting.
That the result was that he's no longer working in this

philanthropic part of the organization any more
because clearly then, that says, the goal is support almost unconditionally,
of almost whatever artistic product comes.
That's, that's very interesting, and this seems to be another example of,
just what you were saying,
this attitude that is the modern German attitude of supporting at all costs.

MK: It's unthinkable that a person or company would come and say I give a half a million Euros for this production and I want it to be a historical performance.

CEC: Mm.

MK: *(pause)* Now.
But it can change.

CEC: Of course, thirty years from now,
who knows?

MK: But of course, they're free to decide, what they want to *(pause)*

CEC: ...support?

MK: Support. *(nodding)*
And that would be a discussion with Mr. Loebe, or Maj-Berit Müller
finding spots that are suitable.

CEC: You said something a while
back about exceptions, that you meant to say.

MK: I meant **this**, that was... somebody trying...

CEC: Ah, to do it.

MK: To put on an example, which was not successful.

CEC: It failed.

MK: Most of those foundations do not want to focus
on the personal opinions of their employees, they're tremendous, but on some goal.
Like the Deutsche Bank Stiftung, for many young people, supporting young artists.
They support our *Opernstudio*, and they have this *Akademie Musiktheater Heute*, and they
would not give money to the *Rheingold*, I think,
that would not fit in their *(pause)*

CEC: In their... paradigm, I think?

Um, so, just to repeat

I think we've established the answer to this, but, feel free...
it's not... it **is** or is not different, do you think, at Opera Frankfurt,
than in other houses in Germany?

With this political leverage. It's pretty much the same everywhere?
(Pause)

And here, specifically?

MK: I think it depends a little on the success.
basically, it is the same everywhere. For instance, the smaller the city is,
the more it relies on the functioning theater.

CEC: Functioning?

MK: In the city of Meiningen, which is very small,
and has 20,000 inhabitants, and has a theater with a capacity of 700
um, they depend on this theater to attract a lot of people...

CEC: Ah, tourism!

MK: (*Nodding*) Therefore, there is some industry,
some “business” in the city for tourism: hotels, restaurants, etc.
If people don’t come to the theater, the hotels will be empty.

CEC: Ah, so there’s also
external pressure with relationships.

MK: So there’s this idea, sure you can do whatever you want,
but don’t disrupt the tourism.

CEC: Ok! ok.
But in Frankfurt...
are there some relationships between Oper Frankfurt
—this is a big question—
and other businesses, or arts organizations,
and any sort of other institutions that you can think of
that rely on or are connected to what Oper Frankfurt does

MK: (*Pause*) There is a *Besucher Ring* organization.

CEC: For tourism.

MK: That this is a very small fraction of our audience at all.

MK: So (*pause*).

I can’t think of any other...

I’ll give you another example. In Dessau, where I just saw a premiere,
they started a new Intendance about a year ago. And there was a baritone in the ensemble.

A good singer, but... they might not have hired him again.

But he is... his boyfriend is the head of *Besucher* organization there and there was no way you
could have this guy as an opponent.

If people didn’t come, we would have all sorts of problems...

but I can’t think of any organizations putting pressure on the program, or
the artistic decisions.

CEC: Ok. Ok, good. That’s a very clear answer.
Relatedly, are there are organizations with which Oper Frankfurt collaborates?

MK: We haven’t talked about agencies yet, artistic agencies.

CEC: No.

MK: Co-productions with other theaters. The *Museumsgesellschaft*, we talked about that.

CEC: We did.

MK: There are early stages of discussions,
forming a more coherent Rhein-Main cultural area Frankfurt-Wiesbaden-Mainz.

CEC: Who's involved in that?

MK: Cities, the Länder, because it also involves Rheinland-Pfalz
and Hessen, it's very early stages, Mainz, other companies or organizations...

CEC: I guess what I was imagining as I asked the question was
other artistic organizations that you're collaborating with sometimes
or working with, that's part A.
And then part B – which you brought up, but I also need to know—
is, I guess, other business agencies.
Anybody that manages singers or sets provisions for how operations need to go.
I'm accustomed to the idea of having unions for these things in the United States,
but I don't know what sorts of unions exist here, so that's part B.

MK: There's nothing regular with other artistic companies in Frankfurt,

CEC: Ok, so, just case by case?

MK: If at all. If we need an... a variety artist...
we would use the people from the Tiger Palast.

CEC: So just, "ad hoc", kind of, ...
oh, for example, what did I see in the fall? *Die Tote Stadt*
and there was a dancer that was part of it, an African-American man,
and I think someone told me he came from Forsythe.

MK: that's Alan Barnes. He used to dance with Forsythe, that's right.
And the ballet used to be part of the Städtische Bühnen. You can still see some signs in the
subway are taped over, and it's just Oper and Schauspiel, and the ballet is erased.
There are still some signs left.

CEC: That's funny!

MK: I think it was about eight years ago that Frankfurt decided not to fund the ballet anymore.

CEC: And now he's in Dresden.

MK: It's now a co-funding between Frankfurt and Dresden. And he produces, still produces in
Frankfurt, and works in Frankfurt. But...
shows his stuff mainly in Dresden, and of course, he tours around.

And we have this new ballet rehearsal stage, a beautiful place, on the 7th floor, right next to Mr. Loebe's office, with a magnificent view.

And they owned that place up to last year. So we could not use it! it was empty! most of the time, but Bill Forsythe had the right to come whenever he wanted to
(pause)

And so there are quite a few colleagues here who used to work for Forsythe who now work in different areas. Like Alan is an assistant director, and was used as a dancer in that production, it was great.
Um, and... one of our video technicians used to be a dancer

CEC: Laughing... I love the way arts organizations work!

MK: At the Komische Oper it was also the same.
It was the guy who handled all video was also, used to be a dancer.
They need to start a second career at some point, anyway.

CEC: Yes, ok!

MK: And one of our colleagues from the *Vorderhaus Personal* (Front-of-House Staff) used to be a dancer. Our technical director and head of lighting, Olaf Winter, was not a dancer, but he came from the Forsythe Company, or from the Ballet, just as our head of the sound department used to work for Forsythe.

CEC: How do you feel
about the fact that Forsythe isn't here anymore,
and that there is no dance company involved with the Städtische Bühnen anymore?

MK: You know, on that scale, or, level of quality, what comes to mind is Hamburg with John Neumeyer, and Stuttgart, used to be John Franco, I don't know how it is now, or München. Officially they are in the same company, but two absolutely individual organizations.
The Hamburg Ballet uses the orchestra for their productions, but there is absolutely no sort of collaboration.

CEC: And when Forsythe was here?

MK: There was not.
You know, the only thing you could do with a ballet company you can do an operetta and have the odd dance scene.

CEC: Well, and some old French opera that involves more dancing.

MK: But I don't think Bill Forsythe was ever interested in that.

CEC: Oh, ok.

MK: And he wouldn't have let us use his dancers for that crap, and John Neumeyer doesn't either.

CEC: So it's not particularly a loss.
Because you couldn't... at least it's not for the company.

MK: No, no! I mean, you could have them play for fifteen - twenty nights a year,
do their stuff, but you could play opera if you hire a couple of more singers...
it's so different.

CEC: And in terms of it enriching Frankfurt,
Forsythe is still here sometimes I mean, I saw a couple of pieces of his.

MK: I have to admit, I haven't seen his recent stuff, unfortunately.

CEC: I guess there were two,
I have this dance friend, who's here as well, and he saw the one that I didn't, and he was like, "I
just have to warn you, it's really risqué!" I didn't see that one.
But I did see "I don't believe in outer space," and it was really fun, I have to say
and interesting from a 70's disco perspective.

MK: Was that in the Depot?

CEC: It was in the Depot, yes.
So, I guess he's still kind of here.

MK: I saw a guest performance of the Antwerp Dance company...
something from the Netherlands who had bought the rights of one of Bill's (Forsythe's) huge
productions from the early 90's and they were....
they showed that in the *Schauspielhaus*, it was a blow-away experience,

CEC: To see the piece.

MK: But he doesn't work like that anymore.
That is small-scale, experimental. You can't call it ballet anymore,
or maybe even dance. It's body/theater movements.
It wouldn't fit in here anymore.

CEC: Why?

MK: because there's no connection to what the Oper Frankfurt does...

CEC: Ah, the company you mean.

MK: Yes.

CEC: I wasn't sure if you meant the company or the city.

MK: No, for the city, it's fine.

CEC: Ah.

MK: I think the city needs a... we are not truly avant-garde, here at Oper Frankfurt,
and the *Schauspielhaus* (Theater company) is not really avant-garde either.
And there is a risk in becoming a little, a little conservative.

CEC: Mm. yes. (*Agreeing*)

MK: And um the Mousonturm, you've probably been there.

I don't know if they can fill that void. I mean Frankfurt was, and you're doing research on that period, it was really, really, ...up-to-date, or even ahead.

CEC: Pushing, yes... the limit.

MK: And we know we're not right now.

CEC: And that's a conscious choice?

MK: Yes.

CEC: It sounds like it is, from what you were telling me before. about Loebe's choices.

MK: yes.

CEC: ok. goodness, we've covered so much interesting territory, how are you on time today?

MK: I thought we'd do this for an hour.

CEC: Yes? So we should probably wrap-up.

MK: But nobody has called me yet, so...

CEC: Yes, well, if you're ok to keep going...

MK: Let's go another fifteen minutes or so.

CEC: That's great, sounds lovely.

MK: I would like to point you out to two colleagues of mine, in the near future, Ticket Sales, and everything associated with that: Elvira Wiedenhöft and sponsoring, Maj-Berit Müller.

CEC: So that's like development, sponsorship.

MK: She's one of the two other people who Mr. Loebe met and immediately thought, this one could fit in.

CEC: Interesting.

MK: I'm exaggerating a little, because there was a position in need of rehiring someone, but we met. I used to work with Maj in Berlin

CEC: Oh, really?

MK: So I've known her for some years, and she had quit in Berlin. She was the assistant of the intendant for the last two years, and she quit, she thought she would try out something new, it was a great time, there was no, it was a good ending

CEC: people just need a change sometimes

MK: And she ended up two months in the Institut Francais in Dresden, then she ended up as a press secretary of a small theater in Swizerland.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And somehow that didn't work, she didn't feel well, and we met at a premiere in Basel.

CEC: And the chemistry was just there.

MK: And Loebe was there by chance.

And I was there because I was about to work with that particular stage director, and we chatted during intermission. And after that, the thought struck my mind, we need someone for development and sponsoring.

“She could do that, and she is not happy!” And then I asked her if she’d be interested, if I spread the word here, and Mr. Loebe said he had had the same thought already.

CEC: Ha!

MK: And just wasn’t sure yet.

And then it was the same process. She came here, they talked.

CEC: It strikes me that what you’re describing is a very intuitive sort of network that is set up here at this company.

Of course, one question I have is, how long, from an institutional standpoint, has the company operated this way? And it sounds like it’s at least since Loebe’s been in charge.

MK: Yes, no, not before.

I mean, how can you discern the intuition and the rational argumentation?

There’s always some sort of chemistry involved there.

CEC: I think so, but I’m an intuitive person.

So, I guess there are other people who operate differently.

And I’m trying to figure out, from a research standpoint, how to explain the fact that it’s all working on instinct and intuition.

I’m trying to figure out what I can point to as the related issues involved because that’s scholarship.

But I understand what you’re saying: that it’s intuitive.

And I think it’s probably true. And I think it happens, to a certain extent—maybe particularly so with artistic people?—in almost all artistic organizations.

Just, maybe it manifests itself a little bit differently in each place.

MK: And Mr. Loebe would admit

that many of his decisions are based on a gut feeling. He’s seldom wrong, anyway,

Maj can tell you about our relations to companies, individuals,

and exacts amounts and percentages of how much money comes in there.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And if I’m not mistaken,

I think it’s about twelve - thirteen percent of our budget that is through ticket sales.

(pause) And since Loebe started I think the number of subscribers has at least doubled.

CEC: Hm?

MK: And when I came, we were short of reaching the 10000 mark, and now we are at 11000, So, it's still...

CEC: Question!

I love it when you're talking and I just get...*(both laughing)*
Is it better to have subscribers
than people who are just buying tickets to individual productions?

MK: It's much better for planning, for a... it's a safety net.

CEC: Ok.

MK: We do a new production, and we know the first series will be...

CEC: Sold out?

MK: Well-sold.

CEC: So, attendance *is* a factor in what you are wanting to do.
I'm interested.

MK: Yes, of course!!

We need the people to come because we want to do more of it!

CEC: But the money comes anyway, from the state?
Or, I mean, the city.

MK: Yes. but we spend all of it. and we ...

CEC: To have flexibility!

MK: We spend all the money for all the artistic productions.

I mean, we don't have a huge bank account or savings in the background
And if we want to continue, we have to ...uh...

CEC: Have a margin.

MK: Hm, how can I describe that? *(pause)*

If people don't come, we lose money and we have to...
we only can do seven new productions the next season.

CEC: Oh, ok. so, I hear you saying that the attendance and the ticket sales
--correct me please if I'm wrong—
give you a sort of cushion or buffer
or flexible area, in which to play in the future with more ideas.

MK: Yes, maybe you could say that...

If nobody would come at all, we would still have like 80% of the money.

But on the other hand, I don't know the exact amount,

but it's much more than 50% of our funding is fixed, it's personnel, it's maintenance.

So, you could take that as this amount of ticket sales is the actual amount of money that we can
actually use for hiring guests, for hiring directors, for building stages.

CEC: So this is where
the money that allows for good artistic quality. That's where that comes from.

MK: Mainly, yes.

CEC: Of course, mostly!

MK: Yes, yes.

CEC: Ok, that makes sense.

MK: The orchestra is there all the time,
we were talking about that, all the people have to be paid
-- there is my...!! (*finds pen*)

CEC: (*laughs.*) Yay, you found it!
Ok, this makes sense!

of course, so attitudes of the public and attendance, their frequency of attendance
makes a difference in what you can produce.

MK: Gives us the artistic leeway or freedom.

CEC: Or even just, maybe,
the resources that you need, for this “quality.”
Good. Excellent.

MK: Interesting.

CEC: What?

MK: Now it’s clear to me, as well.
why ticket sales are important!

CEC: sSe, you know, I have to say,
I think this is why this sort of process can be interesting from both sides.
I mean, I hope that you also enjoy and get something out of this process.

MK: (*laughing.*) Yes, I do! Very much so.

CEC: It hopefully helps us all
understand something better. That’s a goal.

MK: And to avoid taking money into consideration!

CEC: *Nee, nee* (no, no)

MK: *Nee, nee* (no, no)

(*both laughing*)

CEC: I think we pretty much, dealt with that, right?
why don’t we stop here for the day, because we’ve covered quite a lot.

MK: Ok.

End of Interview 2

Interview #3, Malte Krasting July 1, 2010

CEC: So.. I had thought that we only have a few things left and I have to say, I really like the way this interview has been going because I've been learning so much through the storytelling and the examples.
So, I don't want to get away from that style.
I don't want the fact that we have this list of things to cover to take away from that too much.
But I also want to be conscious of your time.
So, please keep me posted if you're feeling anxious and again, we'll get as far as we get.

MK: I would need to leave at about a quarter past six.

CEC: Perfect. I have a rehearsal anyway, in just a couple of hours, So, it's fine.
(*pause*)

This list was very roughly re-edited since last time.
So. Employees!
We talked briefly about artistic unions, but not in any detail
Which groups are governed by unions?

MK: The strongest union by far, apart from the technical... staff is the orchestra.

CEC: Ok, the orchestra.

MK: They're a very strong factor.

CEC: Do you happen to know what they're called?

MK: it's the DOV (Deutsche Orchester Vereinigung)
They... there was a conflict about two years ago, and they actually went on strike.

CEC: Ok?

MK: They, ...it was the premiere of Verdi.
We did perform, but with piano accompaniment.

CEC: Oh, ok...

MK: Which was tough, but we knew something like this might happen so we were able to prepare.

CEC: What happens, when that happens?
is there public response to it, is there press about it?

MK: I mean, the conflict was...
had been going on for some time, for months

it was complicated to explain for people outside of the theater, the orchestra why this was so important for the orchestra

MK: But of course the management was not happy about that.

And, well, we try to cope with the reactions.

Anybody could have given back their tickets with full refund.

But most of them stayed, and in the end, I think it was a PR advantage for the management

CEC: Oh, really?

MK: A couple of weeks later there was a settlement.

It had to do with the earnings for the orchestra members,

should they automatically rise, increase with the employees from the city?

CEC: Ah... so, are they also considered city employees?

MK: No... no, no.

CEC: Oh, so it's just.

MK: But the tarif system... (*gestures, raising his hand*)

CEC: Oh, are you referring to the cost of living increases?

so it's just, staying on par...

MK: Mm-hm. (*nodding*) mainly.

CEC: Are there, um, are there other unions that other people in the company are a part of?

MK: Yes, the choir, and the soloists.

There is also a union for them the GDBR-- *Genossenschaft Deutsche Bühnen Angehörige*

MK: It's much smaller.

CEC: Is it mandatory? Are the unions mandatory?

MK: No, no. none of them are.

CEC: Ok. this is different in the US. We have, with certain size houses, you have to be in a union.

MK: Most of the orchestra and instrumentalists **are** union members, I think.

I don't know about the chorus and the soloists. Rough guess would be about 40%.

CEC: Does it affect their wages? From the company here?

MK: No. not at all. And of course, they have to pay for the membership.

CEC: Oh, yes, yes, I understand that. No, I mean-- its just that, nit's not that union members receive one scale and non-union members receive another scale for payment.

MK: No.

CEC: No, ok, also different.
There are so many **TINY** details to learn about how the systems are different.

MK: And again, I could get you in touch with people who know more about that like there's one singer soprano, Britta, who's... on the Frankfurt board of the GDBR.

CEC: What about, um, technical staff? Stage management.

MK: Technical staff would be organized through some under-groups of VERDI—I think it's Vereingte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaften— all sorts of service-related jobs.

CEC: Ok.

MK: That's one of the biggest unions in Germany.

CEC: Ok.

See, I don't hear much about unions here. So it's good for me to know I'm aware of so much more union presence in the United States, it's a constant presence in negotiations and they're very powerful political organizations in the US. Probably because I think our legal system is set up to be somewhat less favorable to workers in some ways than the German system is already. So, it's has been explained to me by other people in Germany working in other industries that often there just aren't unions, there's not always a need for a union, because there's always someone in the company that's responsible to make sure that employees are treated well.

MK: Yes, like the *Betriebsrat* or *Personalrat* (Workers' Council).

CEC: *Ja, genau.* (Yes, exactly.)

MK: Those are mandatory factors in a company of certain styles you need to have a *Betriebsrat* or *Personalrat*.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And, they have some leverage against the management, of course. There are annually some sort of strikes. But never so much as in France, where the whole life is brought to a halt. There was one very small union, that was about two years ago. The GDL, Gewerkschaft Deutscher Locomotivführer.

CEC: Ok.

MK: Who were sort of, trying to get the same wages, or comparable wages to pilots
And, conducting an ICE train might be a hard job

but flying an airplane is still considered to be something....
But they basically STOPPED all long-distance trains for about a week.

CEC: Wow, even in Germany!
This whole country operates on the rails.

MK: Yes!

CEC: Oh,... maybe I was here?
At one point in the fall, there was just... I thought it was an U-bahn strike?

MK: In Berlin?

CEC: No, here.

MK: Yes, you're right, you're right!

CEC: It wasn't in the Fall, it was in February!
That's right.

MK: But that was, yes, a strike here.

CEC: I forgot about that.
So, I think the second half of the question you've already answered.
They set expectations, but it doesn't drastically alter the
compensation or rights of workers, whether you're a member or not.
Ok. Alright.

So, yes, we can move on from that. *(pause)*
We talked a little about hiring, we talked about chorus and singers
and a good idea of who is permanent, and who is not permanent already.
In terms of the people who are hired occasionally to come in as guest artists
—and I mean this not in an **onstage** capacity, but rather **backstage** or support —
Where are those people found? From where do they come?

MK: Well, if you think about set designers and lighting designers,
most of them are nationally or internationally renowned artists already.

CEC: So, like with the guest singers,
you're kind of, wooing them to come for a production.

MK: Mm-hm.

Mr. Loebe gets applications from all sorts of directors and stage designers.
He travels, actually, to see them. That's how he finds them.

CEC: So it's really, um,
either "word of mouth,"
or someone that's been observed.
Like you were saying before, more this "intuitive" sense
of seeing someone and wanting to bring them in.

MK: I know he's been following some directors for quite a while
trying to get a sense of how they work and how they evolved stylistically.
And then, he gets in touch with them to feel the temperature,

if they're theater directors who many be willing to direct an opera.
What would be the opposite way?
Or could you think of as a different way to do it?

CEC: Hm, let me think about that?
I have to say, I don't know
because I've not been on this end of the process much before.
CEC: You know, my own experiences are...
from a singer's perspective.
I mean, I guess mostly these... methods would arise mostly anywhere,
either from a prior personal relationship with someone, and wanting to bring them in.
Or seeing them, as you say, observing them, following them.
But I guess it could also be that someone applies directly
or that someone is listed with a particular union.
And um, if you're actually seeking someone
that you could go to that, that agency, or that union
and find someone with that particular skill set. (*pause*)

MK: There are agencies that you can rely on, if you had the need to.

CEC But that's not necessary here?

MK: I can't think of any example when
someone would apply for designing a set.
And Loebe actually going with it, if he didn't actually know this person before he...
he wouldn't. he wouldn't. I mean, it could be that you have a director already,
and you want to bring him together with certain other people he doesn't know yet.
To get some new energy, instead of hiring a team, travelling around,
production after production.
Like what happened at the Bockenheimer Depot production, *Der Offener Wund*
It's a little different; it's been commissioned by the Ensemble Modern...
for a composer to write a piece along *Mahagonny*,
the Singspiel by Brecht/Weill

CEC: Right. (*nodding*)
I'm so excited that's coming.

MK: Are you coming?

CEC: Well, I don't have a ticket yet...

MK: no problem, no problem. (*pause*)
I don't know. I don't know if it's going to be so successful.
He decided to have his wife or girlfriend or mother of his children write the libretto,
which is basically a collage of Heine texts.
And they invited a friend and longtime collaborator to do video and do the stage,
and they directed the whole thing themselves.
None of them had experience in directing,

and it's looks like an **arrangement** of some ideas.
But, it's a fairly weak experience from that perspective.

CEC: *Offene Wunde* or *Mahagonny*?

MK: The whole evening.

CEC: The whole evening.

MK: And *Mahagonny* is of course a brilliant piece,
a very powerful one.

CEC: I was very excited .

MK: That's what of course, we would rather avoid
— people who know themselves personally so well
that there's not energy and focus enough—
So, yes, what I wanted to say was,
it could be you have whatever piece (with a certain director)
and he doesn't have a stage designer that goes always with him
and then you might try to find someone new.

CEC: Ok.

So, what you're pointing out—this is really interesting—
with this tandem piece, with *Mahagonny*, is that it's not working so well.
Do you think it's their closeness?
That there's not enough tension and critique between the two of them?
Is that the problem? I want to understand more.

MK: I can't even say for sure because I wasn't part of the process.
Obviously they didn't feel the need for a proper director.
He takes the piece of a composer, or a composer/librettist's collaboration
and turns it into a theater performance. It's still on the stage of being not quite there..

CEC: Just kind-of placed on the stage, I see.

MK: We would have liked a director to be a part of that.
but the Ensemble Modern didn't want it.
And the authors didn't want it, they wanted to do it themselves.
We had not the usual influence because it's a co-production
between the Ensemble and Dessau.

CEC: Aha. so, this is interesting.

This is a case where you do have a collaboration with another agency for a performance,
and actually you don't have very much say in how the process works.
But of course, your name is also attached to the production,
and as a result you also absorb some of the...maybe, critique?

MK: Yes, we did, we did. And we were not happy with that.
um, and there are going to be new co-productions with the Ensemble Modern
and Mr. Loebe is very much willing to maintain more influence.

He made sure that there will be a proper director for the next creation

CEC: This brings me to another question
that I know was on my list someplace!

So, how generally is press response handled?

First of all, is there someone who follows press coverage?

I'm sure there's someone who follows, and clips, and archives.

What is done with that information?

How is it used in the process that goes forward afterwards?

MK: What do you mean exactly?

CEC: Let's start with the basics first.
So, who is handling following the press?

MK: That's our *Pressereferent*
together with his assistant.

He used to have interns, long-term interns, but now we have a regular system.

They were thinking of hiring a clipping agency,
but as of now, he would like to do it himself.

CEC: And from how far?

MK: How wide?

CEC: Yes, exactly.

MK: I guess there are about fifteen to twenty papers.

CEC: Just in the vicinity?

MK: Well, ones like FAZ-- *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*,
Neue Sicherzeitung, *Welt*.

Then, local papers, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (*Frankfurter*) *Neue Presse*,
Mainzer Allgemeine, *Wiesbaden*.

And of course the magazines, like *OpernWelt*, *Opernglas*,

More and more of course, online publications.

Yes, the important portals of classical music.

CEC: Ok, the important classical music portals
um, anything international that you know of?

MK: What's it's called, *Opera News*?

CEC: Oh, yes, *Opera News*?

MK: Mm...

CEC: What about journals?

Is anyone covering trade journals, you know, for different artistic professionals?

Like... *Classical Singer* in the US, for example, or something like that.

Often times, they're talking about particular houses

MK: That would be in Germany the monthly magazines,
like *Opernwelt* and *Opernglas*, etc.

CEC: Ok.

You actually have more of them than we have!

MK: And he's also covering the press, the **radio** broadcasts.
Yes, so, what do we do with it? We read it. We hope it's good, of course.

CE: Mm-hm?

I noticed you have like, a display downstairs, in the Foyer, from *Rheingold*.

MK: Yes we display more of the **good** ones there.

CEC: Aha, just the good ones.

MK: There's been some discussion, actually, about internal censoring.
Since there's also a display on the first floor, by the singer's wardrobes.

MK: I think he does it really well, actually, with a lot of tact.
He wouldn't show a particular review where a singer really gets, um....
He's trying to find the good ones,
and be careful not to misrepresent the reaction.

CEC: Right. and I mean, they're just critics.

Like with everybody, it's just an opinion, of course.

But people do READ them, and people do react to them,
both internally and externally, so it can make a difference.

You know, if you're an artist, you're collecting these things, at least the good ones.

And using them in your portfolio when you present yourself to other people
so of course, they're valuable somehow

MK: Yes.

CEC: So, yes—is it used at all,
in terms of anything other than just displaying?
Future planning, future hiring, artistic decisions?

MK: They're good for advertising
on the website, for example, they're extracts.
There's really just the good ones there.

CEC: That makes sense.

MK: I'm thinking about, when bad reviews would have affected um,
the ratings. Did you say ratings?

CEC: Ratings, uh, no. Attendance?

MK: This man over there is watching me speak English...
He's a very good conductor.

CEC: Oh, sorry!

That we're here in a very public spot.
I know how that can feel, to be watched.

MK: Well, *Offener Wund*.

It's just an experiment, and it failed.
And it has too many people, and it's boring.

CEC: Yes, and so,
the reaction that comes as a result of this experiment failing,
and the bad press, is that...

MK: But we already knew that before the press wrote it.

CEC : So it's a little bit like...

MK: Well if you think that the press is saying the opposite of what we feel,
this is odd... and so far this has only happened with *Rheingold*.

CEC: Oh, right, you told me.

MK: And I would have bet...and still...

(Material omitted—personal introduction to a colleague)

CEC: So, I think the last
question about that is just, what do you do with it?
Where is that press information archived?

MK: In the office.

CEC: Just, period. Ok.

MK: He must have a storage room somewhere.

CEC: Well, there's stuff up until the 90's
at GU, at Goethe Universität.

MK: Yes, but in the last ten years or more... he's so meticulous.
I mean, he finds the tiniest little announcement in a *Zeitung* (newspaper).
He would clip it, glue it on one piece of paper, and file it,
so you have every day this one to two centimeter bulk of paper.

CEC: That is a thankless administrative job
Ok, that's great, that's enough with that. *(pause)*
You were talking before about the internet, and I'd like to jump back there,
and you know I'm interested not just in press reaction and all of this
but I'm also thinking about how the company presents itself from a marketing standpoint,
and how it monitors its image, right?
So, there are lots of ways in which that happens. *(pause)*
Let's just talk about the website, actually.

MK: You've seen it.

CEC: I've seen it, I've been on it...
yes! I've drunk in the website. Many times, all the time *(laugh)*.
Who designs the website—is that in-house?

MK: No.

CEC: It's outsourced, then. Ok.

MK: Yes. But the content is being filled in in-house.

CEC: Ok, is there one location that's handling that?

MK: One person—that's Elvira Wiedenhöft. I think I've mentioned her before.

CEC: Yes, you have.

MK: She's doing that pretty much all by herself.

CEC: And how long has the website existed?

MK: I don't know... it's been redesigned about a year ago.

CEC: Oh, ok?

MK: The content has stayed basically the same, but it looks a little fresher.

CEC: Can you actually edit it in-house, you know if there's just text to change—can that be done here? Like some people have just access, to log-on and change a few words that can be done?

MK: Yes, yes. That's what I meant before.

I know, by the way, the English version is being done and typed by Lucy, Mr. Loebe's ... what would you say? They're not married, but...

CEC: Partner?

Oh, is she an English native speaker?

MK: She's English.

And she's doing all that pro-bono, without being paid.

CEC: Well that's lovely.

MK: It is, it is, and she's very particular about it she doesn't want to be paid in the company her husband is...

CEC: Well, good for the company, I guess, if they don't have to pay for it, and she's happy to do it! *(pause)* So, programs. The program is also...

MK: Can I just stop you for a minute?

CEC: Of course, go ahead.

MK: One thing about the website is also particular.

We have this guest book. And not many opera houses or theaters provide a guest book.

It is, in a way, **heavily** censored.

Because every entry is being monitored before being shown online.

CEC: Before it goes live, I see.

MK: Because of too many sex ads and stuff.
There was a time when there was a lot of hostility, people attacking each other,
sort-of using it as if it were a forum.
Which it isn't, of course. It has cooled down a little bit.

CEC: But in the internet,
any chance that someone has to post
runs the risk of being like a blog poster an internet messenger
or, you know, a chat sort of thing.

MK: And it's a risk you take
and we wouldn't publish comments that attack singers directly, personally

CEC: No, it's important that it's filtered, actually,
I can see that's important. And who's doing that filtering?

MK: Elvira.

CEC: Elvira, ok. Alright. *(pause)*
Programs. are they produced in-house.

MK: That's a mixture.
There is a set layout for all of them, and we do it in collaboration with our printers.
And the graphic designers would have a look, but they wouldn't design it themselves
(pause) I've seen it in other theaters, that they would hire a staff graphic designer.
I would be in favor of that.
But we have a special agreement with the printers.
they basically publish them as their company, and they take the bulk of the risk as well.
We don't pay them, they print them themselves.

CEC: Ah, financial risk!

MK: Financial risk. It's at their own expense.
And they get about 70 percent of the price

CEC: Oh, ok.
So this is really VERY outsourced.
In a way, it seems like it's really produced by another company
and you have a relationship with them.

MK: Of course, the content is completely our own.

CEC: Right, the words, the pictures.

MK: Yes, that's right.

CEC: But the layout is even from their designer?

MK: No, no. it's been typeset there.
But everything is monitored by us, everything that I could say as the editor,
I could say, use these pictures, and they would do that.

CEC: But this is interesting, though,
and totally different than in the US.
Because of course, this arrangement couldn't happen.
Our program booklets are free so, you know, there's no financial gain possible.
So this sort of arrangement would not even be a possibility.

MK: Well, it would, if you would say
the printers could like, collect advertisements.

CEC: Oh, yes! And they do.

MK: But we don't have advertisements.
We have some in the magazine.

CEC: Because it's more of
an informative booklet.

MK: Right, the program book is supposed to be pure.

CEC: Commentary and information, and such...
Is there a style guide? Internally, for, for...

MK: No, no, there isn't.
Nothing written down. We are constantly refreshing the design
if you see the programs from the last four years, you see they are gradually changing.

CEC: But that's visual layout.
Actually, by style guide, I meant, written tone.
Sorry, that's a technical term.

MK: Ok! No, that's cool.

CEC: I worked in an art museum for a while,
when I was just out of graduate school.
It was my first job, and I was shocked to learn that there was this
style guide for the English language, designed just for their agency.

MK: Cool.

CEC: Any way, plenty of people have this.
Certain phrases to use or avoid, punctuation usage,
kind of, levels of language to try to speak with.
Like, this level (*hand gesture*) as opposed to this level or this level.
And ... some companies can be very particular
about the tone they want to set with their words,
and how they want to present themselves.

MK: Mm. There is not.
I think there's a basic mutual agreement,
but you would find if you read an article by Mr. Abels, you would,
...I think his style can be recognized,
for whatever format he's writing. (*pause*)

CEC: (pause)

You seem to have a lot that you're thinking about with this one.
Has it been an issue, that there are different tones?

MK: (waiting) yes, actually.
We've been working on the magazine.

CEC: The *Hinweise*, *Musiktheater Hinweise*?

MK: Yes, the official *Hinweise*.
At least since I've joined the company, and probably for many years since that.
They had just changed to black and when I came here. Which was of course very sad.
And now we're back to color, which is great.
And I hated this magazine from the start.

CEC: Why?

MK: Oh, I can tell you why!
Because it's... it has been handled so formally.
One premiere after another. You have a big picture, you have a quote,
you have the dramaturg's article, you have two of the artists portraits,
another quote by the director or something, the synopsis...

CEC: Plot synopsis, right?

MK: And if you have three new productions in one magazines
you have four pages one, four pages the other, four pages for the third.
And this is just... I just can't believe it...

CEC: Because it's too formulaic?

MK: Yes, that's just, it's not a magazine,
it's just... **boring**. Unsexy. This is a missed opportunity.
I've experienced much more exciting ways to do this. (pause)
We will never achieve what could be achieved because we have no editor, chief editor.
It's more like one of our colleagues is organizing the meeting,
and trying to get all of the pictures.

CEC: So it's just kind of an assembly.

MK: It's the dramaturgs & two to three other people from the house
to do this, and there's no one in charge. No **professional** in charge.
And um, the rest of...

CEC: Any talk of changing it?

MK: I think I'm the only one who
desperately wants someone from the outside.
It needs to be a journalist. And um, it won't happen, because...

CEC: Money?

MK: Others feel, I think others feel...
that they would be stripped of their influence, a little bit. (pause)

That's something that's really been on my mind a lot.

CEC: That's tricky...

MK: You know, I was part of that shift, at the Komische.

Where we had a newspaper that we ...

no, it was also a *magazine* of this format.

And it was all being done in-house, and at some point,

the opera director, the casting director, said that it would... he had the sense that something was going totally wrong. And he would like us to think again.

CEC: Totally wrong, how?

MK: A form, just being filled with the appropriate content

and no overall concept. What's going to be in these two months.

What's the theme? What's the tone of this publication?

CEC: And also, if this is

related to your other critique,

maybe, what is this magazine **doing** for us, right?

What is it helping us achieve, or set a tone?

MK: Mixing types of texts,

like interviews, portraits... if you read through them, I think you would...

maybe you find it yourself. Nothing would surprise you.

CEC: Yes, I mean, I have read...

You know actually I haven't seen new ones, but I

have seen many of the old ones.

MK: The *Hinweise* are a different matter.

CEC: Oh, you're talking about the Komische?

MK: No, I'm talking about these here.

(*pause*) There was a time at the Komische where, I think, with this paper.

It was a really brilliant move. The graphic designer came up with that.

It looked like a professional paper, like you'd launch a new cultural paper.

Amazing. The ones that were being produced about four to five years ago.

Cool authors, we would ask.

That was a suggestion of mine here, to hire local authors from the outside for essays,

that are somehow related, but not DIRECTLY related, to the opera plots.

And Norbert came up with an article on *Hoffmann* which was twenty years old,

from a great author, but what's the point of reprinting?

It has to be newly-written, and specifically for this magazine.

That's what makes it interesting.

CEC: Yes.

Who's receiving the magazine? Can I ask you quickly?

MK: We used to send it out to subscribers, but I think. I'm not sure.

But people take it, it's here, on display in the Foyer. And I think we print 9000 copies,

and they are gone by the end of the publication.

CEC: I mean, I'm with you,
I think conceptually, that it's an important site,
a possible location for making what's done here, the stage work,
somehow get connected... first of all to other people, who read it
the people who would participate in it.
If you were to have critics, or scholars,
or somebody write something that the public
would want to consume and appreciate, this could be a really important location.
A kind of a hub for connecting what's happening at the company
to dialogue in the outside world.
That seems to me to have a lot of possibilities for a theater company.
And it seems consistent for me that, based on what you were telling me before,
since---this is so far back, in another interview—
that this is very important in the history of German theater
and particularly since um, the 2nd World War, of course.
That it's been important to keep and protect theater as a site of public critique
and public commentary, and it's a venue to interact with the world, to comment on it.
And one does that in a lot of different ways,
not just with the stage work, but also with the interactions
and the people who come to the process
and watch it, and see the pieces, and think about the pieces, and talk about them.
So, it seems a little surprising to me...

MK: Not using it for that purpose.

CEC: Yes, not taking advantage of it for that purpose.

MK: And I think we're trying to do **some** of the right steps right now.

CEC: I don't mean to be judgmental about it.

MK: No no! We are....
We agreed to invite people from the society...

CEC: From the community?

MK: To write guest commentaries.
I sat down the other day with one of our theater doctors,
who attends our performances, who did a lot of very interesting research
in the psychological, neurological field, here at the university.

CEC: Kind of perceptual things
with theater?

MK: She didn't work with theater,
but just published a book about the body.

Integrity...with... disease? Something about how...
this disease when people think their legs doesn't belong to them.

CEC: Ah, yes... oh...I can't think of it.
Oh, something... phantom leg or something.

MK: They actually want it to be amputated...
And which has been described as an actual disease
only about fifteen years ago, and amazing research.
Anyway, she some of us knew that she had seen *Don Carlos* and liked it
and we have a revival of *Don Carlos*, so we asked her,
“Why don't you write what was your particular impression of this production?”

CEC: But she's not a theater person?
She's just a frequent patron and subscriber.

MK: Yes.

CEC: Ok, I think I had misunderstood you.

MK: It could just be anyone who is an active member
of Frankfurt cultural society. And I think that could be an interesting element, anyway.
So, there is no style guide. There is a consistency in everything we publish,
the tone is set sort-of through the whole public image we have created
it was different twenty to twenty-five years ago... I'm pretty sure.

CEC: Can you tell me what makes you say that?

MK: Because then the Oper Frankfurt was **the** avant-garde theater in Germany.
They had to provide the necessary scientific groundings which were
explanations and justifications for what was happening on stage.

CEC: Does that provide credibility,
in this country, for the avant-garde?

MK: This is... just came to my mind.
That might have been a subconscious thing.
You tell us, when you are done, with your...!!

CEC: No, no, please tell me what you're thinking,
I want to know!

MK: Why, Klaus Zehelein is one of the ...
And the programs he produced at the Staatsoper Stuttgart
— that was very, very reduced! No pictures, just black and white.

CEC: And as far as I understand it,
some of that was even budgetary, too.

I mean, they were dealing with a lot of financial struggles when he first got there.

MK: Maybe so, but it's also...
He could have done thirty pages instead of sixty.
And included pictures. But he...back in those days,
I think you needed to prove that you didn't do a crazy thing on stage
just out of.... *(pause)*

CEC: Your desire?

MK: You could do that today, nobody would say,
"crazy director." He does whatever he wants, as long as it's working.

CEC: Yes, this environment
you're describing now
is a much more free environment than that one I'm imagining
at the beginning of the Zehelein era. Where, there was more provocation,
and as I understand it, there was a lot of need to justify and convince.

MK: So you find highly philosophical essays,
in the *Hinweise* (company magazine).
I don't know if they helped a lot but... they were...

CEC: It was a tactic, at least.
Interesting, you know,
I'm going to have to go back and look at those again now
and think about that a little more in detail.

MK: I could just grab the opportunity and just get you acquainted
This is Cordelia Chenault.

(a few minutes pause for introductions)

CEC: So, I think that's about it for marketing.
You know, I don't want to cut that off, it was fantastically interesting.

MK: But a very half-cooked idea of mine.

CEC: Half-baked? How?

MK: Half baked! *(laughs)* What's half cooked?

CEC: Almost raw?
It might make you sick.

MK: I see. half-baked.

CEC: By the way, it's 6:15.

MK: I should be going then, soon.

CEC: Maybe just quick questions, a couple of quick questions?

MK: Ok.

CEC: We talked about *Übertiteln* (supertitles).
We didn't talk about what language the production occurs in.
It is original language? It's not always original language?

MK: No most of the time it's original.

Only with very exotic languages, we discuss it... like this Finnish opera.

Still, there are very different opinions about it in the house.

The director wanted to do it in Finnish, but the dramaturgs had a discussion about it,
last week. There are a lot of practical reasons for not doing it in Finnish.

But for me, it's...

CEC: What would those practical reasons be?

MK: Nobody in the house speaks Finnish.

It's just phonetically learning syllables that don't mean anything to anyone.

Which makes it a lot harder, and almost impossible for the chorus.

CEC: So you'd have no already trained dialogue,
or rather diction, coach. You'd have to bring someone in.

MK: Sure, and...

Italian, French, English, even Russian, are much easier.

Czech - we actually did the *Bartered Bride* in German

CEC: Czech is sometimes on that line.

MK: It's a different case than *Jenufa*

because Smetana didn't speak Czech very well. His mother tongue was German,
and we have this odd decision of *Murder in the Cathedral*, by Pizzetti.

Not in the original Italian, but in the English, because of the novel.

Which isit's a little bastard now.

CEC: Yes, ah!

MK: Neither *Fisch* nor *Fleisch* (a German expression, "neither fish nor meat".)
but he expressly wished it.

CEC: I want to say something,
and, it might come off a little like critique, but that's not what I mean.

I just realized a lot of my questions are seeking
a clear position or a clear channel that Oper Frankfurt would take on something
maybe in a little bit more of a way like the Komische Oper would or something...

I'm asking about a style guide, and there's no particular style...

it's just whatever seems to be the best

and I was asking at one point about a mission statement,

and, well, there's not really a mission statement

and I was asking at one point-- I'm very loud here, goodness--

MK: There could be various reasons for that.
Maybe I just don't know them...um, and maybe they just don't exist?
and maybe this is actually a personal problem of mine. I'm still struggling with that point,
having worked at a different theater with a very specific focus.

CEC: But you even said with Loebe
--it doesn't seem to me that you're wrong--
and I don't mean necessarily that I'm agreeing with you or disagreeing with you
but that your observation about the company I don't think is **incorrect**
I think maybe it's correct to say
that there isn't a clear policy about this aspect, or this aspect.
Because also of what you told me about Loebe,
and the way he hires and the way he works.
It does seem to be very driven, at present, in operations and decision making,
by a few key people with a chemistry and a synergy that is working,
they do have some similar artistic ideals and goals.
But it seems that they haven't been expressed.
And even what you told me about the survey that took place,
you told me that they characterized their observations as very general.

MK: *Qualität, Vielfalt, Emotion.*

CEC: Yes, so it's interesting,
it's very... it's difficult to pin down exactly what is driving and organizing,
and yet the artistic quality is for the most part quite high. Tight productions.
And the ones that the company likes do seem to have focus and *Konzept*,
and they're well-executed and detailed.
So I think that there are things, even if unarticulated,
that must be driving what's happening
did that make sense?

MK: Yes...

CEC: It's just a thought.
Because there is such clarity from Loebe when something matches,
and you do still have a sense of what is strong and what is weak.

MK: It's interesting,
How would one describe this era of the Oper Frankfurt ten years from now?
And what's been the recipe? I would say it's... he's able to tell good from bad.
And in all sorts of styles, and... "*Epochen*"?

CEC: "Eras."

MK: Without committing to one particular way...
not just focusing on Baroque music, for example.

CEC: So, actually, maybe that's it?
Maybe you just said it, actually.

It's the focusing on the best, the strongest examples,
or a lot of successful ways.

MK: I sort of resent this...

CEC: Oh, I'm sorry!

MK: No, no, not **this**...

I resent this term, *Quality*, because it is so general.
And Loebe uses it **all** the time.

CEC: And it's very hard,
because it can mean SO many things
and it is so personal, subjective.

MK: But still you agree, that this is high quality opera.

CEC: Yes, I do.

MK: And he... (*pause*)

CEC: (*pause*) I'll tell you,
I don't absolutely LOVE every single production I've seen here,
though nothing has...

MK: Nothing is below a certain...

CEC: Yes. (*pause*) And I'll say,
I'll contrast here with the Komische, I have seen—
my favorite production that I saw this year was at the Komische,
and the least favorite that I've seen this year was also at the Komische.

MK: Which were?

CEC: I admit that I didn't see the whole season.
I was very —mmm—about the *Boheme* that I saw.
I did not like it. It wasn't my cup of tea,
I was bored, and I didn't like the tenor.
And I **loved** the *Rigoletto*.

MK: Well, I haven't seen that one.

CEC: Well, I don't want
to give you an opinion about it.

MK: I've heard really good things about it...

CEC: Yes, I really loved it.
Oh, and something else was fantastic, eh... anyway, it doesn't matter.
But it's interesting, because...
it's not like the polar opposite, but anyway, a very different situation.
And I'm not expecting Oper Frankfurt to be the Komische.
But it's interesting to notice the contrast
especially since you've worked at both places.
It seems to me that when you have such a strong statement,
a clearly defined, narrow idea of who you want to be
you sometimes get the best and sometimes get the worst as a result of adhering to that
so you get a lot more **middle** here.

MK: Yes, I would agree with that.

CEC: But is that different, than Oper Frankfurt's past?
Or different moments in its past?

MK: Yes. And, of course,
there's an accent on the quality on the singing.
That has been improved by Loebe.

CEC: So, he's very singer-focused,
I hear from what you've said.
That makes sense, with the history of him doing these singer-portraits,
and the relationships he has with singers.
So, it's become a more singing-focused house.

MK: Mm-hm!

CEC: Ok. There doesn't need to be a final statement on that.
But maybe it's an interesting observation.
May I just take a minute and see..
Oh, you need to go!

(scheduling next interview)

END OF INTERVIEW 3

Interview #4, Malte Krasting July 29, 2010

CEC: I wanted to start just with more factual information

about support staff and personnel.
Maybe this is very straightforward, but when you bring in singers
what sort of support do they have within the company and in the area?
Let's start with solo singers first.

MK: Mm. You mean musical preparation?

CEC: Yes...

Do they have coachings?

MK: Yes. The regulars—

We have about six pianists on staff

Who prepare all new parts and refresh all parts with the singers.

That schedule is arranged by the guy who is responsible for

Musikalische Einstudierung (musical preparation), the *Studienleiter* (head of study).

We have only one. Other theaters of our size have more, like two...

and he schedules his colleagues, and then puts it together.

(*pause*) Tight now we have the special situation that we have

Three *Kappellmeisters*, which is...

usually you would have a chief conductor and his... (*pause*)

CEC: Assistant?

MK: Assistant! Or *Stellvertreter* (deputy).

And an assistant, and maybe one *Kappellmeister*, who's handling the repertoire.

Or ballet performances...if there were *Nutcracker*, and stuff like that.

But we have now three.

They've all been pianists, *Repetiteuren* (rehearsal pianists).

This is a career move for them by Bernd Loebe

He knows they all want to conduct, they're all trained conductors.

They started here as pianists, and he gave them the title,

and a couple of performances, or a series, every season.

That's supposed to... like an additional training career program for two or three years

and then we expect them to find jobs with other theaters, or go on freelance

however it works for them

But they won't stay in this post until they retire

CEC: Oh? Ok.

It's meant to be more of a stepping-stone position.

MK: But it's not like the old German *Kappellmeister*

Who's an experienced, older, all-around musician.

It's like... um... these guys are...

CEC: ...in training?

MK: (*nodding*)...to become good conductors.

That's Yuval Zorn, the Israeli guy,

and Hartmut Keil, who's been with the company for I think, already eight years.

CEC: Yes?

MK: (*pause*) And... the third one is Erik Nielsen, from Indiana.

This is... he's about to leave the company.

CEC: How long are they...
have they been here?

MK: Erik, I think, joined the Oper Frankfurt
about.... 2004... around that.

CEC: The other two?

MK: Hm. Harmut, maybe 2005, I'm not quite sure.
I ... started here in '06, and both of them had already been here a while.
so I guess they've started... a year or two earlier.
And Yuval is comparatively new, he came from Covent Garden.
He was assistant to Anthony Papano
Yes. That's the situation right now.

CEC: And.. having these three people here
in this kind of early career stage... capacity.
Has that been happening for a longer period of time?
or was that something that has suddenly been..
that Bernd Loebe decided to do, to bring these three in.

MK: No, it's not official.
It's sort of the second round, I witnessed this step.

CEC: Ok.

MK: Before those three guys, it was two others,
who also both started as *Repetiteurs*.
And are both now enjoying an international career.
Johannes is now chief conductor at Toronto
And Roland conducts... it's really going very well for both of them. (*pause*)
And what I was going to say was
...this *Kappellmeister*'s a function... sort of... in-between.
They are still working as pianists, helping out when the rest of the staff is busy.
They are partly responsible for their own performance series,
together with Felice, with the *Studienleiter*.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And that's why we... I think we can work with only one *Studienleiter*,
because that's really a very important job for which they're responsible.
He needs to make sure everyone is well prepared when scenic rehearsals start

CEC: Mm-hm?
So it sounds to me like they're offered this opportunity
to develop skills that they haven't really spent too much time doing yet,
or at least not in a professional context.
But in return, what they're giving to the company is
additional support with a lot of other needed tasks

MK: Yup.

CEC: Because they have a pretty wide skill set. Yes?

MK: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. (*nodding*)

CEC: Ok... Good. Interesting.

MK: (*pause*) And competitive.

There are pianists on our staff—you've met some of them—who are very eager. And who have also studied conducting, and have had their chances at other places or even here. And they're going to conduct at Oper Frankfurt!
...(*text stricken from record...*)

CEC: Can you explain the role of *Kappellmeister*, in the historical sense?

MK: (*pause*) It's of course an old term. Dating back 300 years ago.

CEC: And it's usually having to do with church music.

MK: Yes... I mean, *Hofkappellmeister* was for court music, also of course administrative tasks
The term, how it is used now, is... a conductor who can handle pretty much anything, who is experienced. Who can take over a performance at very short notice, just keeping it all together at home.... while...

CEC: Mm. Kind of, the music director, just, period.

MK: Yes, but like... when the chief conductor is a prominent figure who travels a lot.

CEC: He can also step in.

MK: But the *Kappellmeister* stays.

CEC: A more **permanent** employee. Ah, ok!

MK: That's what you would think about *Kappellmeister* in the traditional way
In German opera.

CEC: I really don't think we have this role, per se..
I mean, we have music directors, we have people that are permanent staff that are in charge of the musical leadership
But they don't usually step in to the conducting role...
I...I'm trying to think of any situation that I've been in where I've seen something like that. And I haven't, really.
Only in a small house, where the conductor is also the music director, there is sometime that overlap of roles

MK: Last time I think Levine was going to conduct *Mahagonny* at Tanglewood, and Erik was his assistant, and he got sick. So Erik stepped in. But um... I think it's parallel to the use of covers, for singers.

CEC: Yes!

MK: Which was not common in Germany. You would have two *Besetzung* (casts)

And one would sing the premiere and most later
And the cover mostly does not perform at all

CEC: But the cover is usually a younger singer
usually someone that's trying to build their career
that also needs to learn the role, and also have the chance to...
like these conductors that you were talking about.
Exactly like that.
But not in a permanent capacity.
It's always like a solo singer
who's wanting to build their CV, their resume.

MK: But back to the *Kappellmeister*, that's the traditional sense.
And I think it's more and more use just to have a second or third conductor at the theater. Who
would be a younger one, most of the time.

CEC: Mm-hm. (*pause*)
And even that, we were talking last time about how
there's a singer focus to Oper Frankfurt.
There's a real emphasis on good singing,
and the quality of the singing and that sort of thing.
But...it's not so one-sided that the singing is the only place
where there's this extra support.
Where there's this extra backup. Right?

MK: No.

CEC: It does seem more rounded, I would say,
in terms of stage directors and conductors

MK: Yes, yes.
Because we play so many performances each year.
We have a lot of roles to fill, for conductors!
And even with a huge staff of conductors, we have a lot of guest conductors.
And this is what we are really proud of.
And like, Kirill Petrenko... also there are sometimes younger conductors.
And you should hear our pianists talk!

CEC: About?

MK: When a young conductor comes,
and doesn't live up to their expectations.
And they know they could do it better

(*both laughing*)
CEC: Yes—
That's really interesting!
I haven't been too much part of the conductor's world.
I mean I guess all specialized groups...
There's a little bit of envy, or pride, or something.
Singers are notorious for being this way, right?

You have three sopranos, and somebody doesn't sound fantastic on a high note,
and the sopranos in the audience are all going "ah, I could have done that better."
I guess that's competition and human nature

MK: I think that's an interesting thing with conductors,
a conductor can make a mistake and nobody notices. Because, the mistake doesn't sound.
And maybe that's one of the most difficult aspects in forming a company,
how to tell if the conductor is good or not. And depending on whom you ask,
you get so many different answers. Ask people from the orchestra,
a string player or a woodwind player, and they would say two different things. And singers and
chorus, stage directors. Everybody wants something else from the conductor.

CEC: Yes, that's true
once you reach a certain level of musicianship.
Often it's just stylistic differences.
And some musicians prefer to work with a conductor of this style, and some...

MK: (*Nodding.*) What happens during rehearsals,
what happens in the performance... a former *Generalmusikdirektor*, Paolo Carignani.
He just, he only played through! Mahler symphonies: "2nd movement again."
Then he would cut the rehearsal short.
He would let the orchestra leave at twelve instead of at one.
He didn't have anything to say! And still, in the concert, during the performances,
he had magical moments. And, you didn't know what happened!
He could, he could inspire them.
And others work meticulously and conduct a dull evening.

(*conversation about ordering food*)

CEC: Thank you, that's helpful. Good context.
Also, I'll add just one other thing that came into my mind as you were talking.
So you had also mentioned before that, especially with *Wiederaufnahmen*,
that the younger stage directors have a chance to come in
—or someone who was an assistant on the production the first time—
has a chance to come in as the main director.

MK: Yes... I wouldn't...

CEC: It strikes me as...that's different?

MK: (*nodding*) That's different.
I wouldn't call that a chance, that's just their job.

CEC: Ok, that's just their job.

MK: Just their job, and sometimes it's nice.
But there are many times it's not really attractive, because you have very little time.
And sometimes you have singers who are not willing to cooperate,

who would start to discuss, and question the decisions the stage director made maybe two years ago. And in the worst case, this assistant conductor wasn't even part of it he just has the notes of his colleague, and the video, and maybe he can ask other singers who were already in the original production but he just has to make it work and have the singers do exactly, or approximately what the first cast has done so that's a tough job

CEC: Yes.

MK: *(pause)* And they have like ten days to revive a complicated production. And... we try to find, when it's new singers who come in, to find people who match the "type."

CEC: Mm?

MK: From the original cast
But you know, you have to compromise.

CEC: Yes, you explained that.

MK: And then you have an experienced "Fernando," who has done it a dozen times, and thinks he knows better, and that can even get nasty.

CEC: I even remember, as you're saying this
Even just from, I don't know, *Billy Budd*, or something
I was watching rehearsals of at one point
I can even imagine and remember the tone in – I can't remember her name—
even in her voice,
she was doing a good job, but I can hear from the sound of her voice,
and see from the way the rehearsals were going, it was much more a very straightforward
sort of process, and even in the tone of her voice, you could hear it was very directive.
And less, kind of... coaxing, or relaying the idea.
The way you get with a new director and a new production.
But it was much more of a straightforward delivery: "This is what needs to happen here."
Some of this may be her personality, but

MK: But you don't have time for...

CEC: Mm-hm.

MK: That's special, because Katharina was brought in as a guest. She was... she worked here as assistant director for like four or five years, but now she's freelance. But she had assisted on that production, and she had a very good relationship with Richard Jones.

CEC: Ah, ok.

MK: Also, the other colleagues probably were very busy, but Loebe brought her in to make that work smoothly. And that's what she was here for.

CEC: Ok, so naturally it was easier, simpler, to convey the tone that way.

MK: And there were a lot of...
there were not so many new singers, but I think
one or two of the main characters, when you
...and of course, she had this nightmare when Billy Budd got sick
two days before the *Wiederaufnahme* premiere.

CEC: What happened then,
can you tell me?

MK: It was especially sad because everybody was waiting
For Peter Mattei to return...

MK: That was a marvelous job
by the KBB (*Kunsterisches Betriebsbüro*, operations office).
Because they found, well, they would call around
—they probably had a list of “Billy Budds” from recent performances—
and they called around, if they were free. And they found Christopher Maltman
Of course, that’s an exciting singer to get a... (*pause*)

CEC: ...to have step in!

MK: ... a singer of his caliber.
I don’t know how many times... he has taken part in two different stagings, maybe?
So he knew the part very well, and could do it just--- quickly.

CEC: That was lucky.

MK: And... expensive.

CEC: Oh! I bet.
Well, if it’s somebody so high profile... in that way.
Yes, it’s going to be more expensive. (*pause.*)
But this was a situation where it wouldn’t have worked,
to pull someone from the ensemble. There was nobody else that knew the role.

MK: No, no cover. That was really... We take our chances with that.

CEC: Oh.
Do you think that’s the right decision?
Do you have reservations about that, ever?

MK: Well, the chances of a guest cancelling performances,
I think, are much lower than if it’s a staff singer.

CEC: Mm. Why?

MK: It’s a question of reliability, and of course, of money.
If Peter Mattei cancels, then he does not get paid, then
for the performance he does not sing.

CEC: Of course, then.

MK: So it’s tough for him.

CEC: Whereas the ensemble singers
are more at a salary arrangement.

MK: They get a monthly salary,
and it doesn’t hurt so much.

But of course, if word gets around “Peter Mattei cancels often”—
Which he doesn’t!—then others know that, and will have reservations
about hiring him.

CEC: Mm. That makes sense.

MK: Oh... who’s cancelled often?

(*pause*) Can’t find any names right now but
of course, there’s a sort of, “red list,” and the...
it would be so much work to prepare a baritone from the ensemble
to have that part ready.
We couldn’t use them for weeks.
The whole thing was just, bad luck.

CEC: And, well, it’s a different situation
Depending on what the piece is, too.
I mean, if it’s a *Carmen* or a *Boheme* or a *Traviata*
or something that’s just so, so standard
you’re probably going to have
someone in the ensemble.

MK: That’s partly what I mean.

We couldn’t have replaced Peter Mattei with anyone from the ensemble,
because you need to find someone equivalent.

CEC: Mm-hm. right!
Because he’s a major draw.

MK: He’s a star.

You have to find someone like him, or you have to cancel the performance,
otherwise you would piss the audience off.

CEC: Do you recall situations—
This is interesting!
Where performances have really been cancelled?
Does it happen much?

MK: Absolutely not. (*pause*)

I’ve seen performances replaced.

Um... when I was an intern at the Komische Oper Back then, they had a *Rienzi* in the repertoire.

And that’s another...when the tenor calls in sick, you have no chance.

So they replaced it with *La Boheme*. Which was sad, and many people left.

Exchanged their tickets. So, no, no.

CEC: So not much.
It’s just avoided, wherever possible.

MK: (*pause*) We had landed at the assistant directors
And their chances, and I wanted to continue...

CEC: Please, please! Tell me.

MK: Their chances would be:

A small scale production, the smallest imaginable, would be one of those.

Oper für Kinder (children’s opera)

CEC: Ah, right!

MK: Like my colleague, Deborah
Would write the... “screenplay”?

CEC: “Adaptation”, I think.

MK: Like, new dialogue, and stuff.

CEC: Yes, exactly.

MK: And she usually works with the KBB,
to learn who’s available, and asks one of the assistant directors to direct it.
That’s the very first. But it’s a tough job, because then you have no assistants.
If you’re a director of that piece, you have to make sure all of your props, and stuff. That’s
natural.... or, like *Pimpinone*.

CEC: In the small space.

MK: That would be... at the request of Fabian.

CEC: I love this space, I think it’s great!

MK: This box, yes!

We have to be very grateful for the *Schauspiel* (theater), who invented...

It’s just what we needed.

I hope we can use it... We **will** use it next season for a very similar occasion, like it’s a...

Anyway, Fabian had asked for an opportunity to show his talent.

And they found this. Telemann being a composer connected to Frankfurt.

And joining the *Opernstudio* (the young artist program.)

So now he’s got... he really expanded his resume with that.

And we had a good performance!

You know they’re very eager to make it work, they will work all the time—a lot—

So from the company standpoint, that’s the best that could happen.

CEC: It sounds to me...

Across the board, and this is even going back to what we were saying before

About Loebe and taking people that have all these different skills

And really looking at them personally and what they can bring

There’s such an emphasis on the personal relationship

Between all sorts of employees and artists that come

In a way that it seems to me—as a positive—

That it benefits both the company and the artist, or the employee, themselves...

MK: Mm-hm.

CEC: ...in the way this is done.

It could be interpreted, depending on the perspective

That yes, you’re asking a lot of these people

They’re working overtime, they’re filling a lot of different capacities...

But at the same time, there’s really attention given

To providing opportunities that people need and want for growth.

And in that way, it balances.

There's positive for the company in that they get a lot of, maybe extra work? And maybe
A chance to have people fill in, and not have to hire extra people, so that's good
And then it's definitely good for the employee because they have a chance to develop their
resumes, their portfolios, try new skills with some trust given.
That seems to be working very well here, I would say.

MK: Yup. Yup.

Even with, what I mentioned earlier with guest conductors coming in,
it keeps the level high. You don't lose your energy, your zeal...

(...personal comment cut)

MK: Yes, if you've done your job well, then maybe,
a real Depot staging will be up for grabs, or...
I'm thinking of a former colleague of ours who was sort-of...
had a little, his role was a little expanded compared to the other assistant directors.

MK: Although they're all equal now.

He's done a Depot production, and a regular stage production at the opera house,
and now he's freelance, he's getting around.

Assisting a lot, to Christoph Loy, travelling with him.

Having his *Wiederaufnahmen* in other theaters.

I guess there are also about six of them, the assistant directors, if I am counting right...

(pause) And one other thing, yes.

Usually they are young, they come from university or academy.

On their way to becoming proper stage directors.

Sometimes the career goes otherwise. Like Orest, who is a little older, and has no ambition to
direct himself, but he's happy with that.

Works with very renowned artists, he seems to have found his spot.

And we have this American colleague, this black guy, used to be a dancer.

CEC: Ah, yes, we...
did we talk about him once?

MK: I think so... he was also appearing in *Die Tote Stadt*.

Alan Barnes. Of course he was a dancer, and wanted to continue working.

So he is different than Fabian von Matt, Because he wasn't trained as a director

But he's very good with movement, with body language,

You wouldn't use him to revive a *Billy Budd* production.

CEC: But it's his directing style,
is for a very different type of...

MK: Yes, so that's the three options for assistant directors:

Young ones on their way up, experienced ones, just very good at this,
and sort of side...

CEC: ... sort of a lateral shift,

yes, I know what you mean.

(laughter over the language from both)

CEC: This is actually a great way to transition,
since we've been talking about stage direction.
I would love to talk about the rehearsal process.
I've seen a lot, so I realize a lot of this is redundant
But I'd love to hear if you could maybe give me a contrast,
a comparison and contrast between what the rehearsal process is generally like
for the different stages.
Including lengths of time, and how the rehearsals go, in flavor or tone.
How they're different between a new premiere and a *Wiederaufnahme*

MK: That's a ..
I don't take part so much in the *Wiederaufnahme* rehearsals

CEC: Well then, maybe let's just start with a premiere.

MK: A new production would...
the regular rehearsal process takes six weeks, in a normal case.
You've been to one of the *Konzeptionsgespräch*? (Concept Talk)

CEC: No, I haven't done that yet.
But I will.

MK: Everybody involves meets in the Foyer:
all soloists, staff, assistants, people from the KBB, costume department,
all of us dramaturgs, and anybody who's interested.

CEC: Can I pause you right there?
What are these people prepared with, when they come?

MK: Well, the soloists have studied their parts,
but they don't know anything about the staging,
other than what rumours might have told them.
Or they come to us and ask us, what's going to be onstage, the design.

CEC: Are they expected to be off-book, memorized?
From the start of rehearsals.

MK: Yes, yes.
Sometimes they aren't and they would apologize.
And try to work it out, but usually...

CEC: That's an expectation.

MK: That's what Felice is responsible for,
the staff, the regulars.

And the guests are, as you would expect them to be. Very well prepared.
Assistant directors—it depends on the relationship between them and the director

CEC: Will they have likely met before?

MK: Yes. But when, and how intensively depends on the persons involved.

CEC: And is that up to them?

MK: I think all of them do try to get in touch with the directors
I mean, they have to plan the rehearsal schedule
for the first week, at least. So they will have talked to them
or met them a couple of weeks before.

CEC: So that's an important point.
They have already at this point planned at least a week or two in advance.
So they have had some meetings.

MK: There are also other assistants there, like costumes.
And naturally they have done a lot more up to that point!
The design has to be finished by then.

CEC: So they have also met
with the directing team before that point. Or..
are they considered part of the directing team?

MK: The assistants?

CEC: No, you were saying,
technical staff and stage design?

MK: I meant... we always have one assistant
For the costumes, and another for stage design
Or even two on both.
And usually one is a member of the Oper Frankfurt.
And sometimes the directors bring someone with them.
The stage designer and costume designer.

CEC: So before the *Konzeptionsgespräch*,
it seems like the individual departments have met and talked
and planned a little bit

MK: Yes.

CEC: And then the formal work together with the group
Begins at the *Konzeptionsgespräch*.

MK: It doesn't sound quite right yet.
Because before this point, the stage director.
The stage designer, and the lighting designer, maybe the costume designer,
their assistants, the dramaturg, and if it all possible, the conductor...
they would have met. **Way** before.
A year before, and a half a year before.
So that in many cases, the staging is in the mind of the director very, very far in advance.

And the stage design is set at that point.

CEC: Ah, ok.

MK: And now they adjust minor details.

It's already being built six weeks before the opening.

The costume sets for the chorus are being tailored, or bought, or whatever...

CEC: Which is why you told me once before
that basically nothing can change after *Konzeptionsgespräch*.
That's really just a format for delivering the information.

MK: Not the outlook of what happens, but the details of what's on stage.

That's still... it depends on the work.

CEC: Yes, of course,
the execution, the details.

MK: The blocking is... of course!

CEC: Ok, good.

In my mind, this is also good to know.
Cause if I'm sitting her just translating the word,
"Konzeptionsgespräch," I'm thinking,
Oh, this is the meeting where things are conceptualized!

MK: No, it's really the wrong...

When I once brought in a music professor,

a musicologist with his students for the Palestrina *Konzeptionsgespräch*.

Um, that was obviously his first, and he was irritated... that it was so undemocratic.

He wondered why there was no discussion at all.

I mean, I gave an introduction and Kupfer told what was going to happen

And he was surprised.

CEC: Yes, the name is misleading!

MK: Yes, it is. Very sorry for that. And it's a very Germanic name,

Like *Konzeption*. There are more, some like David McVicar...

he insisted that he didn't want to have a *Konzeption*. He dislikes the term.

Yes, it's just like, an informative meeting.

So that everybody involved knows in which direction the train is going.

So the people from communications know how to sell it, what to expect,

any complaints from the audience that are going to come in after the premiere.

So, that's the main...

CEC: Yes.

I don't mean to cut you off, but I think I've got it.

It's helpful also to clarify what happens before the *Konzeptionsgespräch*.

So let's pick up there...

MK: So there, we are meeting about a year and a half

before the premiere, and that's usually the first meeting of the director.

Everybody has been picked,
they would meet about a year and a half in advance.
Director, stage designer, that is—the nucleus. Dramaturg. Costume designer.

CEC: And the conductor of course, probably.

MK: Not yet. They don't have the time.
They are just busy conducting.

CEC: Interesting that stage concerns
definitely precede musical concerns.
It seems like there's more assumption

That the musical concerns will work out in the course of rehearsal.

MK: Well, yes.
The sounds don't have to be built in the workshops.

CEC: That's true.
I mean, I guess this is a difference,
with *Musiktheater* as opera? It's theater,
and many of the theatrical elements are so much more variable, piece to piece?
It has to do with the direction and the concept, and the visual schema?

MK: Mm-hm. (*Nodding.*)

CEC: ...that's wanted for the piece?
And the thematic ideas that are going to come through onstage? Visually, mostly?
Whereas the score, unless there are major alterations...

MK: and that's the one point when you would call in the conductor early.
When you have a piece where musical decisions have to be made
Like *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. You have to come to terms with the conductor,
Or the director wants to alter something, as you've said.

CEC: Or even a little with the *Pimpinone*.
I saw there were some changes, a little bit, to the small details.

MK: Yes, the new preface they tried out.

CEC: But that's a less common situation.

MK: Yes.
In that case, they have to work it out between them.
But usually the conductor is not necessary yet.
But this inner circle will discuss, listen to the piece, read it,
and try to find what they want to tell with it, make with it.
And when they have worked out a first draft—and maybe there's a model of the stage—then you
would, of course, as soon as possible, meet with the conductor, and tell him what you think. To
make sure acoustically it's going to work.

CEC: So that the conductor can plan.

MK: Or, if you want to ...do something backstage,
or in the pit, or in the auditorium, all those things would be discussed with the conductor.
And that would happen about a year before the premiere.

CEC: Oh, ok!
That's reasonably far in advance.

MK: Yup. Then, about nine months before the premiere,
you would have the *Bauprobe* (set test build rehearsal.)
A little before you would have the due date for your designs.
I'm little confused if that happens before the *Bauprobe* or after.

CEC: What's the *Bauprobe*?

MK: The *Bauprobe* is...
the construction department has an idea what the designer wants to build.
And they "mark" it, with old materials. Roughly the proportions, the height of buildings, stage
parts. So that you can have a visual image you can try out.
What's it called? With the *Rheingold*...

CEC: The ramp?

MK: The angle.
We had that, and some of us, including me, would try to walk on the, on the...

CEC: The ramp.

MK: Yes, on the ramp, it was rectangular then.
You could hang on a rope, adjust it, try out.

CEC: Mm-hm?!
And see what's physically possible.

MK: Yes, on the angle, and then we saw that...
no singer would do that!
So we reduced it, walked up to the highest point...
we lowered it a little bit again.
That's what happens on the *Bauprobe*. Nothing is finished

CEC: It's more of a testing out.

MK: Yes, of the visual angles, perspectives...
To make sure no basic mistake is being made.

CEC: Good.

MK: Like: the 3rd Rang (Balcony) can't see anybody.
And how deep... how far upstage you can move the singers.

CEC: Without...?

MK: Without making them invisible, or inaudible.

(...conversation about language)

MK: a *Bauprobe* can take up to three hours
You will have extras.

The director might give a small introduction to his or her thoughts.
Technical staff. And you will look at what has been prepared.
And then you would use the extras to play out some situations.
Like, below our *Ring* disc, how far can you go under it.
What can you play out there?
And at that point, a musical assistant or a conductor himself would be there
And give his thoughts, the lighting designer will be there,
Maybe propose some ideas

CEC: Mm-hm.
That sounds like a really fun day!

MK: It can be. At that point you're very free to do anything,
To change the design. There's a limited time frame you have, but you have that.
And once you've decided to go on,
the workshops or the construction partners start doing their jobs.

CEC: Ok, good!

MK: And then...?

Then it's really a long time. The costume department has an *Abgabetermin* (a deadline) later. I'm not sure when, depending on how big the cast is.

CEC: And that's just their deadline.
For turning in the work to their team so that the rest...

MK: No, not to the team! To the theater.
Because their drafts have been discussed with the director and others already
they will hand in their drafts to the costume department
I guess, like, three months before the premiere, three to four months.

MK: As I was saying, depending on how many chorus people there are
Or if you plan to have everything tailored, or if you can buy stuff at H&M.
(*pause*) I think of the process with Christoph Loy,
who begins with carefully selected rehearsal costumes.
And you just end up with the last version of the rehearsal costumes being the proper
costumes...like in *Don Carlo*.
Of course, that was a different director.
And knowing that from the start, that there would be historical costumes
... it was clear that we had to outsource huge parts of it.

CEC: Well, it's such a specialized skill.

MK: Th the singers start their work at this (*pause*)...

CEC: *Konzeptionsgespräch?*
Laughing... delivery day!
I mean... after that, I've seen it,
and it seems to be relatively straightforward

I can compare different productions and see
Generally how long this stage happens, or that...

When would you say that the conductor

I was thinking about who's running rehearsal.

It seems to me that there's a time when it's more the stage director

Then there's a period of time when both the director and the conductor are there together

And then there's a phase where it's the conductor, from then on out.

Can you roughly tell me at what point in the process that

Those changes occur?

MK: I can, after a little break...

CEC: Yes, let's take a little break.

(brief break, then conversation about recording)

MK: So, after this infamous *Konzeptionsgespräch*,
it takes about an hour, then, with the introductions
some of them didn't know each other already
then the director gives his or her speech
twenty minutes, half an hour, something like that...

CEC: Not really a *Gespräch!* (conversation)

MK: ... hands it over to the stage designer, who has brought the model,
and explains certain points.

The costume designer has brought figurines, drafts, pictures...yes...

Rarely, the conductor says a few things.

I don't open the discussion for questions but usually, some come.

Then you would regroup, the singers would spend an hour or so with the conductor

If he's there, or with an assistant.

MK: And sing through the first scenes that are going to be rehearsed
during the first week. Or as far as they come, because you would try to have the conductor
present at that point.

But many times they will be busy with other stuff,
performances from previous productions.

So they won't be able to attend all rehearsals from the beginning.

But they try to lay ground on tempi, and stuff like that.

CEC: Ok, so it's not "marking"

Or even really a read-through.

It's an actual working rehearsal.

MK: Yes, giving the assistants a clue
how to conduct the first rehearsal.

Considering tempi and dynamics.

So the first morning would probably be that way, and in our case, we would all assemble in
Rödelheim and start with the piece.

CEC: Ok.

MK: And then it depends on the director.
If they are going to do a musical run-thru of the first scene first,
and then discuss stuff, or just start... jump right in... whatever.

CEC: Can I stop you for one second?
This is a side note, at some point in the future,
Could you show me *Probebühne 1 and 2*?

(directional discussion about the building)

CEC: So... the Konzeptionsgespräch,
then the time with the conductor
and then the conductor is out of the picture for a while?

MK: Yes, he will show up every other or every third rehearsal
during the first two weeks, that's an average.
And you would try to get through the piece...
and I think that's what you call "blocking"
in about two to three weeks

CEC: What do you call that?

MK: *Inszenieren* (staging).
I find the term "blocking", it's so fixed! It's like, like you build bricks.

CEC: It is!

MK: But you're dealing with people! And motion..
and it really sounds like they are opposing concepts of how to do theater...
I don't know...

CEC: Well,
I think you adjust to it at some point?
The idea of it. But even at the beginning
The idea of blocking is strange.

CEC: I think, I mean, I don't know if you have something similar
But there are always these "blocking books" that we have
that notate fixed moments.

MK: Of course, the assistants are doing that.

CEC: But, even the notion of it...
When I was first learning to do that a long time ago,
when I was in my late teens or early twenties,
to take the idea of a fixed moment,
and that you're just walking from fixed moments to fixed moments.
It seems so stagnant, to me, you know.
It's not thinking about the motion quite so much.
I mean, you can notate that, too, but most don't.
But it, I don't know, it always seems strange to me.

You adjust it, you adjust to it,
you learn how it works.

You do know that there's motion between these pictures. But...

MK: It's the end of the process here, as well,
You have to decide on one version. But I think we want to not call it.. so directly...
Like "blocking." Anyway, that's what happens.
And the director... the conductor would come from time to time,
have a look, especially at the first rehearsal of a scene.
To get a notion. Or the point when the director says,
"I've finished the first act, and we'll have a run-thru..
"could you come and have a look.."
and... three weeks into the rehearsal process, we move onto the stage.
When parts of the stage design are ready. Or it's just marked

CEC: They start to come on.

MK: Maybe you have to go back to Rödelheim.
Or one of the rehearsal stages.
Or you can stay on the mainstage for the rest of the... depending on what's going on.
(*pause*) But I mean, on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays,
we perform, so you cannot rehearse onstage.

CEC: In times when
both the director and the conductor are there,
do you ever find it tense or awkward, with who's in control?
Are they working together?

MK: After that point, the director is in control of the scenic rehearsals.
The conductor or his assistant will conduct and maybe at certain moments stop or
ask to stop if a musical detail has to be worked out.
You would... you would come to terms, say "can we have five minutes"
We have to...

CEC: It's just done ad hoc, very flexibly.

MK: Which is in the interest of the director, of course.
That's not awkward. The awkward moments might occur later, I think,
when everything comes together onstage,
and acoustical problems arise.
I haven't experienced nasty moments except for one time...
Maybe we'll come to that, but it's not important.

CEC: Ok, alright.

MK: About one or two weeks into this rehearsal process proper,
the conductor will start working with the orchestra.
That depends on the orchestra's schedule.

CEC: But independently?

MK: Independently.
That would be—yes. The final four weeks before the premiere.
With three, four, five *Orchesterprobe* (Orchestra rehearsals.)

CEC: And the singers are
not coming into those orchestra-based rehearsals.

MK: No, no.
They will then come in later...but that will be about three weeks before the premiere
The *Orchestersitzproben*—two or three...

CEC: And that, actually...
The rehearsals where the singers and the orchestra are working together
are always happening on the mainstage, pretty much?

MK: No, that all happens in the orchestra rehearsal room.
On the 7th floor.

CEC: Oh, aha.

MK: That's a huge space.

CEC: even the *Sitzprobe*?

MK: Yes! yes, yes.

CEC: ok!

MK: Definitely. I mean that's the point
To focus on just the musical side.
Of course the director... the conductor I mean, I'm sorry,
already knows, roughly, what's going to happen at that point.
Maybe he'll keep that in mind or let the singers know where they would stand.

CEC: Is there anything else
That's called the *Sitzprobe*? Later in the process, or is that the only...?
There is some misapplication of this term in English-speaking theater, I think.

MK: No, no, these are the ones. These are just musical.
And the next step will be the *Bühnenorchesterprobe*. (Staged rehearsal with orchestra.)
The next main step with...there are mainly five or six of these.
They might have... a first lighting rehearsal might have taken place already.
We are talking about two and a half to three weeks before the premiere.

MK: "*Technische Einrichtung*" (Tech setup) has to be done.
This is led by the stage designer, where the original parts of the set design
are being put together onstage for the first time.

CEC: Good.

MK: Hopefully everything's already there most of the time.

CEC: Most of the time, not?

MK: Most of the time something still is missing.
But the original design is there. And that runs neatly into the first lighting...

The light designer will have sorted out ideas.
Prepared something already with his technicians. And lighting will start.
A very dull process, but you know that!

CEC: Yes, that's just the way it goes.
It takes time.

MK: Except, as our lighting director once told me.
—he studied in New York—that American rehearsals start with the lighting.
The blocking will have to find its way around that.

CEC: Yes, I would say that's true
It depends on the house, but yes. Larger houses, that's likely true.

MK: And then every free afternoon.
The directors would assemble and continue with the lighting, using extras.
The *Bühnenorchesterproben*, they are in the hands of the conductor. That's...

CEC: I've witnessed that.

MK: But the director of course, is always present.
Often times he's onstage or on the side of the stage,
to fill the singers in with information and corrections go smoothly, without distracting.
The last steps are the *Klavierhauptprobe* (*Full piano run-through*)
In the middle of the BO (*Bühnenorchester*) process, which is a little like...
jumping into cold water again, because you lose the orchestral sound.
But you gain costumes, makeup, and lighting.
It is always hard for the singers going back to the piano. And it's hard for the director,
because you lose all the beautiful design again for the last BOs.
Then of course, *Orchesterhauptprobe*,
with maybe changed costumes, changed makeup, finished lighting
and then dress rehearsal.

CEC: Ok, that's...it's helpful to have you
talk through that whole process, now that I've seen it a few times.
Because it helps me make sense of what I saw.
For example, I can remember some clear moments when I saw, for example,
a rehearsal where the conductor was clearly in charge.
It was in the *Bühnenorchester* period of time, where the stage director...
I'm not even sure that he or she was there all the time.

MK: was that *Rheingold*?

CEC: No, now I'm thinking of Kupfer
When he was here recently for...

MK: *La Damnation de Faust*.
You may be right, because Harry Kupfer
May be a director who doesn't have to attend all BOs.

CEC: Well, no, he was there,
but not all the time.

There were clearly periods of time where I saw him there,
and he was going here or there, maybe talking to a singer in the background.

So I could see that these things were happening simultaneously,
but I was also not sure how much of that was typical.

But it is pretty much working in these sets of phases for every piece?

MK: Yes.

CEC: That's immensely helpful.

MK: With the Meiningen theater,
they usually have the *Klavierhauptprobe* before the BOs start.
Like ten days before.

CEC: What does that change, in the process?

MK: Well, you have to have everything finished earlier.
But you also have more time to adjust.

CEC: Why do you think that's not done here?

MK: Hm...

I don't know. *(pause)*

The main reason is probably... it's been done this way all the time

And we won't change it.

CEC: Every place is different, yes?

MK: It leads to confusion.

CEC: But it's not a significant,
it's not a significant enough deterrent
or disadvantage, that it's worth changing.

MK: No.

CEC: Ok. *(pause)* And at the Komische?

MK: I think they are more flexible
than Oper Frankfurt,
because they only have five or six premieres, and not twelve.

CEC: Right.

MK: ... I cannot remember.

CEC: Yes, I could see
With fewer premieres, it's a bit looser, time-wise.

MK: For instance, we...

for the *Don Pasquale* I took part in, I think there were two *Bauproben*,
and after the first they decided to do it completely differently.

Then there was another *Bauprobe* rescheduled, and postponed for a month.

And that would be really difficult here. *(pause)*

It happened with a Depot production, which led to a legal fight with the set designer.

Basically the director and the set designer were asked to step back.

Or worse, they were just fired!

CEC: Wow. Official legal proceedings, actually?

MK: (*nodding*)... It followed with no...
what do you call it?

CEC: Arbitration or mediation?

MK: Which cost us.

CEC: Well, let's see
Which would that be, arbitration or mediation?

MK: Arbitration, I think.

CEC: Yes.

(language discussion)

MK: It was a clever move on the set designer's part,
whom I know, actually, she's a friend of mine. It was a complication situation,
as she's also the director's partner, and they just had a baby,
and she's not known as a set designer. But she's very... she has a broad range of skills.
Can work in very different fields, can work as a set design assistant, as a director, herself.

CEC: So many people in theater are like this, actually.
Which is why... it strikes me
that so many have multiple capabilities and skill sets.
Probably because most of us start doing theater at a young age and learn lots of roles.
And so, even if you maybe don't have the technical training
In this one area, chances are you've participated somehow in that area
and maybe do have some skills
I think that must be different than a lot of fields.
I don't know, maybe that's different here.
But I think about my own experiences ... but so...

MK: I think, yeah...

Well, she hired one of the most renowned lawyers in the cultural fields,
who's quoted in the papers often. And he had such, such leverage
that the city's lawyer... he had no chance.
And her case was strong. She had delivered everything, she had adjusted her plans,
and the reason why we fired the team were not quite the ones the opera told.
That was something behind that which was not spoken out.

CEC: I want to be conscious of time, for your sake.

(Discussion of timing, decision to conclude the interview here.)

END OF FINAL KRASTING INTERVIEW

**Appendix B:
Alan Barnes Interview #1
December 21, 2011**

CEC: So, today we'll just get started,
and there will be at least one interview after this one, so...

AB: Ok.

CEC: ...if we find that you think you need more time
to think about questions, that's perfectly fine.

AB: Do I need a piece of paper and a pencil?

CEC: Would you like one? If you want anything...
to jot down... ok, sure, here. I can provide that for you.

I have two copies of my interview questions.

There's a lot of text on here, but these are...

this is a general outline of where we're going.

But I do it in a slightly more improvisatory form.

Would you like a writing utensil? Here... feel free.

That's just more for overview than anything else.

Okay... *(pause)* you're on candid camera...

Are you old enough to know *Candid Camera*?

AB: Yeah, I know *Candid Camera*...

CEC: Ok.

Und los! (and, go!)

AB: Oh my god... that reminds me... well, wait...

CEC: No, no no, feel free!

This is a relaxed environment, and you can say whatever you like.

AB: Because most of these questions are before my time.

CEC: Well, you got here in the late...?

AB: Well, I got here in the theater in 1988...

CEC: Yes, that's fine, we'll start then.

AB: But I wasn't in the opera.

CEC: That's okay, really, this is relevant.
I knew already that you were a bit of a peripheral character...

AB: Kinda, different!

CEC: but I like that.
Frankly, nobody fits directly into a box, anyway,
and that's perfectly fine.
So, what happened is, my project has evolved a bit since I wrote these questions,
and I have tweaked them a smidge in the meanwhile,
but when I originally conceptualized the dissertation,
I thought I'd only be writing on the 80's.
But now, as it turns out...
and I thought I'd be writing about more than the Oper Frankfurt,
but now that I've narrowed it down,
and I think that the time in the '80s was quite interesting, naturally, but I also think that the
company has gone through a series of...
I **know** that the company has gone through some evolution since then.
And I find it kind of more productive to look at what was happening in the '80s through the lens
of contrast with what's happening today.
and let both of those things reveal some stuff
about what's happened in opera here in the last 25 years.
That's the very rough direction of the dissertation, anyway.
I can talk to you more about that anytime you want!
But, we don't have to necessarily, right now.
But interrupt me at any point if you want to ask questions,
and you should think of this as just a "chat"
between the two of us. Okay?

AB: Ok.

CEC: Why don't we actually start with this thing
right after the big black beam, at letter A.
Could you please describe the various roles you've had at,
we'll not **just** say Oper Frankfurt, but let's say, at the theater here?
That means, including the *Schauspiel* (theater), and your time as a dancer.
Since your first involvement at the company,
could you give me a little overview of what you've done?

AB: (*clears throat*)

Well, I got here in December of '88, and I joined Frankfurt Ballet as a guest dancer.
That was on the contract.

CEC: Yes, ok.

AB: I was *Fest* (permanent) here, but it said "guest" because of whatever reason.
Then I was in Ballet Frankfurt for 16 years, until the company went el-foldo in 2004,
and then I joined the Frankfurt Oper, because, they have a wonderful thing here,
if you work in a job here for more than 15 years, they have something called
unkundbar

CEC: Mm-hm?

AB: and that means, "unfireable."

CEC: Like “tenured?”

AB: Yeah, like tenured. So, I had that option in my contract, so at first, I wasn’t really into it. I was like “Mmm. I don’t know if this is the right thing for me, I don’t think it is.” I’d just come from something very creative and I’m sitting and writing in a book. And turning pages.

CEC: Right.

AB: That was I thought it was. That was the crux of what I thought the whole job description behind *Regieassistent* (directing assistant) was.

CEC: So... can I just recap, so I’m sure that I understand? So, you were doing entirely creative work as a dancer, prior to that point, no directing, per se.

AB: (*overlapping*) Yes. No, none. I mean, I was creating choreography and stuff like that, I would choreograph for certain situations, like schools, so there was sort of directorial background.

CEC: Ok... and then, at that pivot point in 2004 I think you said, then at that point, you used this—that’s entirely a German thing, right, this “kund...”

AB: *Unkundbar*

CEC: ...*unkundbar* status, and you went into the role of *Regieassistent*,

AB: yes, because they actually **had to**—the state said they had to find me a job, that was basically in the same kind of creative realm that was a part of the theater. And I actually thought it would be great to be the *Pförtner* (stage door reception)...

CEC: Oh! (*laughs*)

AB: You know, just sitting at the door, and not letting people in, (*buzzer noises, making pantomime of working as a doorman*) But they gave me the job as *Regieassistent*. It was a little stressful at the beginning, but then I found my way into it, and it’s not so bad

CEC: Ok, so since that point, you’ve been working as a *Regieassistent*

AB: Yeah.

CEC: So, about how many productions do you do a year, and what’s your work like?

AB: Normally it’s three premieres, or two premieres... well, it depends, it’s either two premieres, three *Wiederaufnahme* (revivals)

or three premieres, two *Wiederaufnahme*.

So... it depends on how many *Regieassistenten* are there, also.

At one point we were each doing five productions a year, five to six productions a year.

I think now it's four to five. Because we have more *Regieassistenten*.

CEC: And, not **each** of those comes with a second contract, right?
You're contracted as *fest* with all of that included, yes?

AB: Yes... right. Totally *fest* (fixed).
unkundbar.. I love that word.

CEC: *Unkundbar*. (both laughing.) Yeah.

AB: I tell my friends about that, and they're like, "What does that mean?"
I'm like, "They can't fire you." And they're like, "But what does that **mean**?"
And I'm like, "You have a job for the rest of your life". And they're like "**Really**?"
Yeah. ok. so.

CEC: So... can I rewind a little,
now that I understand those two points?

AB: Mm-hm.

CEC: What were you doing before you came to *Oper Frankfurt*
—I mean, to Ballet Frankfurt—that brought you here?

AB: I was dancing at Dance Theater of Harlem, actually.

CEC: Oh, ok!

AB: Which lasted two years, a stressful 2 years. But it made me stronger... to get out, to leave.
And I saw Frankfurt Ballet in New York, and I was totally excited about doing something new,
and they were very fresh and very new, and I thought, why not?
So I auditioned for them, got a job, and came here.

CEC: Cool... so, they had done a
round of auditions in the States?

AB: No, they were on tour, they were actually on tour in America. and they stopped in New
York at City Center, and I went to see a show with a girlfriend of mine,

AB: and we were sitting there and were like, "wow, that's so exciting,
WOW, WOW." Totally excited about the whole thing.

CEC: That was Forsythe?

AB: Yes, William Forsythe was director at that time,
and I knew some of the dancers in the company, in that dancers know dancers,
and the world is tiny... the dance world is **so** tiny.

CEC: The music world, too...

AB: Also, yeah! So, I went backstage and I said hello,
"hello, how are you?" and a woman, Nora Kimball— love her to death!—

she said that, well somebody asked,
“Would you like to take a class?” So, yeah!
I was so excited to take a class with the company, and the ballet master said,
“Would you like to take the class, just to take the class,
or would you like to audition?” and I was in flux, because...
I was at the dance theater of Harlem, I didn’t have a contract.

AB: I didn’t know how... I was trying to get a contract with Dance Theater of Harlem,
and I didn’t see my life doing THIS. I was like – New York—
I’m gonna get into Dance Theater of Harlem, because that’s what you do,
you dance in New York.

And somehow this woman, Mrs. Kimball, chicken-winged me and was like “Yeah, he wants to
audition.”...and I was like “I want to audition.”
So it was kind of like a little nudge into a new life. So, it was nice!

CEC: Yeah, but that’s the way it happens,
I mean, right? life evolves...

AB: That’s the way it should happen, yes.
Yes. It evolved into me doing this, which is nice because
not only do I get a chance to be a *Regieassistent*,
whereas I’m learning how to read music again, learning staging all over again,
how to do lights all over again, how to deal with other aspects of the theater also,
which is very nice! So it’s not just sitting there... it’s... a lot goes into it.
And **also** it’s one of those things where I have chances to actually choreograph operas,
and I’m like “Whoa, that’s nice, that’s **very** nice.”

CEC: So... actually, let’s take a little tangent
and talk about that for a second. I’d love to hear your perspective,
if you could tell me, how the choreography with *Siegfried* came about?
how did that take place?

AB: Well, it was really strange, too!
Really strange, because...we were at the

CEC: who’s we?

AB:... Vera (Nemirova) and the whole cast was at the *Konzeptionsgespräch*
and there was a big huff about the *Waldvogel* (woodland bird)
“Well, I have this idea about the *Waldvogel*.” This is Vera talking.
“She’s going to be running through the forest, with like a jogging outfit on
and headphones, and she’s going to look very athletic.”
And I was like, “Hey that’s such a great idea, yeah perfect!”
And she was like, “Yeah, maybe you can help me with that?”
And I was like, “Yeah, running through a forest, you know, running (mimics).”
And, what they mean by choreography in opera is...**walking**, a lot of the time,
it has nothing to do with movement or dance, per se.
It’s a lot of “can you get them to the other side of the stage.”

CEC: Yes...so

literally, almost more blocking. Just movement-infused blocking

AB: Yeah, blocking!..

So, I was like, “yeah, sure why not? “Run around the stage, simple, track suit...fine.”

Don’t have to do anything too much about it, don’t have to dig deep.

So, then we find out, one of the *Waldvogel*, they’re **pregnant**, so she can’t run around the stage.

So they hire another one.

So, this new one is too “feminine.”

“She needs to be a little more androgynous,” she (Vera) kept saying to me.

AB: I was like, “Ok, androgynous.”

It didn’t click, it wasn’t clicking yet.

And then she turned to me and said,

“You know, I think I want you to do the *Waldvogel*.”

CEC: This is still in the *Konzeptionsgespräch* (KG)?

AB: No, this was like a few days later.

CEC: Ok, because I was there.

I have to inject here, obviously, I was there at the KG,
and I knew that the *Waldvogel* was supposed to change,

and we had this new girl coming on

and all of the sudden, at some point later in the week, I hear:

“Alan’s dancing the *Waldvogel*”

And I was like, “Wait, I thought this... young woman from the Hochschule (Conservatory) was
coming in?” And Robin.

Then I heard, “yeah, but Robin’s pregnant, and... yeah, Alan’s just going to do it now.”

And I was like “there is a **story** behind this...”

AB: (*laughs*) Yes sir. So she says to me,

“Yeah, well, I think I want you to do it!

And it was like (*pause*)... it was really kind of strange, because I had planned my life.

I **love** to plan my life, it’s kind of like nice, to do that sometimes.

And I wanted to go away.

I had worked it out with Hans Walter (the other *Regieassistent*), the dates.

“Can I not do these two shows, because I want to go to New York,

and I want to do this project.” He says “Oh yeah, no problem,”

So... she evades to it... it was still rather up in the air, everything,

and I said... well I went home and I thought about it,

how I could get this girl in a tracksuit to look androgynous?

So I got it, I had this GREAT idea, and I said to her,

“Vera, I have a GREAT idea about the *Waldvogel*”... and I said,

“Yeah, how I can make Robin”... no, not Robin, the other one

CEC: Kataryna Kaspar

AB: Yeah, Kataryna, ... how to make her work as a *Waldvogel*.

She looks at me and says “No. I want you to do it.”

So I was like, “okay, there goes my life.”

And I am now on a production double-time...

CEC: Really? Oh, right... two roles.

AB: *Regieassistent* and now as a character in the opera.

So it was a little stressful..

At the beginning it wasn't stressful at all. It was actually quite nice.

Sitting there with Hans Walter. And she's (Vera) very nice, very into her job, she knows what she's doing, it was all going very quick quick quick quick fast fast fast do do chop chop chop. (*Wild hand gestures.*) and I was like "oh, it won't be so bad"

...**Until** ... the feather came out. (*Feather gesture with hand*)

(*pause*) Then I got a little worried.

Because, her being a director and not a choreographer made it **my** responsibility to make my role integrated into the opera.

And it was funny because she would give me ideas, and she would show me things and I would try to do it the way a dancer or a choreographer would relate to that moment.

And she would say strange things like, "Well, maybe don't be so balletic." (*pause*)

CEC: Hm.

AB: And I didn't really understand that.

I mean, I did understand what she meant,

but I didn't understand where it was coming from,

because she didn't have any knowledge of ballet, or what...

contemporary, or whatever it was going to be.

CEC: Aha, so she didn't necessarily mean ballet as in the style.

She meant ballet as in, "You look like a dancer."

AB: I.. I... maybe? I still don't know.

Cause, we started out working on Lance's (Lance Ryan, "Siegfried")

Feuerring (fire ring) dance.

And she kept saying to me, "You know it should be more ritualistic."

And I was like, "Yeah, but the ritual comes from the step,"

speaking as a dancer...

and she was like, "Let's have it more ritualistic, like"

—she used this walking on fire thing.

CEC: Yes, the *Nestinari* idea.

AB: Yeah... what was that called? *Nestinari*? Yeah.

And there thing was about like, being out of your brain, like on a drug, with the smoke and the inhalation, and that's what's bringing you in.

And I was like, "Yeah, but it has to come from somewhere in your body."

You can't just (*gestures: thump, thump on floor*)

plod through the stage, it has to be something that moves. And I kind of said,

“Okay, well, if she wants to do that, then, well, fine, I’m just giving ideas.” Because I’m not there as choreographic assistant, I’m there as *Regieassistent*.

And I’ll just give her ideas, and if she doesn’t want to use them, it’s fine.

But then when I became a character, and it was **me** doing **me**,

or making a *Waldvogel* actually appear onstage.

Then I had to take some responsibility.

CEC: Yes. Yes.

AB: You know, and then, it also got a little stressful, somehow about what I was going to be called. And then about who did what... it was all a little stressful and strange.

CEC: From whom was that stressful?

AB: From Vera

CEC: She didn’t want to name you?

AB: She didn’t want to name me as “Choreographic Assistant.”

She wanted to say something like “Choreographic *Mitarbeit*” (Choreographic supporter.)

It was just the wording. And she didn’t want to put me on the first page, she wanted me...

It was something, and I was like, “I don’t care,” pay me my money.

And titles don’t mean anything to me, really, because if I was twenty or something,

I’d be like “well, you know, I did all that work!” But now I’m kind of like,

“If that’s what you want, that’s what you WANT, and it’s fine with me.”

CEC: May I, may I interrupt and ask:

Were you then contracted for your second role in addition?

Or was it just presumed that it already went under the heading of what you were already doing?

AB: No, and, and that was a big theme (topic), too,

because I was like, “Well, I’m onstage,”

and I heard, “But well, you know that in your contract.”

In your contract, you’re allowed to perform, or to “*Schauspiel*” (act) onstage.

And I’m like, “But it’s not *Schauspiel*, it’s DANCE.”

And it’s a different language, it’s like...

“Do you not see a difference between *Schauspiel* and dance?” It’s not...

CEC: In that acting is also different than singing, for example?

The singers here are not merely actors who sing.

I think it’s acknowledged here that **that’s** separate.

AB: Yeah! So...

CEC: Was that, was it just from Vera, or was it also from the *Betriebsbüro* (business office)?

AB: Yeah, it was also from them...KBB (abbreviation for *Betriebsbüro*.)

And at one point, I was like,

“Ok, well you know, I’m just going to do what I’m going to do.”

I mean, at a point you just have to do that,
I mean, thank God it worked out, that it came to such a point where...
Vera started trusting what we were doing on stage.
And at one point you have to give it up, also.

CEC: Right. Mm-hm.

AB: If it's onstage and it's, the curtain hasn't gone up yet,
then you have ample time to fiddle and do what you want,
but when the curtain goes up, then it's THAT person who's on the line.
Onstage, and doing what they're called to do, because they're professionals.
that's why you hired that person to be in the production.

CEC: Yes.

AB: You didn't go, "Oh, who's that on the street?"
"Get him! He looks like he could probably do that part."

CEC: Right. You hire someone because you trust
from their background and their experience
that they've got something to bring.

AB: And that's what she said at the beginning.
Vera said "I saw you in *Tote Stadt*, and I was amazed at what you did,
I saw the choreography" and **that** was the background. So I was like,
"Well, she's seen what I've done, she knows what's possible, and that I'm capable of."
So, I went along with it. So...

CEC: Do you remember what...
did she ever, other than the comment, "That's too balletic,"
did she ever express specific concerns? Why this, or why not that?

AB: There was one rehearsal, I'm not sure if you were there.
We were in Rödelheim, and I think it was the 2nd or 3rd time we were doing it
and she told me (*pause*) ...not to use my face. (*pause*)

CEC: (*laughter, nodding.*)

AB: Were you there?

CEC: I was there that day, yes.

AB: And I thought it was funny, she was,
I thought it was funny, because, okay, yeah,
a bird doesn't express itself through...
it doesn't change...(*gesticulating to show a stoic bird face.*)
It acts certain things, it doesn't show...

CEC: It doesn't cry...

AB: It doesn't cry! It doesn't show emotion.
And I was like, "okay, wow!"
This is also a challenge for me, to try to not be human.

CEC: Human!

(laughing together)

AB: Human on stage... This is the challenge.

And I did it, and I felt cold, and she also saw the coldness.

And she wanted this camaraderie between me and *Siegfried* to happen.

And it wasn't really happening. Because it was either, he was doing something, and I wasn't doing something.

CEC: Did she say **why** she wanted that?

AB: Because I (character) was the big tattletale! I was the one telling him what to do

I was the one making him do things, and he actually realized that the only friend he had was this bird. And males, males and a bird.

So there was something wrong, the bird's telling him,

"Kill that one...steal that... wake this one up, do that."

And I was kind of sitting there like that (*gestures, still face and body.*)

AB: (*pause*) You know, not showing anything.

And then two days later, she comes back, she says,

"No, actually, I think you should use your face."

Because the night before, her mother, who I think is a big part of her productions, or she gives lots of input, but sometimes with conflicting information, you go crazy!

So, the mother said to me, "Oh, it was very nice, I love the way you use your face!"

She says, "I love it when you use your face. You should use your face more."

And so I was like (*makes a shocked, quizzical face.*)

CEC: (*laughter*)

AB: What do I do? I was like, ok.

Vera comes to me and says, "You know, I was thinking.

You should go back to using your face,

You know, really expressing the moment." And I was like, "Ok."

(*pause*) So, those were the only two times.

Well, there was another time, we were doing Wotan and Erda.

And we were onstage, and it was FREEZING onstage.

The stage wasn't fixed. the cotton thing on the floor wasn't tacked down properly, and I actually asked *Technik*, "Is that thing for real, are you serious?"

"Yeah, why." And I was like,

"It's too slippery, it's not going to work. You can't really move on it."

Two minutes later, Lance comes and Peter, and they say,

"Oh that's not going to work." (*silence.*)

And I was like "Wow... the dancer again, doesn't get his way."

So, rehearsal goes on, we do the rehearsal through, full,

she gives me corrections, and I do it.

She does it again, she goes, "Can we do it again? one more time, just that one entrance?" And it was cold. and I mean really, Not warm, but **cold**.

She's like, " can you come out, and can you do even more with your face?"

(*sighs*) I had had it at this point. I was like (*makes a sour face*).

And Meredith (Erda) was like, "say something"!

And I was like “Vera... I understand”... all in German, of course.
“I understand this is what you want, but I can’t, I can’t right now”
and Sebastian (the conductor) was like, explaining to me what she was saying.
And I was like, “No Sebastian, I know what she’s saying. **I can’t do it.**”
And he was like “It has to be on your face.”
And I was like, “No, what do you want me to do, just show fear on my face?”
Then I’m not interpreting **fear**, in my body, you know?
So I’m not a dancer, and I’m not the *Waldvogel* anymore.

CEC: Yes.

AB: You know, if she (*the bird*) was to come out and go like this (*pants*),
then you’re going to give me that correction
without me doing the whole scene **again**.

CEC: Wow. Right.

AB: So, I was kind of... (*his face is astounded*).
She said “well you don’t really have to do the scene then.”
And I was like “exactly.”

AB: And she “well maybe we should stop,”
And I was like “ok.” And I think, it’s one of those things when, if you get information,
it makes it so much easier. Like you’re building all of this archival stuff,
if you have the information, it makes it so much easier to dig from.
You know, if you get something generalized, like, “Oh can you go to the left and...”
then you have to go to the left and do **what**? It stops the flow, you know?
I was like, “Eh-eh-eh- I can’t... anymore.”
So those were the only three times that something came in conflict with the process.
Because all in all, the process was really **good**, and it was handled well.
Except the beginning. But it all worked out, somehow... which I’m very happy it did.

CEC: Well, I think that’s part of production generally, huh?

I mean, that you know
from my perspective, anyway
what ends up on stage **is** the piece
and at some point everybody...

I mean, I know this from my own background as a singer,
and my own performing.

At some point you shut all that out and you just do it.

And what you do is what people react to.

And of course, what you do, like you just said now,
is based on whatever you intuited, or hopefully heard in words, or saw in gestures,
that gave you some material to dig in to, and create on stage.

But ultimately the piece itself is what you do.

AB: Yeah. **Hell**, yeah.

CEC: I think of the process of production
as a sort of wrestling to that point and it’s not necessarily easy.

AB: (*laughter*) yeah

CEC: no, just as you're saying...
it doesn't condemn the process
that there was some tension within it

AB: No, no!

CEC: Thank you for sharing that with me!
I had been wondering that for a long time,
how that came about, and your perspective on a lot of it.
Because I know it was not a process without tension, entirely, and **yet**
I don't know... Have you read reviews of the show?

AB: Yeah.

CEC: What do you think about them?

AB: I like them, I mean,
I got a lot of **really** good critiques.

CEC: That's what I wanted to say.

AB: I got a lot of good ones. I got... *(laugh)*
I got one that said I was too "Follies,"
and I was showing off myself, and not showing the bird.

CEC: was that a dance person critiquing?

AB: I have no idea. I don't think so.
I was like, "Why are they so stupid?" And to top it off, he spelled my name wrong.
So I wasn't mad, because he wasn't talking about me.

CEC: *(laughter)*

AB: The stupidity of these things, is really....
Research! Know what's going on!
Don't just throw something out that because you have to say something.
Don't do it, because you **will** get caught.
My name is not "Alan Barress," and whether you think "less is more..."
No! More is more and less is less! In every language, honey.

(both laugh)

AB: It's one of those things, you think you're being funny, or catty, or you know.
No. Save it.

CEC: Well, that's an art, too. Being a critic.
They're also producing something.
And underneath it is their opinion.
And how they felt in the seat, and all of those tiny little details.
Maybe the room was hot and they weren't paying attention,
or they fell asleep, or they didn't drink enough water before they came in.

AB: *(laughing)*

CEC: You know, like there could be

a lot of things that made them grumpy, perhaps.
And at the end of the day,
they still have to write something
that somebody is going to respond to,
and perhaps part of that is making it entertaining.
And not just...

AB: Which is fine, but... you know.
Get your facts together!

CEC: Yes.

AB: Talk about the person that it's about.
Spell the name right! just get the name right! That's half of the battle.
So everybody knows who and what you're talking about.

CEC: But yeah, you can just dismiss that review, right?

AB: But yeah, it's funny because you read the critics,
and you're in the show.. so you understand where it came from.
And how it got to that point. You know: curtain up—applause.
You know how it got there and you're like...
What? he just said... (*lots of gesticulating, surprised, frustrated*)

CEC: Meaning?

AB: Meaning, what people read into a scene!
Or what they read into "the process."
You know, it's very funny...

CEC: Part of the entire reason that
I'm writing this dissertation is that.
I'm writing about the process of bringing work to stage because, you know,
it's unusual as a musicologist
to be writing and researching about the process.
But you can't just look at the finished product and know how it came about,
even though that IS the artistic "thing", the performance object, itself.
The finished product is what ends up on stage,
but to understand that, what the thing was,
that came about from a perspective other than an audience member's perspective,
to really see a lot of the various components, the process is informative, too.

AB: Totally.

CEC: I mean, that's what's so cool about the *Waldvogel*.
The tensions and the reasons that you all arrived at those decisions
would not have come about without the struggle over the face
or, the issues with being cold that day,
and how many times things were repeated
or the fact that there was suddenly a pregnant *Waldvogel*.
But the director wanted somebody in a track suit.

Those things having not come about
would have mean you didn't even get onto the stage, you know?

AB: Yes. yes!

CEC: So we're, yeah, of similar mind here, I think.

AB: Yeah, totally. It's funny because...

At first I was like "wow, here I go... is this going to be another, like,
throw into the pool thing, or is this going to be a collaborative thing?"

And it turned out to be a really collaborative thing.

So I was very happy about it.

CEC: How did you feel at the end
about Vera's response to what you did?

AB: (*breathing... pausing*)

To be really honest... at a point, I stopped caring.

Because I knew it was going to be on **me**.

And I knew that she was going to either like it, or love it, basically.

I didn't think that she wasn't going to like it.

Because she... she knew that I was serious about making it work.

And I think she's very serious about what she puts onstage.

She's **very** serious about it. There's no pussy-footing around it.

"Get your stuff together, show her something, if she doesn't like it, have an option,
have a back up plan."

AB: And she almost always seemed to like my first option.

So I was like, "Ok. So I can go from my first option."

It wasn't like "No I don't like that." She's going to like it.

And she did, she was very happy about the whole thing, how the *Waldvogel* went.

CEC: Mm-hm.
Did she say anything to you about it?

AB: She was very appreciative, she was like
"You know..."

And by the way, you know, the other thing is...

I wasn't even supposed to **be** on *Siegfried*.

CEC: Oh no? when did it happen
that you landed on *Siegfried*?

AB: Orest, who works here, he went away, had to go away.

And they put me on *Siegfried*.

Because **normally** it's Hans Walter and Orest, they do the whole *Ring*.

And I'm the only one that came in, **out**.

CEC: I was wondering that, yes. how you came in,
and as a matter of fact.

And I was wondering why you weren't there on *Götterdämmerung*
I thought you were actually going to be involved again.

AB: That's what Susan said, that's what Susan was like,
"What do you mean, you're not in *Götterdämmerung*. We need you."

CEC: It's become quite a little family,
all of us, yes?

AB: Yeah, it's very sweet, actually.

CEC: Have you ever worked on a *Ring* before?

AB: No.

CEC: That's the advantage of the four piece set,
the group of people...the team.

AB: That's funny because, I laughed!
I was like, "You're in a Wagner piece."
Did you ever think you'd do a Wagner piece?
Because I'd gotten out of all these Wagner pieces since I've been here.
Then all the sudden I'm in one, as *Regieassistant*,
then I'm actually **in** it. (*Makes squeaky noise, hands to face.*)

CEC: Yes, and Wagner has kind of
a special reputation like that.

A funny personal example, you know I'm a singer.
I'm not a Wagnerian. I'm a lyric coloratura.

CEC: So it had never occurred to me
that I might EVER seriously be involved with Wagner.
I was originally like, "Strike me dead if I would have to do Wagner."
And then, what ended up happening, in my segue into musicology,
so I can eventually teach university,
which has now become a multi-year process of writing a dissertation...
what ended up happening is, I had a paper, I had the chance to come to Germany,
just on a whim, to visit actually a friend of mine who lives here.
And I conceptualized a paper, and went to Bayreuth
to check something out in the archive, I thought, "I have to write a paper anyway,
and I'm in Germany, I'll turn this kernel of an idea into a paper."

It turned out being a paper comparing
the voices of two different Wagnerian dramatic sopranos from different eras.
And being able to write about differences in how the *Hochdramatisches Fach* was actually
performed in different generations. I thought, "Hey—totally related to singing!"

And it ended up being an interesting little piece that people reacted well to,
and it was still singing-based. Great!
But because that happened, and it was about Bayreuth and in Germany, somebody nudged me in
the direction of getting to know Frankfurt, and learning more about this Berghaus production.
The next thing I know, I'm writing a dissertation on Wagner.

I had never really believed that I would a) become so serious as a musicologist,
or b) focus on any sort of Wagnerian piece, period.
Talk about your life evolving in unexpected directions.
But you know, if it works...

AB: (*laughing*) If it works, and the outcome is good...
take it and go with the flow.

CEC: So, anyway, I understand what you mean.
Wagner for me is like “Ha? Ha!” (*pause*)
It seems intense, but then again,
there’s a lot of room for artistry in Wagner.
That was really a surprise to me.

AB: I agree.
I saw Peter Marsh and Lance (Ryan), and I was like, “Wow.”
“You can **do** things in it.”

CEC: Right! that was always my impression, too.

AB: I was always just thinking
“Ho-jo-to-ho.” That's what you always hear and see. Horns and spears!

CEC: Right, but there’s a reason why
all these *Regietheater* directors do a *Ring* at some point, I think.
And it’s because there’s a load of
Spielraum (flexibility, space to play) there.

A
B: Yeah, it’s true, there’s a lot there. (*pause*)

CEC: So, just give me one second...
CEC: ...to bring me back to where I want to go today,
because we’ll obviously NOT get through all of it today.
But let me decide for a minute, what to do? (*pause*)

(*conversation about timing and scheduling future interviews*)

Okay, some of these questions we’ll come back to.
I’ll actually leave this up to you, first of all.
What I’d like to do in the remaining interviews, among other things
in addition to your work with *Siegfried*, I’d like to talk about two productions.
One that’s seemed important to you, for whatever reason,
either for personal reasons, or something that was unusual about it.
One in the time since 2000, maybe from your perspective personally
—maybe one since you’ve been on as *Regieassistent*.
And then another one from the period prior, maybe early on in your time, would be great.
Why don’t you take a second to think about what those pieces might be?

AB: Well, the opera one, I know for sure.

It's *Eine Florentinische Tragödie* and *Der Zwerg*. (A double-bill.)
With Udo Samel as the director.
He's an actor, a German actor, a well-known German actor.

CEC: Ok. I don't know him.

AB: He's a very sweet man,
from *Schauspiel*, and he came in...

CEC: May I pause you? When was this?
Roughly, roughly.

AB: 2006-07, something like that? (*pause*)
And... 2005 or 2006...
And he came in and he brought his own *Regieassistent* with him.

CEC: Ok?

AB: And he was very nice, the guy was very nice
and I was the other one. And it was kind of like my first one alone here.
Because he brought his assistant with him, and knew the show,
and what he was like, and what it was about, and stuff like that,
and I had such a great time with him,
because he treated me, I don't know how to explain it.
He treated me like I was a part of the piece.

CEC: Ok.

AB: And not just like, an extra, you know.
"Could you move that, put that over there."
'Cause you know, there are some directors who come in and do that...
very well. (*look with eyebrows.*)
I don't do that very well. But they do that. I don't know if this makes any sense, but
he treated me like a human.

CEC: Yes?

AB: And sometimes, people get like in their own creative space,
and they negate what's going on around them. And what was so nice about it was,
I also realized that I had to get my stuff together, too, I had to get myself together.

CEC: What do you mean by that?

AB: Because I couldn't rely on the other *Regieassistent*
to do most of the work.

CEC: Ah, ok.
You're talking about personal preparation.

AB: Mm-hm. (*affirmative*). Personal preparation.
I had to really get on it. I had to really do things, and focus.
So you know, I made sure I ate breakfast in the morning,

I made sure that my brain was working,, that I had a list of numbers that you know what's going on in the scene, what's happening. And it made such a difference.

I knew **everything**. What was going on, costume change here,

I was like (*gestures putting things into place*)...

And it felt good too! Not just sitting there loping, you know, and being...

the entire day, like (*whispers*), "...I'd rather be doing something **else**."

CEC: Right.

AB: Because you know, at that time,

I was very perplexed about being a part of the opera.

CEC: oh, I see.

It was still pretty early, right?

AB: I wasn't HERE... I was like...

it took me a while to like, really, assimilate.

And he brought this side out of me, and I was like, "Whoa, this is possible!"

And the production was really good. And he gave me an *Aufgabe*, he gave me a task.

He was like, "Can you choreograph? I know you dance, so, can you choreograph this waltz scene that's going to be in the *Zwerg*?" I was like, "Sure."

"It's not going to be onstage, so you're not going to get any credit for it, it's just shadow dancing on the wall."

But I was like "fine," a little choreography, I get to do! And you get something nice!"

It doesn't have to be that I'm noted, or whatever.

(*pause*) And it was like, I was actually a PART of something.

So that was one of the best. That was the best one I think so far with, pertaining to opera, since 2004, since my switch. Now.

CEC: So, now, it...it sounds like the being valued,
and it being expected that you bring something to the process
not being expected in a pedantic way, but in a...
there's an assumption that you come with a skill set, and that you're prepared.
And that THAT'S what has made the process of that piece
fulfilling for you to work on?

AB: It was funny,

because before that period, it wasn't fulfilling.

It was kind of like, NOT being prepared,

coming into work, and sitting over my score, and watching people move around,
and writing what they were doing.

CEC: Mm-hm?

AB: But not really being INVOLVED

because the other one was so involved

with the director, and that's another thing with *Regieassistents* and the directors here.

One is like, to the side, on the side of the director,

and the other one is like, on the side of the *Regieassistent*

CEC: Oh, okay, right...

AB: so, it's like,
you know, (*gesturing with hands, steps on a ladder*)
it's a definite hierarchy that happens, you know, whether or not it's stated,
who's the first *Regieassistent*. We don't have that really.
But it's evident, if Hans Walter's there and Vera's there,
it's gonna be Hans Walter.

CEC: He's the director-like one,
and somebody else is, "we have to make the coffee."

AB: Oh, I don't do coffee...

CEC: But that's an extreme example
of the hierarchy, so to speak?

AB: Yeah. you know, you get the information **after**
it's not always like firsthand information.
And sometimes you feel more involved when you get the information **first**.
I mean, you do! You are!
You're more involved, because you're a part of the decision-making, lots of times.
(*Mimicking*) "Well, what do you think?"
If there's two heads thinking about that, "well, what do you think about that?"
And you're over doing something else,
or you're organizing a cue for somebody to go turn the stage at this point
you miss that. You know, you're very valuable,
and you're also very important to the process, but somehow that process
was very special for me, in that way.

CEC: I have two related questions—
every time you talk, I suddenly have
thousands of questions!

AB: Ching, ching, ching! (*gestures flying questions*)

CEC: No it's fantastic, this is the way it should be!
A very quick-answer question, I think,
which would be:

CEC: Do you feel like that experience with this 2006 production,
or whenever it was, that it's really so rare? (*pause*)
That sort of treatment where you're valued.
What I hear it as, that you're saying, is that you're valued,
and your experiences and talents are incorporated and relied on.

AB: You know, I don't know because
the process has gotten a lot easier and a lot...better for me.

CEC: maybe that's related to my second question
Working on that production, do you feel like that changed how you work?

AB: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

CEC: How?

(pause) I was intuiting that, but...

AB: It made me,
it actually made me grow up, stop bitching, get it together, 'cause this is your job.
And you've got to make this the best way you can.
(aside) I think your light on the video just went out.

(pause, adjusting video/audio equipment)

AB: It made me actually grow up, get myself together, and say,
"This is your job, so you have to make the best out of your job that you can."
Because it's not going to be easy if you sit around and mope all the time.
And I was moping a lot.
And I was falling into a rut, and I was like,
if you're going to be doing this for the next five years, or six years,
you might have to figure out a way to make this work.
You **have** to. *(pause)*
And I thought that that was the perfect time, too,
because that was two different pieces.
The first piece was only two people, very small. Worked in the morning, finished it,
then went into the big piece in the evening, after that piece was finished.
So... it was like, start new, not like a switch, morning, evening.
It was a chunk of work, valid work, wrap it up, finished, put that to the side,
next, you know, let's fix this. It was very nice *(pause)*
So yeah.

CEC: What sort of...

Can you think of concrete things that you do differently at this point?
Other than your mindset. Take your time!

AB: Hm.
I follow the timeline a little better now.
I know what's going on. I understand what's going on.
I think a lot of it was the technical stuff...
Cause all that stuff was done **for** me... as a dancer.

CEC: Aha!

AB: You know, like, calling this person to get that fixed.
You know, like, all that stuff that a *Regieassistent* is supposed to do,
I had to learn how to do. It was learning by doing, also.
Or learning by seeing the other one do it.

CEC: So it was also...
the learning curve, frankly, just being reached.

AB: Yeah.

CEC: Was language ever an issue?

AB: No. *(pause)* I mean, at the beginning it was.
Because we spoke a lot of English in the company—the ballet company.
But I was here so long, I spoke German,
but it was a different language, too. Dance and opera, it’s a different language, altogether,
especially that other side, the technical side.
They would say... “a *hund*” (a dog)...
“Kannst du mir den Hund hier mitbringen?” (Can you bring me the dog here?)
“Den Hund.” What is that?
And it was one of those things with the rollers on it!

CEC: Like a dolly!

AB: And I was like—“*Hund?*”
You know, the conversation was always kind of, different
So I was like, pealed... “What did you say?” You know, and writing things down.

CEC: I had that in *Walküre*.

AB: And you’re like... “What was just said?”
So that took a little time, also.
The language... and sometimes, Italian is a stress factor here, too.
Because a lot of opera’s in Italian.
And I don’t speak Italian, and sometimes they get singers that only speak Italian,
and no German and no English. So I’m like *(sound effects, hands questioning)*
How do we communicate?

CEC: Singer-speak, we used to call it!
Multiple languages in the same sentence.

AB: Funny!

CEC: My first production here
—That’s part of the reason I decided to participate not just in *Walküre*
But the whole *Ring*, if they’d let me—
was because I realized how much of *Walküre* for me...
I mean I watched the process, and I got some of it, as much as I could.
But literally, what meant to be note-taking notebooks, from rehearsals
were at the start just filled with words.

AB: Right...

CEC: I was just stealing vocabulary,
just sucking up
the necessary professional technical vocabulary
that you get no other way.

AB: Yeah that’s true.

CEC: I had it in English from stage!
But also not from backstage, from onstage.
Just like what you were saying before.

AB: Exactly.

CEC: Yes, it amazed me in *Siegfried*
How much more involved I could be.

Just because I understood...

AB: ...what was going on!
I think that was a big thing.
Yeah, when you know the timeline, too,
What's happening onstage. What is that person saying?
What does that person mean when he says that?
That's the big thing, too. *(pause)*
That's what was nice about working with Vera (Nemirova),
because she was in your face, telling you what was going on, all the time.
(whispers, makes faces) "yeah, I see him as this...
"kind of guy who runs around and does this"
and I was like "oh, yeah!?!"

CEC: Yes, and she really makes these faces, too,
she really gets her body into it.

AB: Yeah! So I understood...
I think ... it took that process with Udo, that click,
to figure out that it can be enjoyable.
There can be some legitimate joy, also
So... and before opera?
There are so many.
'Cause I had so many wonderful experiences with dance.
Here...there were so many—so many! There was so much freedom
That was given to us, from our director.

CEC: Yeah?

AB: "Ooh... go on and... be beautiful!"
You know, something like that, like...
A direction like... "Go ahead and, do what you do best!"

CEC: Can you tell me,
the work that you did with the ballet,
Were they collaborations with the opera?
Were they—I know that you rehearsed here in house. Right?

AB: Yeah. At the beginning, they were an opera company...
And then...

CEC: You mean a dance company!?

AB: Yeah. But they were an **opera** company.
An opera ballet company...

CEC: Oh! Ok, I got it.
I'm with you.

AB: When there was a ballet,
and an opera, the ballet would go into the opera.
You know, that type of thing.
And then he stopped that,
William Forsythe.

He was like, “No...we’re gonna kind of... weed that out.”
So he’d leave that out, and then we became the Frankfurt Ballett
And he ...he decided to go on his own little tangent
Which made Frankfurt Ballett the way it is—was—

CEC: Yeah, can you characterize it?
Just in a nutshell for me?

AB: Well, it was **so innovative**
at that point,
He was called “the bad boy of ballet,” William Forsythe.

CEC: Yeah, yeah!

AB: Where he was like, doing hip-hop onstage,
But hip-hop with *pointe* shoes,
And he had speaking onstage, he had storytelling onstage.
And he had electronic music. Canned music.
No orchestra! Canned music.
From the composer he always used.
And that was (*whispered, hand gesture*) “New!”
So exciting! It was, “Oh my god!”
And then, it started building speed,
And it was going all over the world.
The news was hitting Japan, Australia, America
It was everywhere...

CEC: And then they were touring?
Or ...what was “hitting”? People borrowing the style?

AB: The news...
The news the Frankfurt Ballett is around. They’re the ballet company to be watching.
And because they’re so innovative, this is what they’re capable of.
And they were on tour. We were on tour all the time.
We did like two premieres here, and we were on tour. We did evenings here, too.
You know, it was **the company** to be in, and **to watch**, during the ’80s and ’90s.

CEC: Yes, yes. (*pause*)
From what I understand, Oper Frankfurt productions
were also similarly so in the ’80s, as a general rule.
You weren’t around to witness much of that collaboration, were you?

AB: Hm.
Because I was, dancing... at the ballet.
I mean, I saw some performances of the opera
which I enjoyed... the talent!
So much talent came through this house!

CEC: Yes! And from
the direction and organizational level, too
I mean, it was...

AB: I mean, that Cambreling guy,
he was a bit stressful.
But he was a genius with the whole thing,
and the whole conducting, and running that, so...

CEC: Did you have any chance
To work with Michael Gielen?

AB: No... (shaking head.)

(*pause*)

CEC: Hold that thought,
You are a little unusual for my questionnaire...

(*both laughing*)

CEC: Let's try this one...
I think it's applicable with both sets.
Choose any production, in all honesty. From...maybe even your first,
because I imagine you have strong memories of your first dance production.
Let's talk about it as a... typical or atypical example... you can tell me!
But... can you just describe your primary memories
of that rehearsal process.
Where. When. Who.

AB: My first ballet one was a musical, actually.
We did a musical here called *Isabel's Dance*.
Which was very famous, everybody loved it, it became one of those cult things,
like *Rocky Horror Picture Show*.
They knew the lines from the show, they wore T-shirts, the whole deal.

CEC: Really? (*whispering*)

AB: Yeah, it was crazy.
And, me coming from the ballet company that I came from,
I was kind of like, you know. Ballet, gotta do ballet!
So my first role on the ballet opera stage,
I was a show girl. (*pause*)

CEC: (*laughing*)

AB: Black little leotard,
red stockings, red pumps, with long ponytail, and gloves.

CEC: Now, which stage is this?
Are we actually talking here?

AB: Yeah, yeah! Here. Frankfurt Oper Stage.
There we are. First performance! I'm a showgirl.
I look back, and I'm like, "Wow" (*whispered.*)
How do you get to a place like this?
AB: How do you get to place like this. And it's funny because

it happened where I was supposed to do another part,
in that musical. But one of the girl's... quads (quadriceps) froze
and cramped, and she couldn't dance for like two weeks,
something like that.

So there were **no** replacements, and I was the new boy...

(both laughing)

So, William Forsythe looks at me and goes,
“Hey, use the new boy! Use him, use him. We'll use him as one of the show girls.”
So there I was, rehearsing, as a show girl. Onstage, as a show girl!
So, yeah, that was my first. And it was so funny because...
It was kind of like that snowball thing, you know,
Where you get pushed, you just get pushed into this situation
You have to make do with what you have, and you do it.
And that was that.

CEC: And that's when
the creative work really comes, anyway.
When you're really limited.

“I have a very confined set of circumstances here...
“and I'm limited, but hey, that makes me creative!”

AB: And the first opera one... *(pause)*

It was kind of like... I think, was it summer? Yeah, it was summer.
So I had summer break, after the company went “El Foldo,”
and, then I came back, and I had to be *Regieassistent*,
and my first project was... *Macbeth*.

CEC: *Wiederaufnahme* or...?

AB: No, premiere. Yeah, premiere.
With Keith Warner. And, I walked into the KBB:
“Hello! I'm Alan Barnes.” They're like “Hello! Oh.”
“Yeah, I'm supposed to be a *Regieassistent*”
“Oh, right! Right? Riiiiight...” *(knowing tone)*

(both laughing)

AB: Like, “What are we going to do with you??”
So they... I'll never forget... Almut Hein (current director of the KBB) looks in her desk,
and she takes out a *Macbeth* score, plops it on the table, and goes
“Here, that's for you.”
I was like... “Danke schön.” *(quietly.)* “Ok. So... what do I have to do?”
“Well, you show up at this time, do this, do that...”
I was like... “Ok.” *(quietly.)*
Then I was like... I was so excited, because...
I was being entertained! The whole day!

And I was like—I'm not entertaining anyone! They're entertaining me!
AB: But... I was not working. I was sitting there, with a closed score!
Like that... looking and watching (*posture: slouched in seat sideways*)
“wow, that's beautiful!” so great... “oh, the voice!” you know, taking it all in.
And I saw my other assistant kind of like, you know,
(*gestures frantically, writing, sorting things at the table, moving fast*)
I was like: “What is he doing?”
So, I was kind of like, in and out about the whole thing...
Then, two weeks into that production, I got called off the production to go
and help another director with another project for choreography,
and I was like... “Ok, that's much better.”
So, they took me off that project, put me on this other project, and I was like,
“Ok, I kind of got out of that!”
‘Cause I didn't know what the hell was going on anyway, thank goodness!
And I know a little more about this.
So, things at the beginning of this opera thing kind of worked out, but didn't.

CEC: Ok?

AB: It was also kinda like one of those, you know... (*gesture, push back into ground*)
It was one of those, heels back into the floor things.
I was not gonna be pushed...
But the dance one was like: push, run, go!
You know, push, stumble... (*stands and pretends to stumble*)
that kind of thing.
At least I could do it.

CEC: I think

We may be at a pausing place right now?
So this might be a good place to stop for today.
Thank you. This is actually, very helpful.
The sorts of stuff that you are telling me.

AB: Oh, good!

CEC: It's great, to just kind of have these
Concrete stories.
And I'll link things up as need be.

END OF INTERVIEW 1

Alan Barnes Interview #2

February 20, 2011

CEC: You mentioned last time four pieces in total.
we talked quite a lot about *Siegfried*, and we may come back to that,
but I don't want to start there.

We also talked about *Florentinische Tragödie* and *Der Zwerg*,
which you mentioned was the most significant moment for you, on the opera side.
You also brought up your first piece with Forsythe, which was *Isabel's Dance*,
And *Macbeth*, your first opera experience,
which I think you were only on briefly
before switching to a dance project.

AB: Exactly.

CEC: What I'd like to do,
at least with these last three pieces,
is talk through a series of questions in detail.
Whatever you can still recall about the process. I'll guide you through that. So!
Do you care, with which one we begin?

(pause, shakes head "no")

Ok... let's maybe rewind and first talk about *Macbeth*?
Understanding that it was your very first production
and you were only there in short.
First I want to talk a little about the collaborative process...
Can you just quickly recall who you worked on the production with?
So the main players.

AB: Buh... this was so long ago.
Daniel, something, from Australia...or was it David?
He was Macbeth. And Lady Macbeth was Louise...
Clark or something like that.

CEC: It's ok, that's enough
I can look it up if you can't remember.

AB: She was fantastic, she was so funny!
She was very talented. I mean, they were both very talented,
and to work with Keith Warner was very nice, too.
And Barbara Zechmeister was also in it, doing...
Who's the one that screams a lot...Lady McDuff?

CEC: Yes, that would be the one,
the second.

AB: She was in it, and then some other people.

But they were guests, I think
I mean, the collaborative thing, for me,
was really short-lived, because it was kind of like,
“Well, here’s your score, go through it, and see what you’re going to do,”
and I had to learn as I went along.

AB: because I didn’t know what was going on.
So, I was with Axel... at that time, with him.

CEC: I’m sorry, doing?

AB: *Regieassistentz*.

CEC: Ok, so he was...

AB: He was the other one.

And it was fantastic because he was **on** it. I mean, like he always is. Was.
And he was drawing, and making notation in the score
And I was just kind of happy that I was there. Listening to these beautiful people sing.
And I didn’t really understand my... idea of what a *Regieassistent* was supposed to do.
So then I learned as I went along, that you have to... write in the score. (*laughs.*)
And you have to know what they’re doing and what’s happening at that point.
Not just enjoy.

CEC: So, who else was on the team,
That you recall? The production team.
Keith Warner, obviously.

AB: Yeah, and Axel, me, then
James MacNamara took over for me.

CEC: Oh, as *Regieassistent*?
Who is doing now—
is he doing *Inspizienz*? (Stage Management)

AB: Yeah, he was doing *Inspizienz*,
At the Bockenheimer Depot.
He does that, but he also does a lot of stuff in America now.

CEC: Yes, that’s what he said.
I met him on *Calisto*.

AB: Yeah, that’s a hard one to say,
about collaboration. Cause that was kind of like
thrown at me.

CEC: Then, we can move on. We can go through the series.
We can talk more about collaboration with other things.
One question I still would ask is:
Do you remember interactions of the team
either that were conflicts, or really productive collaborative moments?

AB: Yeah, I do.
One really nice thing that happened was...
Keith wanted it to be really mysterious and magical at some point.

And I was looking at it, and I was looking at it from a dancer's point of view.
Because that's where I just came from.

And this moment when there was a scream... the *Bühnenbild* (stage design) had like a big door, and a big curtain that was in it, and the porter—the waiter, the butler—would always close the curtain.

And Lady Macbeth was always supposed to make believe she was closing it.
You know, like that. (*gestures, pulling imaginary curtain stiffly in a line.*)

AB: And I said to her... “you know, it's supposed to be mysterious and magical, and nobody's supposed to know what's really going on behind there, and because you're the lady of the house, and nobody's supposed to know what's going on in every room, this is your home, this is what you know. And I think you should do something more like, like a swipe. A magical moment where you go like *that* (*swiping gesture with arm*) and it just goes away.”
And you just see the man doing it, but she does something like that.
And Keith loved it, Louise loved it, and I was like, perfect.
So that was... where I actually had something to do with the production. In that moment.
Then there were other points when people were asking “what do you think about that?”

CEC: People like who?

AB: Oh, you know.

Like Keith turned to me and said,

“Well what do you think about that moment right there,
is that too dance-y, or too movement?”

And I was like “It looks fine,” because I didn't realize that I had power to say things.
You know, so, that was strange.

I don't think anything negative came from it, the only thing that came from it
was that I just didn't... I felt I was... put into a situation where I had no idea what to do
I always felt that I wasn't able to be the best that I could.

That was the only negative thing I felt during that process.

CEC: This may be a tangent, but
do you know, or have you seen, rather, have you witnessed
other people in the same sort of situation?

In that they'd come in, and they are not aware of how collaborations are done here
or what their roles are?

Have you seen other people come into the process like that
and experience similar difficulties?

AB: (*pause*) I don't think so.

I think my situation was so rare.

And so out there, that I thought I was the only one.

And that I really was the only one who did something like this.

And then when I see other people, like newer people, younger people coming in

And they just go “oh, I'm gonna do that and do that”

And I was like “wow, how do you know that?”

You know, I thought that was something rather extraordinary, too.

CEC: That they'd come in with that knowledge...

AB: That they'd come in with that already,
did they, did they go to *Regieassistent* school?

CEC: Well,
I do think in most theater training, there is some of that that goes on
although one of my questions is,

CEC: is that different house to house, how that operates?
Which actually brings me to another quick question,
Have you worked in recent years outside of this house?
I mean, doing directing.

AB: Opera?

CEC: You can answer either/or.

AB: No, no opera outside of this house.

CEC: But you have done other...
Presumably choreography? Work in dance.

AB: Yeah, Yeah. (*pause*)
But that's what I mean, with the *Regieassistent* thing.
...with dance, you learn to be a ballet master while you are there.
It's kind of like, you know...

CEC: It's an acquired skill.

AB: Yeah, it's like you get it, learning by doing.
And I didn't realize, I thought, like, you know, people went to school for that
And I think that now I'm learning that.
It's something that you learn with the amount of time that you do it.
I mean...

CEC: I think most creative professions are, really.

AB: Yeah...

CEC: And I would say these younger people coming in
They may be new to the "professional world"
but they've already been working, at least in conservatories
on theater pieces in a variety of roles for a long time.
I would guess that anybody going into direction is not coming purely
from a stage background.
Or what do you think about that?

AB: I think that's absolutely right.
I think it has to go that way.
You know, you don't come from "baker" and then become like a *Schauspieler* (actor)
or maybe sometimes you do!
But... there's some sort of craft that you're supposed to have.
As a foundation. You have to have some sort of foundation.

CEC: Interesting...
I just want to point it out...
That, you know when you were talking about the productive collaborative moment
That you were able to be a part of in this first opera, *Macbeth*,
that was coming into it, quite obviously, from your perspective as a dancer.
Those were the questions you were being asked.
Those were the things that you had to say.
Because that's what your experience is.
I would venture a guess that's not really unlike what most other people experience,
You talk about what you know, and you learn other things,
through the process of doing what you know.

AB: Yeah, and that was the switch
Because I wasn't being creative. You know, I didn't feel like I was being creative.
I was sitting, watching, and I was writing in a book.
And that was not creative for me. That was...
"Creative" was being a part of it. Being able to collaborate.
Being able to venture into something.
Being able to have your own opinion about something.
Being able to **do** something about what's happening onstage.
I was like... "ok. I'll just sit here and watch other people do it...
and it would probably be a lot easier if they would just do it this way."

CEC: Ahem, I'm going to jump back
to your last interview, I know you haven't heard it in a while,
but you were also mentioning the *Florentinische Tragödie*,
that that experience was so positive for you.
And part of the reason, we were talking about last time,
that it was so positive, is that you were able to do something
with your real background.
And your skills were valued in that.
And maybe there's actually a similarity there.

AB: I think so.
I mean, it was also that... the director actually trusted me to do things.
And I think it was something of responsibility that I was missing.
You know, somehow when... when you have no responsibility, you don't do anything!
It was always like "there's the new boy."
So don't give him too much, because it might be too much for him.
So I was always asking questions—or rather, not asking questions—
because I felt like I was being stupid if I asked a question.
You know, like, "he doesn't know that!?!"

CEC: Yeah! I know that feeling.

AB: You know, stuff like that.
So... that was where I was, until *Tragödie* came along

And I was like “oh! So you have to be a little more aggressive Yourself! I have to be a little more aggressive about how to get things across. I think that was a big... I think that’s why I use that one as an example of a turning point. because after that came other things that I **knew** I was good at. I was like, “Oh, I can do that.” That’s not a problem. Just make sure they go on at the right time, They go on here, they do that, You know, that was the click. It wasn’t like, “And then they, what? And ...what did you say?”

CEC: That was the moment where you started to feel secure.

AB: Yeah.

CEC: Yeah. Cool! That’s helpful. It’s interesting to hear the patterns emerge while you’re talking. It’s cool. So, yeah, we don’t want to beat a dead horse with *Macbeth*. But... I’ll ask a few words about administrators. Do you recall how much interaction there was on that piece, for example, between administrators and the creative staff? Were they involved much?

AB: *(shaking head, no, slowly & deliberately.)*

CEC: Not really at all. No.

AB: They’re rarely involved.

CEC: Are there members of the creative team, Or were there members of the creative team That performed any sort of administrative tasks?

AB: No. *(shaking head no.)*

CEC: Ok, so there’s really not much overlap.

AB: I rarely see that. When it’s creative, it’s creative. And when it’s supposed to be administrative, sometimes it’s administrative. *(Laughing.)*

CEC: Sometimes I would wonder if there’s a little bit of a crossover between the two, maybe in the dramaturgy? Because they are... or we are... sometimes in there doing creative work, and sometimes supportive work outside. You know, working on the program, working on the bios.

AB: Yeah, but I still think that is Something that is part of the creative flow. You know, I feel like administration is, you know Payroll...scheduling...you know... programming...

And stuff like that.

CEC: The non-visible side.

AB: Yeah.

With dramaturgy it's like, there's...
you have to read, you have to be in the pieces you're in.
You know, you don't take yourself out of the piece.
Whereas administration takes itself out of the piece.

CEC: Right.

I mean, the only really...

Having worked as a dramaturg, essentially, or something akin to
Dramaturgische Mitarbeit (dramaturgical collaborator)
on the last few pieces, even as a *Hospitantin* (intern)

I did a lot! And I think probably the setting of the program,
Actually doing the layout, was the thing most related to administrative work.
Because all it required was a little of visual.

CEC: "Eh, does that fit the flow?"

But otherwise it was kind of a cut-paste computer task.
But... I guess you're right. It's a different kind of artistic role.

AB: Yeah.

I definitely believe that.

CEC: It's interesting how people draw those lines.

So... (*pause, reviews questionnaire.*)

These questions don't apply. But I have more!

We've talked a lot already about your memories...
but just another couple of mundane questions.

Where did most rehearsals take place?

How long do they typically last?

And do you remember, in the arc of the rehearsal period

Were there any key points—at last in so far as you were there—

When the tone of rehearsals changed?

You know? Like, at this point, everybody's off book.

At this point, the director's in charge, or the conductor's in charge.

Can you talk about what you see as those big arc points?

AB: Well, most of the time, with a premiere, It's set out in Rödelheim.

That being one of my favorite places in the world.

My favorite moment is the last rehearsal in Rödelheim.

Because you know that, once you come in to the house, things get **much** easier.

Because you have full staff. Whereas out in Rödelheim, you are staff.

If the costumes are not there, or the costume person, you're dealing with the costumes.

You have to take care of the *Requisiten* (props), staging.

You have to take care of everything. Entrances, exits.

And you have to know what you're doing.

It becomes rather encompassing... you become the piece while you're there.

You see it every day. Or you see the section every day. You become the section. Then once you leave Rödelheim, it gets put on somebody else's responsibility.

CEC: To logistically manage it.

AB: Somebody else manages it now.

So now it's.. now you get to deal with other things.

Like how the house and the singers deal with each other.

Because, before, in Rödelheim, and on the *Probekühnes* (rehearsal stages)

Your development is between that group of people in that room. That's the process.

CEC: Only the people on the creative team.

AB: And then all the sudden

When it branches out, you get more responsibilities as a *Regieassistent*, also.

Now it's somebody else's responsibility to get them to the stage,

or "you have to be here at this point."

Something that happens between the house and singer or the house and the director and that's basically on you, too, on the *Regie*. (direction.)

CEC: How so?

AB: Well, if there's a problem with a singer,

or if the house has a problem to get to a singer, we're kind of like that liason, too.

CEC: Ok, I see what you mean.

So you're in that sense, the go-between.

AB: Yeah.

Between house and creator, and stuff like that.

CEC: That's another variable.

AB: And on top, sometimes having to jump back into...

"No, this has to be here, that has to be there."

There has to be a constant communication between *Regie* and stage, also.

CEC: Mm-hm.

And they're also not three feet from you.

AB: No... there's a lot of stuff that goes on.

And then, the next big ellipse is to the orchestra rehearsals.

Which are... sometimes can be stressing. But sometimes they're magical, too.

Because you kind of sit there, you listen to beautiful music, and you take in what you've actually put together, you actually see it happen.

So you get a whole different view of what actually happened than in the past.

You know, piano, "tink tink tink," Then all the sudden you've got, like, swells of strings and harps and horns, And you're like, "oh, that's beautiful there!"

"Oh, that makes sense!" Then the creative juice starts to flow even more.

Because then you see "oh, maybe this could happen there, or that..."

CEC: So it becomes less...

I wanted to say “*grob*” (rough), the picture,
and you start getting more... little, detailed ideas?
Is that what you mean?

AB: It starts to take shape,
you know... it’s rough at the beginning
but it keeps getting sanded down, until it’s nice and smooth,
until the flow is right.

CEC: Can you think of an example,
and I guess you could pull from any of the three operas
that we were talking about...
from *Siegfried*, or *Macbeth*, or *Florentinische Tragödie*,
Can you think of a moment, in that stage of the process
that you could tell me about, from any of those three pieces?
Where you recall it getting this “sanded down”
Take a minute.

(long pause)

and if you can’t find anything just now, we can come back to it.
If it pops into your head later.

AB: It’s funny because,
In *Siegfried*, the first time when I felt like it worked
was when I felt like I understood what was going on...
I mean, I understood what was going on, because I was watching it
But when you’re in it, you have a different perspective
on the whole scene.
And it was the first orchestra rehearsal.

CEC: And this was you onstage?
Or watching?

AB: Onstage.
And I suddenly understood the whole entire story.
Also. You know, because you’re involved...
with the singers also onstage.

CEC: Can you describe what that moment was like for you?

AB: It was kind of funny because...
Sitting outside of it, you know the people, you know the story,
you understand what’s going on,
but you don’t understand their inner dialogue.
You don’t really understand what’s going on inside them at the moment.
You see the peripheral stuff, you see the exterior. You don’t feel what’s inside.
And once you join in, then you understand what’s going on inside the person.
And I think that has to do with like, tactile...

If you touch a person, or you embrace someone, if there's contact, you feel something different. You understand a little bit more what's inside. You know, if you don't touch a person, then there's no contact. There always... acquaintance, what happens to a person, but once there's a touch or something that happens, like bodily contact, then there's that moment of blood-blood, skin-skin, warmth-cold

CEC: Much more information.

AB: Yeah. You get...

You get perspective on what's going on inside. And that was... I think that's what happened in *Siegfried*, too.

CEC: Do you think a person can get that,
Not being onstage?

I know exactly what you're talking about... I'm a performer, too.

AB: I don't... I really don't think so.

I think people get their idea of what it is, they think... they read into what's going on. They can read into it, they can say, oh well in this section, you're feeling this, You're believing that.

I mean, I've heard people saying things to someone that's just come offstage, and you're "ok, yeah... ok..." (*face wide-eyed in surprise, giving false agreement*)

AB: If that's what you saw, then that's good, that's what you got.

But that person, the actual singer, actor, dancer... was probably thinking of something **totally** different. To bring this out to the audience.

CEC: And maybe feeling a different emotion.

AB: Yeah (*nodding yes.*)

CEC: It's a question of perception.

AB: And sometimes people perceive things that are actually **not** going on onstage. You know... and once you joined in.

That's why, you're going into it. I would see Peter (Peter Marsh, "Mime") do things onstage, and then we would talk afterwards

—you know that one section, where he's hammering the anvil—with that little shudder afterwards. I was like, it should be, you know, the aftershock.

"Boom!" and (*sound like a quick series of bumping/bouncing thuds*).

And he says "Oh yeah, that's good! I was thinking of something else...but yeah."

It's one of those things where once you step in and give an idea,

or you actually understand where he's coming from, you have no idea what's going on.

You actually have no idea what's going on.

CEC: I guess another question is,
which one of those is correct?
And I guess there's not a real answer to that.

AB: No.

Because then you have creative freedom.

You know, as the dancer, singer, actor, you have this moment of,

“Well, I choose to do this right now, because this is what feels the best for me right now, at this moment.” Thank you for your help, director / directress. But right now, I think that... let me show you what I’m going to do. I found myself doing that a lot, too.

“Okay, give me an idea what you want, and then you tell me if I’m on the right track.”

You know, that type of thing.

CEC: I feel like what you’re saying right now
is making my mind spin in the direction of critiques and audience and press.

Because I’m just thinking about perception.

And I’m wondering...

Because the issue that you’re raising is, what you’re saying is, as I’m taking it,

That people performing onstage, embodying someone,

acting it out, feeling one thing,

and people in the audience, some of whom are critics

some of whom are directors, some of whom are... who knows what?

They are all perceiving it, taking it in, interpreting it.

And that’s their view on the piece.

This is from different perspectives.

They’re coming in to the piece, and maybe they’re going to eventually write about it, too.

And then—we’ve talked about this before—*Siegfried* and the critiques

Some of them that seemed idiotic, at least from the performance side.

CEC: They are churning something out

that may or may not have any relationship

To what performers onstage experience.

I wonder how... I wonder how concretely, in examples, do you,

have you seen any sort of influence of that fact,

the knowledge that people are going to look at this and interpret it,

in the production process?

Is that getting talked about? Or how people are going to react to something.

AB: Yeah, there was one production, *Fidelio*.

CEC: When was this? Roughly.

AB: 2007? 2006? 2007? (2008)

We had a great woman, Erika Sunnegårdh, fantastic singer.

She had sung the role before, and she would always say,

“Well you know, this is the part where the audience goes crazy.”

Or, “This is the point where the audience feels that this emotion is this.”

So she put *Regie* in from the audience’s perspective.

Which I was kind of like, “That’s weird!”

That somebody takes into consideration what the audience is doing at that moment.

Normally... what I learned through dance is that you go onstage and you educate.

You tell a story, but you educate people. You try to educate them.
You don't just feed them something, just shove stuff in their face, you try to divvy it up, give it to them. But you explain what it's doing to them.
"It's going to feed your brain. This is going to make your nails strong."
You know, "This is going to make you grow big and tall. This nurtures your bones."
You know, I felt like it... if you feed a person... (*frantic gestures, blank faces*)
And they're just taking it in, they're oblivious to what they're being fed.

(interrupted by another colleague, brief conversation)

CEC: You were talking about *Fidelio*

AB: Yes, *Fidelio*,
And how she put *Regie* into the audience's perspective.
or what they **should** be feeling, at that moment.

CEC: My question, that that prompts is,
First of all how, and
I understand that the audience is coming into the production process,
but how does that affect what you all were doing?
Other than just an awareness. Do you think that it changed anything?

AB: I don't know!
It was really strange. To add that in.
Because I thought somehow it slowed down the process.
When you think about what other people think, then you lose your flow.

CEC: You become more self-conscious.

AB: Also!
But you actually lose flow, you slow down, you go, "Oh. What are they going to think?"
"Oh, should I put that in there now? Or should I...hm."
And I don't think it has to do with self-confidence. I think it has to do with...
Where were you initially going? And were you thinking of the audience in the beginning?

CEC: Mm-hm. Ok.
Do you think that that is something that goes on, otherwise?
Other than in this *Fidelio*.

AB: I think so. I do, I think so.
I don't want to mention any names, but
I did hear a director say once, "Oh yeah, the audience is going to love this section."
"And the critics are going to die, they're going to love that part."
Like...how do you know? How do you know that...?

CEC: Do you remember what they were speaking about?
I know you would like to keep that more anonymous
and I can understand why, but

without necessarily mentioning the opera or too many stage details
—I realize that’s kind of hard—
is there any way you can tell me
more what it was about?

AB: Well, it was a moment where,
it was done for a specific reason.

CEC: The trick, or whatever was happening...

AB: The trick,
the idea that was supposed to come out onstage. It was done for that reason.

CEC: To enact... some response?

AB: To have the audience and the critics
love that production. Or that section.

CEC: Ok.

AB: It was purposefully done for that reason.

CEC: I understand the reason
for the abstraction about it. I won’t push you further on that.

AB: I didn’t really get it,
I didn’t understand why that was a factor in the *Regie* at that moment.

CEC: Can you think of any reason why, practically?

AB: No. pleasing...but...

I mean, I think it’s nice to please people, but I think you can’t please everybody.
And if you start trying to do that, then it’s an uphill battle.

CEC: Yeah, well then
you’re at a point where you’re not driving the craft
the craft is...

AB & CEC: driving you (*speaking together.*)

AB: Yeah, true.

CEC: Let’s leave that for now.
I’m not saying we won’t come back to it...
because it’s an interesting point!
But I want to leave it for now. Let’s leave *Macbeth*.
I think we’ve gotten a little information out of that.
And also, you didn’t have a huge wealth of experience in that piece.
So let’s turn to *Florentinische Tragödie/Der Zwerg*.
Which was much more involved for you. So I think that will be easier for you.
And even more productive, probably.
Let’s back up a little bit then?
Back to the collaborative process.
So, quick overview, just the facts, man.
Who was on the production,
The key players that you recall,
Did the work of any particular one stand out as unusual or interesting to you.

And if so, please explain.

AB: Well, what was so nice was,
it was me, Udo, and Udo brought his assistant that he usually works with.
I forget his name, Antony
Very nice, very efficient, very smart, very on it
Worked with Udo before, so they had a great rapport, and I just kind slid in there.
Which was nice, you know?
And it was good because I was the liaison with them and the house
So I learned that also. How to deal with... the KBB, how do we get those things situated?
So I learned these things like (*snap*) instantly.
Which was very nice, and on top of it. Schedule was fantastic!
We working in the morning, we took a break, or two hour break,
And then we went into the 2nd piece. Which was *Der Zwerg*.
So we finished... No! We did, we actually did *Florentinische Tragödie* first,
we did like two three weeks of that. Finished it in the mornings.
Finished it, beautiful wrapped (*gesture, wrapping a present*)
Beautifully done, worked out like a charm,
then we started on *Zwerg*, worked, had a little hour break,
worked a little more, and left really early in the day.
Which was nice, which was fantastic.
So the whole atmosphere of the thing was...
the flow was really productive.
You know, it wasn't like, stop and start.
(*Whispering*) With a five to six hour break, then come back.

CEC: And that was also in Rödelheim?

AB: That was also in Rödelheim.
So, and then, and it was... Robert... Hayward (*pause, remembering*)

CEC: What was he doing?

AB: He was the lead in *Florentinische Tragödie*.
And Claudia Mahnke was singing also, as Bianca.
So it was just, heaven! It was actually heaven to see these two together onstage
acting and singing, the voices were just amazing!
So I was very happy to come to work, because I knew that I was going to see them.
And I knew that I was going to hear them. I knew something was going to turn out beautiful.
Because Udo was just sitting there, and just let them be free about what they were doing and how
to work. He had a good rapport with everyone, it was really nice!
Then we went into *Zwerg*, and then it was Juanita Lascarro. Voice from God!
And Peter (Bronder)... I always forget his last name. British guy.
Very nice. Talent! Just talented people that were willing.
To take ideas and to make them into something.
And to take ideas from **everything** that was happening.
You know, from the *Regieassistenz*. Udo gave me a lot of responsibility behind stage.

“Make sure they do this, and make sure this happens.”
“Can you get that together so that the balls cross, and then...”
“Can you make it so that the girls do that in the back?”
“And this is the interesting thing, we need to do this and this and that”
(*pause*) “Oh sure, I’ll handle it!” I was like, oh, this is nice!
I can do this and that and still be involved with the front, too, you know?
So I understood that my strong suit was behind stage.
I think because, coming from dance, you like to be onstage.
And I like to be near the stage, I think that was like
a comfort zone, too, to be near the stage. On the stage.
Instead of being out front. I was like “Oh!”

CEC: You feel like you’re doing something?

AB: Also, also.

CEC: I see that in your body language.

When you describe being onstage, your body’s doing things! (*chest forward, alert*)
And otherwise your body is just closed (*shoulders drawn together, lower.*)
So it seems like, to be physically involved, you like that.

AB: Definitely...

And I think that was the main thing.
And I think I changed my whole idea too, you know?
I like changed my pattern. I woke up early enough to get there on time,
because that was one of my things, being on time.
And I ate breakfast, I got myself together for it. So I think that was a big turning point.
And I kept thanking him at the premiere party, like hugging him.
“Thank you Udo, you made this such a great experience!
Thank you, thank you, thank you!” And that has not happened often.

CEC: It sounds like you have a really high opinion of him,
and how he works.

AB: Yeah, I do.
I do—and I did.
Because it was so different than all the other ones.

CEC: What do you think the difference is?

AB: I don’t know.
I don’t know if it was because he came from *Schauspiel*?
He’s a famous actor, so you know...

CEC: He’s an actor.

AB: A famous German actor.
He came in, and he was like...
“Let’s try, let’s just see what happens!” (*light, relaxed tone*)
It wasn’t like...(*grumbles, growls.*)
Like some...old opera director...

CEC: You mean like, he was willing to play...

AB: Yeah, I think that was a big thing.
What he was doing was so...elegant!
And it wasn't like *(pause)*
He put ideas into their heads, but he had ideas
And they were coming from somewhere else,
Whereas singers, they block out stuff.
This measure, I need to be here. This measure, I need to be there.
“And when I sing that, should I go over there?”
You know that's how they block out things in their heads.
And he gave them ideas of certain things, you know?
At this moment—and all directors do!—but I felt,
It came from somewhere else, because he was an actor.
You know, if you're in notes and music
—which is wonderful, because you should be musical—
but sometimes I think, it dictates the story, sometimes.

CEC: Oh for sure.

AB: Sometimes you lose sight of the story,
Or the story turns into something different. Just like you see three *Toscas* in one night,
and they're all different.

CEC: But that's the *Schauspiel*.
That's different, the acting, staging, theater side,
that's different.

AB: But that's what made it so nice.

CEC: Yeah, I mean, absolutely.
I would say that music controls something like that, to a certain extent.
Music can direct you emotionally.

AB: Which is a beautiful thing,
I'm not saying that's wrong.
But when you put something on top of it, from a different perspective, you can almost see the
music. Which I enjoy. To see the music actually happening. Not just hear the music. And I think
that's a big dance thing, too, you know. Balanchine said, if you don't like the choreography,
close your eyes and listen to the music. You know, that type of thing. But because you have
grandiose *Bühnenbild*, sets, costumes, stuff like that
you want to see what's happening, too.

CEC: It's like making the aura of the music
visible, tangible? Cool. So, back to the *Tragödie*... So, can you describe,
in this really awesome piece, the relationships between the members of that team?
So, just, whichever key relationships stand out to you.

AB: Well,
What was nice was that, between Robert, Robert Hayward and Claudia (Mahnke).
They were so compatible as husband and wife.
Major chemistry. You believed everything that was going on onstage.
So, I think that what they were doing onstage actually emanated to us
radiated out to us, and we became like a little compact family.

You knew that, we knew that, I knew that when she took three steps over this way,
She was going to the door. I had to be there to hand her the scarf.
It was kind of like, relying on everybody to be where they should be at the right time.

CEC: That's interesting,
Because you know what was happening to me as you were saying this?
Is that I visualized, almost like a play, a play within a play.
The play onstage is the play within a play,
Then you're on the side, she's coming to the door,
and that's another staged moment.

AB: Yeah, and that's a play inside a play.
Because you're also in a dialogue about why you have to get to that position.
That was another thing. You know, he put pictures in your head.
To say why the material was out, why was the scarf involved,
Why was the train set there, why was...(pause)

CEC: So you really have a vision.
In the background.

AB: Exactly. And that brought everybody together.
You know, It wasn't kind of separated. And sometimes you do feel disconnected,
and separated from the singers. The *Regie*. Sometimes.
And in that, I didn't.

CEC: And that's kind of, the goal.
You know, you answered so quickly in the first interview
That this was the one you wanted to talk about,
I don't want to put words in your mouth,
But it seems to me like this is sort of the epitome
of what the theatrical process should be.

AB: I think so. (pause)
And because it came from a place where, he let the actors, the singers, be involved.
And not just put stuff on them.

CEC: And yet gave a very overarching vision, of why.

AB: Yeah.

CEC: So you felt, you had the think to connect to.

AB: Yeah.

CEC: Very cool, very cool.
That would have been a neat production to be a part of.

AB: I thought it was—fantastic.
I haven't done anything like that!
You know the only thing is... I worked with Dale Duesig in *Reise nach Reims*,
That was also nice.

CEC: When was that?

AB: When was that? Oh, God. I have no idea.

CEC: Just so I have a...
so I can find them again, Alan.

Roughly?

AB: '04? 2004?

And he called me to go to Amsterdam to help him with a big dance section he wanted.

He had some ideas... the thing was set in a health spa, and he wanted massages, and tai chi classes, and dance moves, and catwalk, and stuff like that.

He was like, "Oh yeah, I need him to help me with that."

And I was like, shipped to Amsterdam to help him. To collaborate with him, to get ideas into his head. This I could deal with, this I could get into.

But that was short lived also. And everything else became... what it is now.

CEC: And what is it now?

AB: *Regieassistenz*. You assist the director. (*long pause*)

CEC: It's support work.

AB: Yeah. Support work.

CEC: So, moving on from that.

(*pause, reviewing questions*)

Oh...did we finish talking about the milestones, in the big arc of a project?

You were talking about the arc of being onstage.

AB: We did, we talked about,

We got to the orchestra part. Oh, that's good, yes.

After the orchestra part is premiere. So premiere happens, and then after premiere, nothing happens.

CEC: Then, you just let it go.

AB: It's done.

Whereas with dance, premiere happens... you're still buffing, cleaning, fiddling with it.

And I found that to be really strange, too, getting into it.

When it's done, and it's written in the book, close the book—that's it.

CEC: Then it's set.

AB: It's done.

CEC: I wonder if that comment would also be made

By the people who are performing.

Well, you performed in *Siegfried*!

AB: I think so.

CEC: Was that different, in *Siegfried*?

AB: Well...

there are tons of nights I did different things.

So, I mean, I don't know if that's one of those moments,

AB: If that's what happens.

But that's a perspective thing. Once you see the person onstage, are they doing the same thing?

It's not like a Broadway show, where you've gotta hit your mark. Every night, you know.

You have to be **there** for **that**.

Seven, eight shows a week, same show.

The correction is, “you weren’t on your mark today, Susie.”
That type of thing. There’s no... freedom.

CEC: So there is more of a fixed idea
of what the thing is.

AB: I think so.

But I think it depends a lot on the person singing, to make it fresh for themselves, too.
Because after the premiere, sometimes you don’t see a person for a week, or two weeks,
Until the next show. You know, and you’re like...
and there’s so much that has happened between the premiere and that show.
Do you remember what you did? Of course you remember it, but, are you going to enhance it,
what are you going to do?
I think the leaps that happen in the beginning are great.
Initial introductions, fantastic. You see who you are dealing with.
Rehearsal period, you get to know who you are dealing with, you learn what they are capable of.
What does that person...how does that person deal with you?
Goes to music? How do you deal with seeing this on music that you haven’t heard in a while,
and how has it changed you?
Then premiere. Then it’s like tied up, it’s done.
It’s kind of like those four phases. And then, after that,
The leaps are bigger. It’s not like (*sound effects, small regular steps.*)
Not like one after another. Then you wait!
So those leaps that happen... I mean maybe you come back with more...vigor.
A bit like learning a language.

CEC: Well, I can speak about that
And I’m sure you can too, having learned German as an adult.
But you have to be in it really, really intensely, or you don’t learn anything.
And then you have to go away, and let your brain recover,
And then sometimes, after two weeks in the United States,
You come back and you’re like, “Oh, my German’s great!”
Have you had that experience before?

AB: Or you’re speaking German in America
And everybody’s like... “no.”

Mother: “Alan, no... find your words. That’s not American. “That’s not English. Find your
words. Stop. Think, then talk.”

(both laughing)

AB: She caught me too, it was fabulous.

And I was like lalalalalala (*babbling*). And she was like, “What did you just say?”
I was like, “What do you mean, wasn’t that English?”
She’s like, “No. I think two words were English, and then something else came out.”
And I was like, “Really? Oh my God.” Not right, not right.

(pause, personal conversation, text stricken)

CEC: Okay, we’re still on *Tragödie/Zwerg*.
Can you tell me any sort of media memories.

Like press, audience, coverage, after the fact? Or anything like that?

AB: No.

CEC: So your memories are purely of the process,
and nothing after, or reacting to it?

AB: (*shaking head.*)

CEC: All right.

Have there been...I'm intrigued by this line of thought brought up with *Fidelio*.
Do you see this line of thought coming up in other productions?

(*pause*)

AB: I don't know. I mean, I don't know if it's conscious.
I mean, the one thing that I remember was conscious. **Was** conscious.
But I don't know... I think somehow,
people have a certain set idea about an opera, and they say that's how it should be done.

CEC: Who's they?

AB: The director.

CEC: Ok. Alright. But they...

AB: They've seen it done this way,
Or they've heard that it's done this way,
Or sometimes even, administration comes to some rehearsals, and says,
"That's not going to happen. You can't do that." Or, "Can you do something else?"

CEC: And have they said why?

AB: Cause they thought it was too provocative,
Or too vulgar, or too out there. (*pause*)
I think that's censorship, isn't it?

CEC: Well, maybe to a certain extent.

I mean, I do think there are boundaries to everything, whether spoken or unspoken.

AB: Yeah, but...
of course there are boundaries, but I thought,
if there are no boundaries in artistic freedom,
then why not let it happen? Then again, the flow gets stopped.

CEC: What sort of things are we talking about?

AB: There was one production here where
it was kind of like, men with stocking caps on their heads, cutting out nipples,
putting lipstick on their nipples, and throwing up, and drinking, and cake, and peeing,
and I was like... it's all in one piece!

AB: And it's kind of necessary, really! You can't take out one of those things without the other
things, cause then the other things look really stupid.

But if you keep it all in one piece, then, it's toned down, cause it's all there.
You know, if you throw the kitchen sink on the stage, everybody's gonna be like,
"Oh, it's the kitchen sink." Oh, okay, wasn't expecting that, "Ok, great!"
But if you do just one thing, that is like (*gasp*).

CEC: Risqué, risqué.

AB: "Oh, my God!"

And then somebody says you can't do that, Then you're like, "what do you mean, I can't do that." You know...I found that to be **very** strange.

CEC: So, the feedback that you're recalling
That was saying, "No, no, no, you can't do that."
That was a more, erring on the side of, let's pull this back and not be so extreme?
Rather than pushing for some sort of new interpretation.

AB: Yeah.

CEC: Ok.

AB: Yeah, but that's the question. Because once you take that out,
You have to make another suggestion, you have to give another option.
If you take that out...

CEC: What are you going to do, instead?

AB: Exactly. Then it becomes something else.

So, again, there's that push and pull of flow. License, censorship, you know...

CEC: But this is all, relatively general, I think?
It's not like, any sort of explicit statement of
We can't do this because this person is coming. And that would be a bad thing.
There's no concrete reason for it other than,
That feels like it pushes a boundary. Yeah?

AB: Mm-hm.

CEC: Is that what you're saying?

AB: In that instance, you mean?

CEC: In that instance, yeah.
Have there been more specific sort of censorship things?

AB: I don't think so, no.

CEC: ok. We can put that to bed, then.
(*pause*) Post the opera, *Zwerg/Tragödie*
Did working on that piece alter how you think about making work?
Either kind of like, generally, or within opera.

AB: Yeah.

Because it was funny because, I did the opera, then the collaboration with Dale
with the *Viaggio (Reise nach Reims)*, then the *Zwerg*,
Or was there something in between? (*to self*) Oh that one was horrible!
I mean horrible for me. And, it gave me a new perspective on the way opera could be directed.
Not should, or would be, but could be.
There's options, it doesn't have to be one way.

CEC: So, what the process can be,
So, as a model, then.

AB: Yeah.

CEC: oh, cool!
So, did the piece itself,
Whatever it is that gets fixed and performed
Did that reflect any larger political or social issues that you remember
Any overt references in the staged work?

AB: Well, there goes perspective again.
Because being outside, you see different things.
Then all the sudden, I read the...
I was in the audience and I read the *Übertitel* (supertitles)
And I liked the duchess, or princess, or whatever, in *Zwerg*,
And at the end, I realized, she was a little bitch.
She was a little bitch. She was spoiled, she was rich, and a little bitch.
But it was Juanita, and I was like, oh, so cute, and the voice, the whole thing!
And then I realized, “she’s so mean!” She was talking about this little guy, he was short.
Like “you’re just, ugh, you’re just so tiny.” She was always like, demonstrating bullying!
And just keeping like, “You dwarf!” “You’re tiny! Like you love me! The very idea...”
You know, that type of thing.
The class... all that came together.
Like, sometimes you can...it can be a lesson, too.
And that’s where my non-knowledge of opera was nice. Because I was learning, also.
It isn’t just set in stone... that Tosca’s going to jump off the bridge.
She’s gonna jump. It doesn’t have to be that way, it could be something else.

CEC: And you’ve got that in your head
From the beginning, because you weren’t an opera person from before.
The people that you worked with on in that time,
Have you worked with them again?

AB: No. They haven’t come back.
Udo’s never come back. Antony, no.

CEC: Hm. That also nixes my next question.

AB: I mean, I worked with them in *Fidelio*.

CEC: Oh, yeah?

AB: And that was kind of funny. That was funny, yeah.

CEC: Um, you have given me so much information
This is actually so super helpful,
I know for you, it’s probably like, why are we asking all these questions?
But for me, it’s really providing a richer picture of what goes on here,
And what your experiences have been, at least.
Which is great for me. Please let me say a big fat thank you!

END OF BARNES INTERVIEWS

Appendix C: Pamela Rosenberg Interview #1 February 14, 2012

(introductory conversation about IRB paperwork)

CEC: So, as I said before, I really want this environment to feel relaxed and comfortable, it's really more of a conversation than anything else. I think I told you at the beginning, I'm—the original part of the project was to look at a couple of different opera houses. It was originally conceived as, I wanted to discuss Oper Frankfurt and the chain of events that followed this Gielen Era in the company of the '80s, and the development of, this sort of, *Regietheater* idea and trend. If you want to call it a trend, kind of, the flavor of opera that's been done over the last quarter century, three decades. As it turned out, that turned out to be too large a project. And now I've begun really just to focus on the Oper Frankfurt in the last year and a half. And the way I'm doing that, I'm primarily comparing the Berghaus staging of the *Ring* that took place in the 1980s, and the Vera Nemirova staging of the *Ring* that's been taking place recently. I had the opportunity to work on that with the team, which was a fantastic opportunity for me. And in the course of that I've gotten to know the house pretty well, and many people that have worked there for quite a long time, who also worked on the Berghaus *Ring*. The project is still in service to understanding what has happened there in the last few decades, in terms of larger operatic trends. And I see German opera generally at the forefront of what's happening, and has been for a while. And that it's broadened out, from a kernel of a few really important developments and houses, one period of which was this Gielen Era at the Oper Frankfurt of the 1980s. That's primarily what I'd love to speak with you about today. But you can also feel free to make observation about opera elsewhere

that you feel might relate to that subject.
So... we can just have a chat!

PR: Right!

CEC: So, let's just start out with you.
Because what we're talking primarily about is your experiences and memories.
That's what's the most helpful things to me are from this interview. *(pause)*
Would you please first describe your work history at the company?
What your roles were, and when.

PR: Yes.

I was hired by Gielen in March 1980
to be *Szenische Studienleiterin* (head scenic study coach.)
It was a new creation, the job was a new creation.
Gielen had started in '77, and by that time,
they had built up a body of work that was so...finely honed, and so specific,
and now it needed to be performed.
That they were starting to see that in the normal repertoire system,
they weren't able to keep the productions up to the tightness that they needed to be...

CEC: May I interrupt you?
Was that because of the fact that with every *Wiederaufnahme* (revival)
it has to be reset with the new performers?

PR: Yes, or...

it would be played just in repertoire.
So that meant you had various piece played on a constant basis,
and so just, you would have them, somebody cancel,
or a member of the ensemble would be in the final rehearsals of another production...

CEC: So you lose the intensity.

PR: You lose the exactness of it,
but also the intentions.

You know, six to eight weeks in rehearsals with the director,
you are informed from the inside about why you are doing something.
And, so just to have someone come, and repeat it by rote, it doesn't reflect,
the meaning doesn't get out.
So Gielen hired, and Gielen decided that they—so he and Klaus Zehelein
—and at that time, Christoph Bitter was Gielen's co-Intendant, so to speak,
and they decided that they needed to create a new position for someone to come in,
with the *Regieassistenten* (directing assistants) under them,
but also, the *Musikstudienleiter* is responsible
for keeping the level of musical renditions up,
and they needed a comparable situation for the scenic side.
Someone to come in and judge on a day-to-day basis if things were becoming too flabby.

And to call new rehearsals, do new rehearsals, so really to be responsible for keeping the original intentions of a production, at top pitch level.

CEC: Ok.

PR: And um, so they offered that to me, because I had done revivals, I had originally started out doing stage direction of opera, and I had done a revival of *Così fan tutte* there, I had been the assistant...and Gielen wanted to do *Così*,

PR: his first or his second season...

I mean '77 was when he started, so I don't know if it was already that long...

(pause, interruption at the door)

PR: And so now they were going to be doing a big revival after three to four years, and switching it to Italian from German, and I got really terrific reviews for it, so they decided that I would be the one to do this.

So that's how I started out, in March of '80.

And the very first thing I had to do was ... by Neuenfels.

It was a big revival that was planned,

and Neuenfels wasn't going to be able to do it himself.

So I just sat in front of the video for two solid weeks, just absorbing it, taking notes, and then with thousands of questions, spent a day with Neuenfels, asking...

what was driving the *Konzept*. So that was my baptism by fire! *(laughing)*.

That was like, ok!

CEC: May I just interrupt you again, to find out a little more of what you were doing before this *Regie* (directing) experience at the Oper Frankfurt?

PR: Sure.

I would just occasionally take on projects, because I had two kids. And...

CEC: And you were in the States, you were in Germany?

PR: Germany. Do you really want this?

CEC: Just a little! The basics.

PR: I came to Germany originally...

after I graduated from Berkeley in '66, I came straight to Germany.

Because I wanted to do *Opernregie*, and I wanted to study with Wieland Wagner.

And there were masterclasses in Bayreuth at that point.

And so I got into those masterclasses to do *Regie*, and that was the summer of '66, and because he had done the revolution, and that really interested me.

In my four years at Berkeley, besides being at every free speech movement,

I also went standing room to every single performance

—well not every performance, but every production—

at the San Francisco opera for four years.

And I just found the level of the productions—don't ask me why, because I had

no background, except some undergrad in theater.
I thought that the level of production was harmless and uninteresting,
that I really wanted to do stage direction, to make more compelling,
and I had read a lot about Wieland Wagner,
And a friend of mine, John Rockwell, who later became a music critic,
he was my TA in my European History course at Berkeley,
had been to Bayreuth and seen it, and described it all to me.
And I thought, “that’s where I want to go to learn... about *Opernregie*.”
So I was there that summer,

PR: And unfortunately he was in and out of the hospital already
with the cancer that killed him very quickly,
so I saw him at some rehearsals,
and at some point he offered for me the following summer to be his *Regieassistent*.
But then he died.

(both reacting, shock)

He was such a loss to the opera world!
His brother was nowhere near... the level of insight, and the motivation that he had.
And anyway, by then I had already enrolled in the Guildhall School of Music and Drama,
where again, I was looking for a place where I could really do *Opernregie*,
and there were no conservatories that did that, at that point,
So when I saw the Guildhall, in London, I thought, okay, well, they’ve got a real drama
department, and a real music department, so I could combine..
the owner, the director, I wrote, and I said, I would like to come study this,
and he answered and said, we don’t do that, and I just kept writing him letters,
and driving him crazy until he said,
“Alright, alright, come, put your course together yourself, just leave me in peace, you can come
and do it.” And I was there for... not very long.
I was in Germany in the fall, and then it was December, and was there for a semester only,
because I then found out about the London Opera Center,
where I then went and did the Stage Management Diploma.
And in Bayreuth I had met my husband, who was a German composer and he had a guest
professorship there in 1968, they had just inaugurated this performance center with a full blown
stage for opera, etc, and the opera department who ran it.
They did all these stage productions, and, all of these seminars in musicology and music history,
etc— they were looking for an assistant, and I got it, and then I got there,
and we were married in no time.
And I applied under my maiden name, and then I got there and they said it ended up being
impossible for a married couple to be in the same department, it was nepotism,
so... anyway, that’s... I was his TA for all of his opera history courses, and they did lots of
productions there and scenes, he would direct the full operas, and I would direct the scenes, so
that was a great experience.
And then we went to Ohio State, he had a guest professorship, they offered him tenure once
getting there, and he turned it down

—and I did my Russian History masters in that time period—
but we came back to Germany for me, so I could do opera,
and so I did various things, it was...

CEC: But primarily direction, at that point.
From then on.

PR: Yes.

CEC: Freelance?

PR: It was freelance, and then, so in '74 in Frankfurt...
they asked me. So I was there, and with Klaus Schultz.
I did the *Programmheft* (program booklet) with Klaus Schultz,
while I was there, and he offered me...he then became *Chefdramaturg* in Munich,

PR: And offered me a job as *Dramaturgin*, that was weird.

But anyway, he... but it was just as our twins were starting school,
so I said, fine, because rehearsals were 10 – 1 and 5-8, in the afternoon, I would be home... but
then realized it would be 12 hours a day, so I turned it down.

CEC: This is really an issue as a woman in this industry,
I understand.

PR: Oh, absolutely.

And so then, yeah, only occasionally then would I do something.

But then so when, this was offered to me, out of the blue,

the boys were stable kids, and my husband said, you've gotta get back in full time.

CEC: Well, and it's best in one place, too!

PR: Yes,... best in one place!

So yeah, desirable.. and the boys were turning 10, they were fine, they were fine.

So we moved to Frankfurt and the only thing was, so I started this job...

Christoph Bitter and Gielen had a parting of the waves.

Bitter was an alcoholic, and it got to the point where he... there were things that he wasn't
doing, casting-wise, or not getting contracts, I don't know,
it was very sad, because they were very close. And so, Bitter was fired, terminated,
then Gielen asked me, cause he really respected my ears,

CEC: ...musically,

PR: ...musically. He respected my ears, we had known
the Gielens and their kids for years, and had on various occasions spent time with them,
anyway, so he asked me to come into the *Direktion* and do all the casting,
and take over the duties of Christoph Bitter.

And he said, you have to be clear on the fact that,

if you do it, because it's more than full time, that you can't also be split and be down on the
stage, directing. It would be like two full-time jobs.

CEC: How long after having this position
was that switch?

PR: Oh, the switch came... theoretically the switch came

six months later, but we had to wait until Renate Ackermann, we had identified who could come into that position, and she couldn't come for a while. So I think it was about a year—I can't remember exactly—but I think it was about a year. And so there was a phase where I did both.

CEC: Ok. With children. *(laughing)*

PR: With children. *(laughing)*

I had always said, if I could direct *La Damnation de Faust*, I could die happy.

CEC: You mean creatively?

PR: *(laughing)* Anyway!

Life would have been worth it if that was all the time I was going to have,

So I then, about a month after I signed the new contract, committing to it,

PR: my husband said, are you **sure** you want to—he really believed in me as a director—do you really want to give yourself up like that?

And I said, “Look. I’ve seen enough really brilliant directors.”

And I was really good, solid, but not genius, really not, and I had seen enough really in action to really know...

And I also knew—because my husband was much older than I was—at some point, I was going to have to support the family, probably.

And I didn't want to be locked into the position of being a *Regieassistent* for 30 years! And there was a guy at the Frankfurt Opera—because the usual pattern is, you go as a *Regieassistent* for five years, then you start branching off and start getting your own, becoming a director yourself. And he had tried that, and had done two productions, and he had to come back to being a *Regieassistent*, because he had a family to feed!

And he was in his late 50s, having to be a *Regieassistent* to young geniuses.

And I just thought, I don't want to be locked into a position like that!

So I felt, and I just felt that those freelancing years where I had only occasionally taken on something, really been doing it... I said, I'm good and middle of the road, but the world does not need another one like me.

And so, a month after I had signed the contract,

a phone call came from the *Intendant* in Augsburg, who I didn't know from Adam, and he offered me *Damnation de Faust*. I thought I was just going to faint.

I said, why are you phoning me up and offering me this?

And he said, he had had a cancellation, *kurzfristig* (short notice)

it was five or six months, and the director had just cancelled on him.

And he had phoned many people to get ideas,

and he had talked to Klaus Schultz, who was head dramaturg in Munich,

and he said, “I know who could do it in her sleep, that's Pamela Rosenberg!”

Because one evening, when we were supposed to be working on the *Cosi Programmheft*, (program booklet). I was supposed to be working, I spent four hours talking with him, telling him about *Damnation de Faust*.

And, so, “I know somebody who could step in and do it!”

And I had to say no to this. Because when it would happen, I would already have been under my new contract. So I had to, with regrets, say no.

I burst into tears and started sobbing. And my husband, he just could not believe it.

And I really do feel that I was much better in what I did...because I really so understood the artistic process, and I understood how they think, and I just said, I'm a great midwife, I can really help being on the other side, helping the productions come to pass.

Organizing an opera house in such a way that really-- that's one of my strengths.

CEC: We all have to make those sorts of choices.

Along the line, I know I told you, I'm a singer, and I'm also a musicologist.

And part of the motivation for that is, I know I'm a good singer, and I've worked,

and that's great, and I know there are a lot of other good singers,

and at some point, I would like a family, and I would like stability,

and I also know that I'm intelligent enough to teach, and to be involved in a background level, at a support level. So I'll take other sorts of work.

PR: Yeah, yeah!

CEC: That's kind of, the direction I'm shifting into, and everybody makes those choices.

PR: (*Nodding.*) And, I mean, now...

Well, I still don't know, unless you've got, you know, a husband or a partner that really helps take care of the kids, I don't know how you do it!

CEC: Yes, I'm ...
still working on that one myself!

(*pause*)

You know, this is...

I know this may feel a little bit of a tangent to you,
that we're talking a little bit about the background,

but I'm finding it really helpful, actually,

And I think giving this a personal angle
helps me situate it well.

(*taking a water break*)

CEC: Maybe, since we're talking about you and your career right now,
before we dig into the productions and whatnot,

can we jump forward, now, actually, and can you tell me,
when did you leave the company? And why.

And the big arcs of your career, from that point to today.

PR: Well, Gielen's era came to an end.

CEC: Yes.

PR: In '87. So we left as a team.

And I was just, I was devastated. I couldn't believe it was over.

Because it had really been...as if I had landed in paradise in those years.
And I could not imagine working in another *Stadttheater* (city theater),
or anywhere else where this kind of ethos that we had, of digging in, and being
grundlic (thorough) is the wrong thing...
We just really, how we went about what we did, was...

CEC: You mean “thorough”?

PR: No, that’s not what I mean.

It’s just, the kind of intensity that we invested in... in the pieces. And...
and then the generosity with which we invented those pieces in *Betrieb* (administration).
It was so much different from... if you went to Munich, or Vienna, where the singers would
meet each other on stage, essentially, and just be thrown in...
these *schleuder*-productions (spin productions)...
and just the artists that we worked with, and the bizarre, wonderful, original, honest minds... I
just the thought of getting into the kind of *Betrieb* where you’re just churning stuff out...was an
anathema to me.

And...and out of the blue, Peter Zadek approached me, he needed a *Betriebsdirektor* for the
Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, and he had talked to someone, who had said,

PR: “Frankfurt’s finishing soon, and she’s exactly who you need,”
and that came to pass, and it was...absolutely the worst time in my life.

(*laughing*)

I mean, I thought as a director, he was brilliant, genius,
but had a serious sadistic streak, the way he treated people,
and he actually brought me in and actually,
someone else was also *Betriebsdirektor* (director of operations) there,
but he was too weak for him, and he said that he was bringing somebody in because he was
always accused by all the other directors who worked at the *Schauspielhaus* (theater)
because he as intendant was also *Regisseur* (stage director),
that they all get *B-Produktionsbedingungen* (B production conditions)
That he gets all the good conditions and all of them have to suffer.
They would just have to get their stuff on stage, somehow.
And so he said he needs a *Betriebsdirektor* that fights for them, against him.
Truthfully! Sincerely! I mean, it was just an incredible year.

(*pause, personal comments from PR*)

PR: I was initially supposed to have a 2-year contract,
and I was just... I was so miserable,
and the Amsterdam opera approached me,
because ... they moved to a new opera house, and the intendant, had in the course of the two
years in the new opera house had a humongous deficit,
and so he had been fired, and they were hiring someone with zero opera experience, zero.
So they wanted to hire me, and be called “Manager of Artistic Affairs”
and really set the whole thing up,
do all the *Disposition* (assignment of resources & logistical organization)

but also the ideas... I mean, he was a babe in the woods.
Which... but he was a really fast learner, too. I mean the first year...
I basically decided the repertoire, did the *Disposition*, did all the casting, and...so I took a lawyer
to get out of the second year of the contract with Hamburg,
which I managed to do, I found a lawyer who had won eight cases against him,
I thought, "Who can help me get out of this nightmare?"

CEC: It speaks volumes
that he had eight cases against him prior!

PR: Yeah.

So, they said basically, Zadek saw the lawyer and basically gave up.
Anyway, then I was in Amsterdam for two years,
And then Klaus Zehelein and I went to Stuttgart, where again, it was a little like...
I felt like it was Russian Roulette, because, the intendant...
he had approached Klaus to come as opera director, he was ... but in one year's time.
And Klaus said, I'm a dramaturg, I don't know how to run an opera company.
I want to bring someone with me.
So originally we were going to go there as Co-(Intendants).
and then they said, only one could do it, so I was *Stellvertretende*, (the deputy.)
He was *Operndirektor* and *Chefdramaturg*,
and I was *Stellvertretende Operndirektorin* (secondary opera director) and *Betriebsdirektorin*
(operational director), who does all the scheduling.
But I initially had said we cannot take that over in just a year. I need much more time to do the
planning. And they said, well, you need to take it over in a year or you don't get it.
So I was for not taking it.
But Klaus at that point was not working, he was writing, and he wanted to take it,
so I said "You have no idea what that means!"
And so, I had to do this big analysis, of the place, because they were doing 40-45 productions a
year. I said there was no way we could do that many.
I moved in the summer of '90, so I did two years in Amsterdam,
and then it was just analyze, analyze, analyze, and then I created what I consider to this day to be
the most quality-producing *Dispositions*-model that there is,
unless you're doing stagione. Which has its pros and cons.

CEC: Can you tell me about it? More about the model?

PR: Yes.

I said, I think we can cope with 20 – 22 pieces a year.

CEC: Premieres, or, no?

PR: No, total.

And five of those would be premieres, and three...
This was not counting the ballet, because I also did the *Disposition* for the ballet.
From the word go, I said I am going to do all the planning, rather than leaving that to the
Chefdisponent (the head of resource assignments),
because I understand what we're aspiring to each time.
And only if you are really informed to what the artistic concept results are can you do

worthwhile planning for them.

So...what I did was, then have... three or four who would receive a certain amount of two *Sitzproben*, three *BOs* and stage rehearsals, etc, the way some people do premieres.

And then a handful of other productions which you'd have on the roll, give them good rehearsals, but not that generous. So what I would do after a premiere, I would do usually about seven performances within a period of a month after the premiere, a month to six weeks, and then I would do clusters of three, so we'd wait three months, then do another cluster...so you'd have to brush up, but not much,

CEC: But they had at least three performances to stay in the mode.

PR: Yes, so they could stay in the mode.

And... so there were maybe five productions where we'd said, okay, we can do this once a month...and not have it suffer too much.

And after the premiere, you'd keep it on that kind of roll.

And, for the second year, instead of doing the clusters. So it was just paying really special attention to how much rehearsal you generally needed for something,

And the other thing I did, because I did the planning three years out, minimum, was that if we needed a guest, for one of the roles,

CEC: a guest singer?

PR: a guest singer.

PR: I would take them under contract for all of those performances.

And if they weren't willing, that meant that we didn't do it with them.

So that meant that you were committing to at least two years of coming back to Stuttgart for these clusters.

I used to have knock-down drag outs with agents.

Because they wanted the glory of the premiere...

But I had built up a really fantastic ensemble in Stuttgart, and so I didn't have that many guests, the ensemble was,

if I do say, one of the things that I'm most proud of in my life.

But also found...enough singers who really committed to the kind of work we did.

And I discovered a lot of singers!

CEC: Can I stop you there, because I've been hearing, actually, some things about this for a while.

I had heard a bit about the ensemble there.

That's always been one of the things that's stood out to me about your time there.

What were your motivations for bringing on so many younger singers?

Was it this sort of planning, in many ways, the fact that you could bring them on for a season, because they were younger and green and maybe less booked?

PR: No, I believe in ensemble work!
I absolutely believe in ensemble work.

I think that in Frankfurt, there were singers that had done so many productions together! They had developed antennas, and just the cumulative mutual experience that they have, just gives them an extra layer onstage.
So I completely believe in ensemble work.
But for that, you have to find great singers! And there are a lot of them out there.
And you just have to.
I always claimed I could write a guide to orchestras and every provincial opera house in Germany, because I went everywhere looking for singers!
I used to take, just hints that people would give me, I would go after them.
For instance, we did a *Boris Gudinov* in Amersterdam, a young guy was singing Boris, and he was the president of the British Youth opera, I think it was called, and they used to do two productions a year in very strange venues, with young British singers. So in rehearsal one day, he said, “They’re doing a Magic Flute just now, in some church or some place, and you need to go hear Katrina...”—some girl. So I did!
So as soon as I got to Stuttgart, I took her into the ensemble.
She was just glorious!

(personal conversation)

PR: So I was scrambling around, looking, looking.
There was a great *Studienleiter* in Munich, what was his name?
PR: And he used to go to Scandanavia for about three months a year to work with young singers in Stockholm.
So, he was one of my sources...
and I would say, have you heard any new young singers up there recently,
and he would say “uh-huh!”
There’s this girl, she’s just finished at the conservatory, she’s just done one thing,
so I flew her down, just on suspicion, and then took her.

CEC: like collecting...

PR: Yeah.
so that’s the way to do it. So then,

CEC: But it wasn’t really about the money,
and it wasn’t...

PR: No... well, it was about the money in as far as we didn’t have much money in Stuttgart, because once we had signed our contracts, we came out of the woodwork, we learned that this had been in for over nine million!
And that was why he had said, take it now or you don’t get it, because he knew that was going to be coming out of the woodwork.
And he was hoping, because that time he had been *Intendant* and *Operndirektor*, and so he gave up the *Operndirektor* thing, because he said, “Oh, I’ve got too much to do with being *Intendant*.”

But he knew he was going to be in the line of fire.
And I think he thought, that if he got really credible people,
then maybe his skin was still going to be saved, or something.
I don't know, it was... but.. what turned out was, we had... it was still kind of...
you couldn't take money from the travelling budget and put it into sets, for example,
it was... for instance the material budget,
for the three-four years it had been *überzogen* (overspent) by several times.

CEC: Oh, goodness.

PR: And the way he used to cast!
He would just call up agencies and say, "Send me stars."
So just from January until June of 1990,
he had overspent the "singers" budget by a million Deutschmarks, etc.
So they actually wanted to install an office from the *Rechnungshof*,
they wanted to create an office in the opera. But we didn't create the budget,
and we refused to have someone from the *Rechnungshof* in here.
If we overstepped the budget, then maybe the next year.
But you know, we just, it was... it was very, very tight, compared to what they had had.
They had had star singers for years.
So, but that's not the reason. But it was really the belief in the ensemble.

CEC: Ok,
so it was really more of a coincidence.
I had heard it attributed to that, so I was curious.
I do want to keep us moving forward, as it's a little after three now.

(discussion about timing of next interviews)

CEC: So, maybe let's just a little bit more
about your career since then,
just and then...

PR: We had the Stuttgart time,
and I think one of my greatest pleasures was ...a critic from the *Süddeutsche*,
he went in, surreptitiously to four or five just normal repertoire performances of ours
and wrote reviews saying, "these repertoire performances are like premieres!"
So I thought... it's working!

CEC: So do you think that the work you were doing there,
and it sounds like it was also an incredibly powerful period for you,
you said that the Oper Frankfurt period was kind of gold, in a way.
But it sounds like this was also very special.

PR: Sure it was!

CEC: Do you relate those two experiences at all
in your mind?

PR: Sure, of course!

CEC: In what ways?

What stands out in your mind?

PR: Well, just the whole approach to how to work, and Klaus, you know Frankfurt was as much Klaus's making as Gielen's.

CEC: Yes, I've gathered!
Can you pinpoint concrete aspects?

PR: Well, we would spend, first of all, although we worked together most of the time, was that we came to mutual agreements about the repertoire, and teams, and if we couldn't agree—because we were very different!—then he would choose one, and I would choose the next, but we had very long, groping discussions about pieces. What kinds of readings, what kinds of associations, until we circled in, okay, who would be interesting to deal with, with that, etc. So I think that it was, every *Intendant* thinks that he thinks about content a lot! But I think that we really, really did.

CEC: Do you get a sense that it's different than ways that other people seem to work?

PR: Well, to many at that time... at this time, there are many that I admire who do something like this a lot! I think, "he's carrying the torch, etc." But yes! I mean, we would start, way, way out, ahead of time.

CEC: like how long?

PR: oh, at least three years. And with the production team, or with the director, start... if it wasn't clear who the designer should be. **PR:** Really, those kinds of discussions with the score, but the kind of *Konzeptionsgespräch*... took place over a period of time.

CEC: So not just the official *Konzeptionsgespräch*, but..

PR: No!
No, I mean, the team, getting together, we'd go off someplace. To Austria for four days. To a Bauernhof someplace, and dig in. And one of the innovations, or differences to many other places where I've been, or not been, but observed, is that the conductor was...(clap!) part of it! From the beginning.

CEC: Ok.

PR: From the delving in to the score, so it really wasn't just the dramaturg doing musical analysis. or thinking about... certain psychological situations. It was also... we expected the conductor to be a part of these delving-in sessions that we had, and... also what is apparently unusual, I can't imagine that it is, but it is!

Is that the first two days of rehearsals,
where we would go through the gamut with singers,
the director was always there, as well.
So the conductor would spend the first two days musically going through things with singers, at
the piano, and the director was always there.
So you had all these discussions in *Vorfeld* (in advance).
It wasn't that the conductor never showed up,
maybe to the *Konzeptionsgespräch*, if you're lucky,
and then you didn't see him again until very late in the rehearsal process,
and he starts having heart attacks because of tempi, or interpretation, etc.
So all that went very much hand in hand. It was expected, and it was thorough.
And when I got to San Francisco Opera,
I did the same thing, and that was shocking to people.

CEC: Let's use this chance
to jump to San Francisco.
Because I'm curious about your years there
and how you felt this translated to another continent,
and to another house and manner of doing opera.

PR: Well, when the first approached me,
a headhunter approached me, and I just laughed on the phone.
I said...

CEC: You were still in Stuttgart at the time, right?

PR: Right.

But I had decided that I was not going to stay.
I submitted my... ten years is always enough.
And I just thought... we're going to start repeating ourselves.
And I had been offered the Deutsche Oper, which I turned down,
and then they called from San Francisco.

PR: And I just said, "I know how conservative they are."
How reactionary, almost. And I said, "I don't think they understand what I do."
And so I... I'm not right for there.

And I don't want to be that far away from my kids and my grandkids.
And... no. But she kept coming after me, coming after me, coming after me.
And I said... ok. I'm going to be in California to see my mother,
because my father had died the year before.

She was very depressed, and I thought I would be there for a while.

And I said... okay, you can come talk to me where I am.

And after about a three hour conversation, she said,
"You're what they need. They understand that they need to go to the 21st century."

Well, so then, I did go to San Francisco and then...

I talked about my doubts! I said, "you need to see what I do."

So the chairman, who was a venture capitalist in his seventies, flew over to Stuttgart.
and went to several performances.

CEC: Who was that?

PR: Pitch Johnson.

And he then flew back, and talked to the search committee of twenty people on the board, or whoever it was, and just said, this is what we need.

We need to be brought up to where the rest of the world is, etc.

So I then said, ok, if you're willing to go for, to take this leap, so am I!

But I thought, it's going to be a huge piece of work to get the audience moving to a different direction. I mean, I remember standing through *Meistersinger* twice in 1964, and I was 1994 in San Francisco from Stuttgart to audition the Adler fellows, and I went to *Meistersinger*, and the curtain opened, and it was the same production after thirty years! And that's the difference between the States and here.

Here, nobody expects to see something set in stone.

They don't think anything is a definitive production, a definitive interpretation.

And they... I mean, within an hour's drive from Stuttgart, there are seven opera houses!

And after Wieland Wagner's Wagnerian reading,

then you had Chéreau's George Bernard Shaw, and they know that they are seeing a reading of something.

CEC: Can I pause you? Who's they?

PR: The audiences and critics, both.

So they were... maybe more resistant to certain things than to others.

But they see enough variety to know that there are various approaches.

And...whereas in the States the shelf-life of a production is so long...

Because here, after five years, you've played *Zauberflöte* so many times that you do a new production. They're not used to seeing the same thing for thirty years or forty years.

And there they are.

CEC: Do you think there's a cultural component to that,
between the two countries?

That's encouraging people (in Europe) to be more open-minded, or more theatrical?
To expect readings here, and not in the States?

PR: Well, I mean, I just think that...

you have much more opportunity here.

PR: Before the wall came down, I remember there were all these opera houses in West Germany. So you saw much more.

In every city, every little town, had a theater, or an opera company.

So a kind of civic discourse does take place, about what you've communally seen, etc.

In the states you can drive a thousand kilometers, and never have..
a live forum for something.

So I think that's a very important consideration, to understand why,
and also in Germany, it's been in... I think in '94 we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the orchestra! So once the principalities no longer were there,
it still was part of the citizen's rights!

CEC: It's an assumption of civic life.

PR: Yeah!

Is that cultural institutions are there for the citizens.

And there isn't that basic assumption in the States,
and that's why I think it's much more...or it's labeled an elitist thing.
But that's also partially because of the cost.
I mean, I remember in... there was a big recession in '93 in Germany,
and so, we had this board meeting where one person on the board said,
well, let's raise the prices.

CEC: Stuttgart, you're talking about.
(laughing)

PR: And everybody on the board said, "No!"
You know it's... in a recession, we want them to be able to come
for the price of going to a movie.
It's a political statement that it should be available to a broad...
broad swathe of the population.

CEC: And that's really in the *Geist* of the thing.

PR: And in the States, because it's...
you know, a 60 million budget, and I had 1% that was subsidized.
So I had 125 tickets that were 25 dollars, and after that, it went up to 45,
and... out of 3200 seats, I had 300 that were under 45. And then these huge leaps.
And so, what comes first with the...running a company,
because you're economically just so vulnerable to the whims in society.
If you have 10% less intake at the box office, then you're just,
it completely wipes out the bottom line for that production.
So you're not willing to risk it.
And so then, if your audience has only been served really "safe" stuff
for the last thirty or forty years, where do you expect them then to have the...
to be open to new things? Because they've never had it.
But I found that in San Francisco, that I needed to start with a real statement,
so I said this work is so important, it will be kind of a clarion call.
And I remember one man on the board coming up to me, he was in his 70s, and he was just
foaming at the mouth, and he said, "Are you out of your gourd?"
A five hour opera written in the twentieth century, and he had the grace to come up to me at the
end of the run and say, he found the work life changing.

CEC: That's a nice pat on the back!

PR: And it became this cult thing in San Francisco.
It sold more that season than any of the war horses, except for *Butterfly*.
So, then I had several people come up to me and say that...
that had made them trust me, and made them open to other things.
But it also changed... it was also a wonderful...
within the company, that everybody got so into putting on this...
it was such a difficult work! It was huge, so massive, for every department involved!
And then it was transcendent. To do that kind of work.
They got that. It was very different than saying, "Let's put on a show!"

CEC: That it was a real sort of new spirit, of direction.
You know, that actually makes me think.
Were you privy to the sort of audience change that happened in Frankfurt?

PR: Oh, yeah!!

CEC: And I wonder if you see parallels there.

PR: *(pause)* Well, in Frankfurt we had this dip!
Big dip, I remember, because... also William Forsythe.
Which Gielen said... ok, he's got to take over.
I mean, we were down to, at one point... maybe 200 people.
(pause) Billy (William Forsythe) had been brought in to do one or two evenings...
I think roughly '82, there were like 200 there or something.
It was a hugely courageous thing...

CEC: How did it turn around?

PR: People just started getting it. Younger people.

CEC: I was going to say—it was a different audience?

PR: Well, it was,
a different audience, partly. Because it had been... very standard stuff.
So it was a real shift, and the people that hadn't gone to ballet before started coming.
And then... you could see in our audience the change, definitely.
What was... in Stuttgart, they were so terrified...
"Die Frankfurter kommen!" (The people from Frankfurt are coming!) That...

CEC: Wait, why?

PR: Well, because, except for the Philip Glass Trilogy,
It was very, very, very conservative in Stuttgart. Just star singers all the time.
They really wanted to be like Munich, big star names.
So they thought, "We're going to have unknown singers,"
and, but the think in Stuttgart that was so fascinating is,
they've got a really **very** interesting Burgertum. Really open,
they say show me, but I'll look at it. Intellectually very active.
With Stuttgart, I was really dreading it. I thought, "oh god, this is going to be..."

PR: And I ended up being very taken by the spirit of the city,
and the intellectual curiosity.
And we lifted it from 87%, before our first season, and we lifted it to 94%.
And we lost, let's say, 6000, but we got 15,000. So there was a shifting.
And Frankfurt was not **that** dramatic. Frankfurt, there were a few years where they were really...

CEC: I don't know the history of the Burgertum in that city, in Stuttgart,
but I know in Frankfurt for centuries long,
there was a very deeply ingrained conservative attitude.
And it doesn't surprise me that it took a while.

PR: Yeah, well, it's a banker's city.
Right. Not so bad, considering that.

CEC: Exactly.
And so, jumping back to San Francisco,
the shift there...

PR: The shift there, felt similar in certain respects
I mean, my timing was as awful as it could have been.
I became Intendant & General Director in August 2001,
and then the dot-com bust had started.
Anyway the short of it is, the deepest contraction in California history was right then.
It was the dot-com bust, then 9-11,
the stock markets had had a continuous downward spiral,
and so **all** of my revenue streams were hit simultaneously.
And I remember, between September 11th and the end of January, which is when the fall season
there ends, we had taken in three million less at the box office than expected.

CEC: wow.

PR: People hibernated, they stayed home.
I mean, the one thing that was lucky,
if I can label it that way, was that, they couldn't say it was my fault.
Because it was my first season, which had been planned by my predecessor.
Every single thing on the stage...everything had been planned by him completely.
And so... they couldn't say that my radical productions had chased people out of the theater. But
it wasn't his fault, either. It was just the bottom falling out of the economy.
Besides, the sponsoring money gone, ticket sales... we didn't have...
and that's the one thing that shocked me when I got to San Francisco,
I accused the board leadership of not being up front with me.
The endowment was **mini**, and the nineties had been the golden years in California,
and the rule of thumb for performing arts organizations
is that you should have three times your annual budget as your endowment,
and they had half their annual budget as their endowment.

CEC: Would you say that's just in the States,
or universally.

PR: No, just in the States.

CEC: Because of the different subsidy levels.

PR: There the pattern should be: 45% ticket sales, 45% donations 10% endowment.
That's the golden rule.
But... and the point of an endowment cushion is that, in hard times,
you've got this cushion. But they also had...
It's been like karma, everywhere I've gone, there's been a deficit!
They also hadn't told me that there had been a continuous deficit in the San Francisco opera for
the prior six years!
In the year '99, no, 2000, they had had a two million dollar deficit!

So I had said to the chairman at some point,
“You know, I’m coping with this huge situation.
If you knew, shame on you for not telling me.”
Because it was presented as this big, wonderful, financial plum.
“So, shame on you... and where was the board?”
Anyway, so it was horrible!
Because by the Spring of 2002, I realized this is a deep, deep situation,
it’s not, I mean 9-11, it ended up being the deepest contraction in forty years!
And so, my first premiere that fall was going to be Messaien,
and there was no way I could undo the planning for that first season.
And anyway, so in January I presented a plan to the board,
to take my own budget down by 30%, and I did it for two years,
but I said I said I will only... because I felt that I had been brought in under false pretenses. And
I said that I am willing to stay, and be a good girl scout,
and fight this incredible fight. But only if we all agree here on the board
that we are not going to deal with the deficit by lowering the artistic challenge.
It’s not going to be saving money that way.
If you don’t agree that the way we will get out of this is by doing top quality,
that’s also challenging, in certain ways, then I’m the wrong person.
And then I said that the first thing I needed was for them to go out into the community to ask for
more money. We need 100% percent participation by the board.
Because that’s the first thing, what’s the board doing.
So it was horrible, I used to vomit at night, because I had to let go 25% of my staff.
And I would vomit at night because the next day I was going to have a talk with
somebody who was wonderful, excellent at their job... it was just incredible.
And I spent, I don’t know... and the whole social part of being a General Director in the States is
just... horrible.

CEC: How so?

PR: Well, it was just constant, constant, constant socializing.
I had probably 20 different long dresses.

CEC: Oh you mean the kind of networking,

PR: The social... it’s nonstop.
and the fundraising, so I did fundraising, I would go to breakfast with somebody, then lunch
with somebody, then a cocktail party—it was nonstop. And then going to make calls to people,
and I had a staff of sixteen, who only did money raising strategy.
but it’s you as general director who does the big ones, cause you have to have enough for your
project. So I spent 14 hours a day just doing that.

PR: And I remember, that year, that raised 36 million that way.
And then you get to July 31, and you start it all over again.
And I... so the challenge that I had anticipated, of turning the audience around,
ended up not being such a challenge, in a way, it was the finances. It’s just incredible!
And then dealing with the unions...
They’re much more militant than here, but one thing I did was with the orchestra,

I sat all the unions down at the table, and I spread out our books,
I said, “it’s not coquetry on my part.” I want you to take the books and look at them,
So, the chorus refused, to look at them.

CEC: Is that AGMA?

PR: Yes. That guy is really a menace.

But the orchestra took them, and studied the books, and then came back, and saw that our situation was genuine... because I wanted to do something called “interspaced bargaining,” and they agreed to do it, after they’d looked at the books.

And the point of interspaced bargaining is that you identify your common interest.

You have a mediator there for the first few days, who does stupid games with you, all sorts of things, it was almost bizarre, but it worked!

So there were 15 members of the orchestra participating,
and 15 members of the management and the board,
and so, the point of it is, that you really take reversed roles,
we would play the part of the orchestra.

Anyway, he wants you to know, you’re in this boat, so it’s your interest, too.

to figure out what’s the best for all together in this company.

and it really worked! And the end of our two sessions, it was two days and two days,
they told me to go to the board and write down the number I needed to get out of them.

...and I was afraid they’d lynch me or something.

So I went to the board and wrote this number... but there was this big intake of breath, but we started talking, and after that, we started negotiations. And negotiations weren’t easy, but they ended up doing the biggest giveback in US orchestra history.

CEC: Can I use this as a spring point
to transition back to Europe?

PR: Yes...

I just wanted to say that my contract ended there in 2006.

and there was a clause in it that in 2004,

we had to mutually decide whether or not we wanted to continue,

And in 2004 that summer, they said, they wanted to extend to 2009,

and I spent a week at the lake, some friends had a house, and I had two days by myself, and I
though, life is too short.

CEC: For the galas and the fundraising,
and the...mediation.

PR: Yeah... the mediation and being responsible...

the fact that I got art on the stage was a miracle.

There were two solid years where I just did not sleep.

CEC: And at the end of the day,
you have to make a human decision.

PR: Yes... you know, the level

and it’s always been stressful, in an opera company,

but the enjoyment you get balances it out the pulling out your hair.

But this I just decided that it does not balance out.

CEC: Right. Well then, by contrast, then, feels like a very natural pivot point, actually, you mentioned that the unions are much more difficult to compromise with and to negotiate with in the United States than they are here.

What sort of bargaining agreements have you experienced here?
What sort of...experiences have you dealt with here, that are similar?
How would you compare and contrast?

PR: Well, first of all, here there is one orchestra contract for all of Germany. And that's negotiated once every ten years. So it's not nearly as involved. There, the contract is renegotiated once every three years. So here there's a distance, and then you have *Hausvereinbarung*, there are certain differences (for the individual house.) So there are those sorts of differences. Stuttgart, for instance, was a delight, in that they had done, several years before we got there, they had done *Hausvereinbarung* with the chorus. Because that was one of the things in Frankfurt, and in many houses, you have all these *Zulage* (additions). If you get up on the table and dance, is that still your chorus work? You have all these arguments about whether you're going to agree to that sort of *Zulage*. So in Stuttgart, they had for every chorus member, across the board a thousand marks.

CEC: To be dismissed from that?

PR: And what it meant also, was, because you were guaranteed that pay, so they attracted that way, also! That's why Stuttgart had the best opera chorus in Germany. Because the singers who auditioned for it were really, actually of a higher caliber, in a way, because they got better pay. Whereas that other chorus, you might, sometimes, get a little extra role, or a *Zulage*, but it wasn't guaranteed, so with this you just...

CEC: You're paying it, and then you don't nickel and dime for every time...

PR: Yes. Of course, sometimes there are solo roles, and of course you get paid for those, so... it used to be that sometimes we'd have difficult negotiations with... the chorus... it wasn't that one didn't have some...

CEC: But much fewer.

PR: But much fewer. *(pause)*
Less. *(laughing)*

CEC: Less. *(laughing)*
you understand!

PR: *(nodding)*. Less interaction. And also because, the time frames... go much longer.

And there, because everything is paid in increments of an hour.
theoretically. And here you get a monthly salary.
So I mean, that's something you need to write on...or tell someone.
Is the difference between...
it costs almost twice as much in the states to do opera, as it does here.
I mean, in 2002 I did a parsing of the Met and Munich,
when I was trying to make clear to the board how skewed I found so much of...

CEC: In Munich?

PR: No, in San Francisco.

I mean, the unions there.. the stage hands, for example, their contract ended after 5pm.
But the difference is that... at that time, Munich had a budget of 75 million dollars.
and the Met had 205 million dollars.
And for the 75 million dollars, Munich had 40 productions, and including ballet
...and they had a young artists program.
the Met for 205 million dollars didn't have 40 productions, they had 27, they had 190
performances, and the reason—one of the reasons—is in my analysis at that time of why this is,
is if you're doing... anytime I'd scheduled an opera that was a little bit longer than usual, it
meant that you paid...

CEC: You mean, the performance?

PR: I mean, a Wagner opera as opposed to *Boheme*,
the you need more learning rehearsals for it. more staging rehearsals, etc. etc.
And since rehearsals are theoretically in the contracts paid in increments of hours,
Then you are automatically paid more for the longer operas.
Whereas if you are doing it here, you embed it in your *Disposition*.
So the musical rehearsals, even just the music learning rehearsals in the chorus room
are embedded in their normal schedule.
You have them 10 – 1, and then you have them again in the evening, you have them 5.5 days a
week, with that schedule. And you just give them a lovely salary.
So that's one of the reasons... an evening in San Francisco... it's just insane.
And I just kept saying, there's going to be a train wreck!
Because you can't keep that level of fundraising, and then especially you have the unions getting
increases every three years.
There's no way you can keep that going.

CEC: I'm in shock right now!
I'm so glad that you said this.

I've been here two years, and somehow that detail has never come to my attention.
I haven't sung in a chorus in this country, and I sang in the States.
And I had no idea, and somehow I totally overlooked this detail,
that the chorus is paid a salary, essentially, rather than a wage.
And that makes a huge difference!

PR: It makes a huge difference! And also with building sets.
What it costs to build a set in the States you cannot believe! You cannot believe.
I mean you would be able to build four sets here for what it costs in the States.

PR: And... so I had the situation where Klaus and I were going to do a co-production, we were going to do Busoni, *Doktor Faust*, first in San Francisco, then take it to Stuttgart, and at some point I realized, this makes no financial sense!
For him to do the coproduction with me.
Because the synergy of saving something... is not a given at all.
Because what it cost us to build the thing there is four times what it is in Stuttgart or in Munich!
And so I ended up coming up with this idea of..."Klaus, you all do the costumes," and we do the set. So he didn't have to see our figures.

CEC: I have just a couple more questions, and I want to keep an eye on the time, because I know you have to go at four.
The last question that I have about the San Francisco time, and then I think I'm pretty much ready to wrap up the talking about your career steps.

PR: And then we can talk more about the *Alcina*.

CEC: I'm wondering...
in addition to the kind of budgetary things we've discussed in San Francisco and the fact that you kept this commitment to the integrity of the artistic work.

PR: Sure.

CEC: Can you think of any particular elements that you brought to San Francisco in terms of how the productions were made, that were out of your German background here.

PR: *Bauprobe*. (the set test build.)

They had never had *Bauprobe*. And I was insistent.

And I said that the advantages, it's *Goldwert* (invaluable)

to have a conductor come into the *Bauprobe*

and identify something that he hasn't realized, although he's seen the model, just acoustically, I mean, you could walk into huge acoustical disasters.

And the *Bauprobe*... there are just so many ways in which the *Bauprobe* is...

for proportions onstage, etc. etc. They ended up really getting it,

and what we were able to do then was to use it on the rehearsal stage,

Because there, it's more stagione, so it's possible to move it to the rehearsal stage and just leave it, for the time, so, it wasn't such a *Verschwendung* (waste) as when I first talked about it!

At first they said, "we're going to what? We're going to spend money doing what??"

CEC: Oh, that's great. And in terms of dramaturgy...

PR: Everybody kept saying, "what's a dramaturg?"

CEC: No, really?

PR: Um... yeah... I brought a *Chefdramaturg* (head dramaturg.)
Some people got it, some people didn't.

CEC: And by people, you mean the board?

PR: Yeah, the board.

So I tried to explain to them what a *Produktionsdramaturg* is.

it's not just doing the literary background and the historical background,

...that's not the main use... also analyzing the score, and what kind of metaphors are...

So, *Alcina*.... *Alcina* was in Stuttgart a cult.

That production, we couldn't put it on enough.

Every time we put it on, it sold out immediately.

And we were invited to a festival with it.

And Brian McMaster's said, he's never heard audiences in Edinburgh react like that they televised it... and it didn't even occur to me that it was controversial.

And it split San Francisco down the middle.

And I had people come up to me with tears in their eyes, saying they never in their lives had been affected by something so much, *punkt*, period, never. In the theater or the opera.

And others coming up to me, just barely able to contain themselves.

And John Copley, an English director, had done all of the Handels for the last twenty years there, and they were all Rococo, and always very... coy.

So this faux-humor kind of thing. That was the Handel that San Francisco had had for twenty years straight. And so, Jossi's... anyway...

the audience was really split, fifty-fifty.

And I was... I remember, I'll never forget. I had gotten an email from somebody saying...

Well, there was a website in San Francisco for classical music. They had gotten a thousand hits in one day! They said that Mozart doesn't get that many around the world!

And then I got an email from somebody I didn't know, and it said,

they had given a dinner party the night before, and there were eight people, "Four of us thought we had gone to heaven and died, with *Alcina*, it was so fabulous. And the other four loathed it to such an extent, that...and we discussed it for three hours straight."

And then I thought "yes!"

(both laughing, excited)

PR: It's fine that half of them were against it!

And I just thought...when have you been at a dinner party

where you have exclusively discussed a production for three hours, you know?

And I thought, that's just fine with me.

CEC: Now you can die.

Even though you didn't get to direct Faust.

(both laughing)

PR: Yeah! So, that's what it's about.

CEC: Right.

PR: So I think, that's what the audience was like, in San Francisco.

A lot of them completely got it.

CEC: The blogosphere was probably completely insane.

PR: Yeah!

So the thing about the States is that the marketing department tries to sit in on decisions about repertoire, etc.

PR: I would make my plans for the repertoire, and the marketing people would come in, and what they do is,

they have tables on how often something has been performed in the States, and that's how they do their box office projections! It's absolutely stupid.

So anyway, so how do you do that for Messaien, or how do you do that for...

so they were terrified when I was going to do the *Le Grand Macabre* by Ligeti.

"You can't do that! We're only going to have 60% sales!"

Because they do your ticket prognosis. Which is part of your official budget that you show your board. I said, "Look. This piece was premiered thirty-five years ago..

and in the meantime, it has been shown at thirty-seven companies, and has had fifteen different productions." It's entered the canon. It's not for nothing.

Most new pieces, if they get done two different places and one production, you're lucky!

I said, "Believe me! This is one of the great comedies in the opera repertoire!"

And we're going to do it, I am overriding you. We're gonna do it, and I predict we'll have 85 percent." And they just looked at me like, "huh." (disbelief.)

you know, 3200 seat house. And then we had 88 percent or 89 percent.

So much for your tables! What do they tell us?

CEC: Well...and the tables, they're also only about the work itself, they're not taking into consideration the type of production, or the director, or the performers, or any other factor. That's influencing things. And that's not happening here.

PR: No.

And I consider subsidy...the two justifications of subsidy are so you can take artistic risks and further develop the art form, and expose your public to the huge repertoire that there is, from Baroque to Contemporary. But also to keep the seats at an affordable level.

CEC: Yup. So people can actually participate, and have it be a part of life.

PR: In the States, it just is, it's the lack of subsidy and you have to make up for it with seat prices. Which already makes it a very elite art form.

CEC: I'm actually delighted about where this has gone today.

PR: We haven't gotten to Frankfurt yet.

CEC: No, and it's not at all what I expected, but I'm delighted, because it's making my wheels turn. It's bringing a lot to the table, that, and

I'll keep us on track for Frankfurt for the next time.
If I can just plant a couple of seeds in your mind for the next interview,
and I can remind you of them before we actually meet again, if that's helpful to you.

PR: Yeah, yeah!

CEC: Because I know you have a lot to do.
What I would love to talk about next time,
I would love to actually dig into
your experiences work on certain productions in those years.
You told me a lot of generalities today about working with people.
And a lot of comparisons between, I guess Frankfurt and Stuttgart,
and Germany and the States, which is immensely helpful.
Now I want to get into the concrete details of
working on the *Ring* cycle,
and particularly working on the Neuenfels *Aida*,
I would love to talk about those productions...

(personal conversation)

In addition to those productions,
I would love to know from your perspective, any pieces that you...

PR: *The Trojans.*

CEC: Okay, thank you.
I would love it if you would choose for yourself,
other than the pieces that I brought up, two.
One that you feel... maybe *Trojans*.. is particular,
that you wouldn't leave out,
that was so important that stands out to you.
And then one that you would pick as more typical,
representative of what was happening in that period.
So you can think about what those are.

(End of Interview 1)

Pamela Rosenberg Interview #2

July 2, 2012

CEC: I'm hoping can dive in this time, well, last time we had said, I would love it if you would talk about a couple of pieces, and I'll go through a series of questions with you about them, of your choosing and then I'll ask about a couple of my choosing, and we can run the gamut of questions with both of those productions.

PR: Ok.

CEC: And we'll see how far we get today. Hopefully pretty far. You had mentioned before, *The Trojans*, last time. As a very important / unusual piece that sticks out in your mind. That you wanted to talk about. So, maybe we'll start there?

PR: Mm-hm.

CEC: Ok, good. Um, so first I want to talk about the collaborative process for that piece. Who can you recount for me that was involved in the production? Just first off. Just factually, please identify anybody that you still recall working on the production by name.

PR: Well, Ruth Berghaus. And then Hans-Dieter Schal, who was the designer. And Nina Ritter did the costumes. And Klaus Zehelein did the dramaturgy. Gielen was the conductor. Yeah, that was it.

CEC: Ok, the singers I can look up. So, no problem. And can you explain your particular role within this.

PR: I didn't have a particular role within the *Trojans*.

CEC: Were you involved in the piece at all in rehearsals?

PR: No.

CEC: You were purely on the administrative side at this point.

PR: I was involved in casting.

CEC: You were involved in casting.

PR: But not, in the production process of that one.

CEC: It's a tricky thing, of course
there are some administrative decisions that **are** creative in nature,
and casting, in a way, is one of those things.

PR: Yes!

CEC: Do you remember any of your concerns
during the casting process? Any of the things that...

PR: Well, we had the situation,

PR: the lucky situation of having Bud Cochran in the ensemble.

Because the role of Énée is...equal to Tristan. In its difficulty.

And it goes on, he's in both Rome and Carthage. So it's an enormous role, and the tessitura is high, and... there are some roles where I think, if you don't have someone who can sing it, just don't do that opera.

CEC: Understood.

PR: And for me that's one of those roles.

Both Cassandra and Didon, are... you can always find excellent Cassandras and Didons.

But an Énée—they're very few and far between. That was the major problem.

And then we had the wonderful ensemble. Many of the roles...

it wasn't rocket science on my part.

CEC: Ok.

(both laughing)

CEC: Did you actually have Bud Cochran in mind
when you all programmed the piece for the season?

PR: Yeah, we wanted to do Trojans,

and knowing that Bud was in the ensemble meant that we could contemplate doing it.

It wasn't that we were looking for something for him.

CEC: But when you were
brainstorming the season, it was quickly in your mind,
oh, we have somebody for this role,
so we can program it, without question.

PR: Yeah. Right!

CEC: Ok, cool. We'll move forward.

Did the work of any particular member of the creative or administrative teams
stand out as unusual to you on this piece?

PR: Well, what was very unusual about this
was that Hans Dieter Schaal had never done a set.

CEC: Oh, ok!

PR: In his life.

And I forgot to mention Max von Vequel,

who was our technical director, because it was very much a collaborative effort.

Since Schaal was a novice as far as stage work went. Schaal happened to be in the office during early internal talks about the piece. He was a conceptual architect. And the idea was Klaus Zehelein's, to approach him. But he was obviously going to need real guidance through it. It was very fraught. One of the things we had contemplated doing was doing *Dido and Aeneas* coupled with the *Trojans*, and as it turned out, Schal created a monster.

CEC: how do you mean that?

PR: I mean it was, we had to close the theater a day and a half to build it up.

CEC: Ok.

PR: And what was I think a bit startling for us because we had scheduled the whole season. This was obviously two to three years ahead of the season, we had scheduled the whole season, and you'd expect your Technical Director, then, to be sure that something's being created that enables you to keep your scheduling going as planned, but it was as if, Max von Vequel, he identified so much with this grandiose plan, that he did nothing to make it more practical.

CEC: At all.

(family interruption PR)

PR: So we actually had, it ended up being a big crisis because we had the largest turntable in Europe, and so the technical possibilities were enticing. And they were then used to the hilt. Nevertheless, in the course of the evening, you started off with Troy, in the course of the evening, you had this very huge, involved construct, becoming Carthage, and he used every single inch of this enormous revolve, and then there was a smaller revolve within that. So it really meant that we, to do things like lighting rehearsals, all of the scheduling of the countdown rehearsals etc. was shot to hell.

CEC: Ok.

PR: And I can't remember now, the specifics, but we actually then had to —we'd never done it— close the theater where performances had been planned for something else.

CEC: I wanted to ask that,

PR: and that had never happened before. It was...

CEC: As I'm familiar with the way things are running at Frankfurt now, of course, you know, you've got two performances, then one performance, then something else, and they're rotating, it's repertoire, so that's the way it is.

PR: And we did repertoire constantly there. And...

CEC: So could you break it down at all?
In order to enable new productions?
Or just basically, once it was constructed...

PR: Well, the way you do it is,
of course, we did have certain amounts of closed evenings for rehearsals,
lighting rehearsals, but this was just so immense and so huge that in order to do
lighting rehearsals that make sense, you have to have your original stage set up.
So it ended up...the amount of rehearsals was scheduled,
you weren't able to actually do them in that order. So, it was a huge political do-do.

CEC: Was that...? I was just going to say...
Can you tell me more about what happened? So...

PR: I can't... it's so long ago.

CEC: Ok.

PR: I mean, it's so long ago, I just remember it was.
Sort of the biggest conundrum that we'd been faced with.

CEC: I imagine major losses, too.

PR: That too... because you're having to cancel...
and then not have that ticket income,
and if there were any guests involved, you still had to pay them. Etc. So yeah.

CEC: Not the ensemble singers?
Ah, well, they're salaried, so...

PR: No.

CEC: Can you describe some of the main relationships
between the members of the creative team.
So you started to talk about this kind of unusual pairing
that you were going into before...
maybe you could tell me more about how they interacted.

PR: Well...

CEC: From what you saw.

PR: Ahem... I went to several of the meetings.
And I mean, it starts off with an analysis of the score.
Gielen and Zehelein analyzing together, and figuring out that some parts of the music
that are considered to be trivial. And the interesting discussions, sometimes were about getting,
digging in there, and figuring out why, in fact, it ends up not being trivial.
How to use it dramaturgically.
And so those kinds of musical analysis, and then with Berghaus being involved, the...
in Carthage there was this scene that she did, which is kind of this,
what we would call tingle-tangle music, and um, you listen to it, just by itself, as the music, it's
kind of... the symbols being cute.
Ding-ding-ding-ding-ding...kind of almost... not gypsy music.

So she had these bodybuilders come out, with greased bodies, so that they, their *Eitelkeit* (vanity), was weirdly... reinforced by this trivial music. By the vanity, the showing of themselves, so that the music, through what she did scenically, then had a dramaturgical function, in that part of the story.

CEC: Although it didn't necessarily have that sort of underpinning already, just from the plain old score text

PR: You wouldn't think so, I mean, I've seen productions of *The Trojans* where the silliness of that music... And she just sort of grabbed it by the hair, and made you realize something, about the social workings that are going on there in Carthage.

CEC: Do you know at what point she brought that idea into play? If that was something she came with?

PR: I don't know if that was her or Zehelein.

CEC: Oh, ok.

PR: Very often it was...

CEC: ...interplay?

PR: Interplay. Yeah.

CEC: ok, good.

So... can you tell me more about having an architect as a stage designer, and how that changed the situation?

PR: And another place that was just absolutely breathtaking... one of the best realizations that I've ever seen was the royal hunt. Which is, the air is kind of pregnant with eroticism, it's after that royal hunt that they finally go to bed with each other, for the first time, and it's through the headiness of this, and it often ends up being kind of embarrassing, or trite. The kind of symbolism... and what she came up with, together with Schal... But see, this is where Schal's imagination, Hans Dieter Schal, who has an incredible visual imagination, and her... she was always adamant about, you don't illustrate what you want. You do something contrary to it.

CEC: She—Berghaus?

PR: Berghaus.

What they had was a huge wall of plants. Of green plants. It was a massive wall, of grass, undulating grass, in a way. So Aeneas and Didon sort of climb up on this wall, it went not the full width of the stage, but almost. And, to this music, the grass was quivering. There were actually bodies under this grass, making it move, I think. I'm not sure exactly what it was, but it was incredibly, suggestive in a way, without being very explicit.

CEC: Who were the bodies?

PR: They were supernumeraries.

And then she and he, each from one side of this, move towards each other.
And in my mind, a couple of times, they had gotten under the grass,
but I'm not sure if they really were,.. but they were moving across this grass
towards each other. It was the most erotic.

CEC: That sounds really sensual.

PR: Oh, it was unbelievable.

Any rendition of that scene I've scene anytime since was just nowhere near it!

CEC: Do you happen to know if there was a recording made? Video?

PR: Well there was a working video,
in the theater, which, every production we ever did, there was a working video.
Just so that you could do the *Wiederaufnahme* of it.
And this was too early to have been in the University project.
When they did more professional videos.

CEC: Maybe I can get my hands on that,
somehow. From the house videos.

PR: I mean, you should go see Mara Eggert,
while you're here. Because she's got tons more photographs of everything.

CEC: That's a great idea.
I don't know why that didn't occur to me.

PR: Cause she's been...
and she's in the midst of trying to get rid of a lot of her photographs.

CEC: How much was she around?

PR: She was at all of the staging rehearsals.
She took massive amount of photographs.
And I just saw her the other night. And she's...
she's sold some of her archive somewhere.
But she's trying to downsize, so I don't know how many of these..
But Neuenfels, for instance, when he was working on his autobiography last year,
he was out at Mara's and going through boxes and boxes of photographs.
To see what he wanted. I mean, they may still be in Berlin with her,
she may not have sold them yet. 'Cause the only photographs I have
are the ones in this book!

CEC: I think we're pretty much done with collaborative process...

(loud construction noises increase—both agree to move inside.)

CEC: So you were actually just starting to tell me...

(Rosenberg points out some pictures in the Eggert Book)

...as we were coming in from the porch
about the tensions that arose at the end.
Can you tell me more about that.

PR: Well, I unfortunately can't,
because it's thirty years ago.

(laughing.)

But there were a couple of issues where Berghaus and Zehelein disagreed.

And quite strongly, with each other. Certain conceptual issues, and...

I can't remember whether Hans Dieter Schal was also involved in that discussion,
whether he also agreed with how certain scenes were approached, or not.

It was quite grave, this whole production was, such a massive thing to produce,
it's like doing half of a *Ring*.

So one of the thoughts had been, was to do *Dido and Aeneas*,
before we put the two parts together,

because they were produced separately, to then couple one with *Dido and Aeneas*,
and that ended up not being feasible on the same evening, after all.

CEC: Why not?

PR: Because of the set.

CEC: Just because of the set?

PR: Yeah.

But it would be interesting to interview Hans Dieter Schal about this.

He lives south of Stuttgart, near Ulm. See how much he remembers.

He might remember more of the discussions than I do.

CEC: That's a good idea. Ok.

But it's ok—your perspective is valuable in and of itself.

So you tell me what you have, and that's fantastic,
and I'll keep hunting other places, as well. Great!

I want to talk a little bit about work style, of the team,
and how they were working together.

Did the way they worked affect, in any way your role,
and the way that other direction staff and administrative staff,
that weren't necessarily part of the creative team.

Did that spill over, from one area to another?

PR: Well, yes.

In several ways, because, there was a high degree of awareness
of what one was trying to achieve artistically.

CEC: On whose part?

PR: On the part of the *Betriebsbüro*, Matthias Weidmann,
the guy doing all of the planning, schedule planning, etc.

I was very involved in discussions from the very beginning, with the team.

To try to smell out what would be the inner characteristics of a character, sometimes the casting issues were very simple because we had an ensemble we did most of the work with the ensemble, but it would be, sometimes if we needed to find a certain way of looking at a role, then we sometimes had to go out and look for someone, as well. But the way, the *Reihenfolge* (order) of rehearsals was much, much, much more thorough than in most opera companies, and indeed, we all, for everything that was newly produced, we had a certain number of evenings where we shut the theater, so that we could do three days in a row of lighting rehearsals, then *BOs*, etc.

That's not all that unusual in other houses, but we were... much more aware of needing to make those kinds of decisions based on the artistic results we were trying to get. Rather than having it be just operative. It's not like going to Vienna, where... "forget it, we keep our repertoire going, and you figure out how to light it in two hours." It used to be, anyway. They've changed somewhat, too, in the meantime. It was just much more, thrown on the stage, and this was much more... the process itself was something that we... and the house was aware of. We were very aware of those decisions affecting the kind of production we were going to get.

CEC: Who drove that?

PR: That was driven by Matthias Weigmann, who was our *Betriebsdirektor*, and Klaus Zehelein, Gielen... you know.

PR: Gielen setting standards about what we want, we were all completely passionate about the mission. So it wasn't that...

CEC: So this was an agreed upon sort of approach, that everyone consciously got behind.

PR: When Gielen brought me there, ahem, to Frankfurt, it was because they had recognized the fact that in the normal *Betriebssystem* (operational system), repertoire *Betriebssystem*, it was extremely difficult to keep the intensity and quality and purity of a production. In tact. And they said, the art we do makes a difference, so why should we go to the trouble of doing it, and then have it fall apart? And so that's everything in the *Betrieb* was there to reinforce that. I mean, when they brought me in, they only needed two and a half to recognize that in the normal system, we're not going to be able to do this kind of intense work, and keep it up, unless we figure out it. How to keep it up. So that starts with the thoroughness of the rehearsals. For a normal piece to take six to seven weeks, by the end of that time, it was just in the bones of the singers. So if they did it six months later, it was part of their DNA.

CEC: So I want actually to repeat, because I'm starting to synthesize some of the pieces of what you've said this time and last time.

It sounds to me, and pardon me if this is simplistic and obvious,

as if one of the things you're emphasizing is that this period of time, one of the things that made it so golden, in a way, is that kind of the best part of the intensity that you get in the stagione system, was translated in a way that functioned within a repertoire house.

PR: Yes. Yes.

CEC: You would agree with that statement?

PR: Yes.

CEC: Ok.

PR: And if you can make that happen, then... I think it's preferable to the stagione system.

Because what creates the identity of the house, you can keep seeing it.

Whereas with stagione system, after seven or eight performances, it's now you see it, now you don't, and it just belongs to the past. And...

CEC: So you have a sense of sort of the... permanency is an exaggeration... but of the identity of the house.

PR: The identity of the house, is made up of the continuing mass of the repertoire.

And it also affects the ensemble. I mean, it's predicated of course on the idea of having a good ensemble, an excellent ensemble, and having... most of the roles taken by the ensemble.

Because then the ways that they interact with each other, it's something that's cumulative.

CEC: You mentioned that last time. That at some point, the singers become so tight with each other,

PR: There are antennas they have for each other. It's just good to keep that on the roll.

CEC: Wonderful, thank you.

PR: You have to do it really, really, consciously.

And if somebody else comes along and says,

oh that's impossible, they can get really slaphappy about doing it totally unconscientiously, just throwing singers around onstage,

of course in a situation like this you're going to have to throw singers in.

If somebody gets sick and it's an extremely complicated, very, very individually read production, how do you throw somebody in it? Etc. So it has its problems, no question. But I mean I... if you really are not self defeatist about it...

I mean, I heard somebody at one of the opera companies here say recently,

it's fine to do kind of a generic production because at least in the repertoire system it won't get worse. And I thought, great, let's aspire to nothing!

CEC: Let's aim high. That's cynical.

PR: Yeah, I was hearing about a new production here

a couple of months ago, and someone actually said that, to the powers that be.

And they said...at least it won't be hard to keep up.

CEC: Wow. (*laughing*)

Well, I guess...
not everybody's in the same place with it.

(*pause*)

Now, I want to talk more in a different direction,
and more details about the production period.

Just nitty gritty details, trying to lay out on the table.

So, we already talked about who was involved in the production period,
and primarily what they did. Just a couple of details about *Trojans*, still.

Where did most rehearsals take place at this point,
how long was any given rehearsal lasting, and approximately...
I'm talking about staging rehearsals, mainly.

PR: In the rehearsals before you get onstage,
it's simple: 10 – 1 and 5 – 8.

CEC: Oh, so, just the same as it is now.

PR: Yes.

And at that time, there was the big rehearsal stage,
we didn't have the ones outside the building

CEC: The Rödelheim space.

PR: yeah, we didn't have that.

At that time, we had the big one,
which I think was converted into the orchestra rehearsal space...
this was before the fire.

CEC: we've now got two *Prob Bühnen* (rehearsal stages)
up on five, I think,

PR: Yeah, That was the big one, and then there was a small one.

CEC: Yeah, in the same space? It's kind of on the side.

It might even be the same two, then.

Okay, so just those two and the stage, at this point. Ok, great.

Do you remember any other milestones during that rehearsal process,
that were important.

Some of these are generic questions.

So to a certain extent, there's this sort of staging phase,
then the singers are also having coachings,

and then there's the milestone of moving onto the mainstage,
then there's really getting the lighting elements set, and the technical set,
were these phases...like the typical plan?

PR: Well, obviously,

it just took on another dimension, once it was on the stage.

I'm thinking of Didon's death in the rowing boat.

Just having those spaces to work in is very different than the marked thing

on the rehearsal stage, and Berghaus had already figured out the thing that came from Nina Ritter, and you should talk to Nina, really, 'cause she's one of the great dramaturgs in the world, in her head, in every production she's been in, I think she was the one who gave... she gave Berghaus the idea of the cocoon, to die in. This big gauze thing that she crawled under, to die, I'm sure that was Nina. That's the sort of thing that Nina...

CEC: What was her role again?

PR: She was the costume designer. But Klaus Zehelein always says that he learned dramaturgical thinking from Nina, when he was first starting out.

CEC: Interesting!

PR: Yeah, she was amazing. And this...(showing a picture)

CEC: Ah, that's the boat!

PR: So obviously, once you get into a space like this, the possibilities are just... how you access it. physically, and then... the *Nachtwandlerische* (sleepwalking) Scene, this incredibly beautiful sleepwalking music, and developing certain things. She could only develop certain things once they actually got onto the stage. She could think it, but not really develop it. Another thing that Nina came up with was, this is so...activistically out of our realm of really understanding something, this kind of *Naturmensch*, Cassandra and.... what's his name? (to herself) Oh, Pamela, this is embarrassing.

CEC: I can't remember either, ...but that's on p.134 in the Eggers book, I'm just reminding myself.

PR: This animal man was, in a way, cause it's so afar in our past... not really a marter. But Nina had these big red sticks that they tied to her arms, and she was... not a Christ figure, but...

CEC: ...manipulated?

PR: No, no! like the walking wounded.

CEC: It's a splint, almost.

PR: Yes, it was like this red splint. And here she had this...kind of triangle gauze red *panzer* (armor) thing and gauze over her eyes, for being half blind, but it was like the walking wounded. A long train. I mean, Nina was just amazing. Peter Hirsh, Nina's husband, was Gielen's musical assistant on this. He would remember it...every second of the rehearsals. They live near Chiemsee.

CEC: I'm collecting lots of names today, this is great.

PR: And then again,
what she did for Troy was that, it's a folk that far off in the distant past,
almost at the beginning of mankind in our heads, they had,
they were these strange beings. The *Trojans* were these strange beings,
and then here, the women, they are being sacrificed, and pulled off their hair,
and you saw... so here, that's Troy... and that's Cassandra, you can kind of see the dress.

(viewing pictures in the book together)

CEC: Oh, that is really fantastic...
the dramaturgical perspective coming in through the costumes there.

PR: Oh, totally.
Everything that Nina did,
I mean, also what she did with *The Makropolous Case*...

CEC: Right.

(turning pages)

PR: And then here, for instance, Carthage.
You know, whenever you're in the south, Greece,
which are also so far from us in their rigidity, all the women wear black,
and she had them black and white, blending in with the landscape.

CEC: Yes, she really sounds like a fascinating character.
Just keeping us on track, talking about the production period,
sorry, it's fascinating, everything you are saying.
But I'm trying to keep to my questions,
to make sure I get through everything.

PR: Yes.

CEC: so, we were talking about the rehearsal process,
and the milestones of coming onto the stage,
how much that changed the product.
Would you describe that as a typical milestone?

PR: Not necessarily.
In this particular case the stage,
there will be spaces that you can only kind of simulate on the rehearsal stage,
and so your whole relation to the space you're in changes on the stage.
It doesn't always have to be as extreme as it was in this case.
For instance, for Troy it made no difference whatsoever.
But there were certain aspects of Carthage...

CEC: Because of the scale?

PR: Because of the scale.
And then, some things were just way, way, way up there!
I mean, I couldn't walk up there, I almost had to vomit, he was so far up.

I was... seasick.

So, the feeling that that gives you is a completely different one.

CEC: True, ok.

Was would you say that this production period for Troy, for *Trojans*, was different from ones that you had been involved in prior?

PR: (*Shaking head no.*)

CEC: No. Typical. Ok. (*pause*)

Do you remember any concrete discussions about the goals for the piece, the most important conceptual goals for the piece? And or political, if there were any.

PR: (*pause, thinking*)

No... there was nothing political nothing that was specifically political.

CEC: I just threw that in there because sometimes contextually that's an...

PR: No, I mean it was, much more about the framework, that it's so far from us.

CEC: And that was really the main sort of *Konzept*, if there was one.

PR: (*pause*)

CEC: Or would you not characterize it that way?

PR: No, it was...

just one of the aspects of how to read it.

And I mean, well, the political... results of blindness and fanaticism.

I do remember a rehearsal with Berghaus where the *Trojans* had this...

kind of forward thrusting, triumphal... march.

So they were led around, and they get more and more lost in what they're singing, it becomes this kind of delirium,

PR: And there was Berghaus in the front, leading them on, leading them on!

She said, what was it? "We're lost in our own kind of grandeur, that we've...

that they have completely lost their heads in their *Selbsttäuschung* (self-deception) and their *Rausch* (frenzy)," and the *Selbsttäuschung* of the ones in power, and all of the ceremonies of power blinded them.

And there, it's as if she were:

(*banging on the table*), "Come on, come on! Even more, even more!"

Like, leading them to the triumphal charge,

CEC: That these were figures so wrapped up in their constructed...

PR: And just the power then of

this mass *Rausch*, of ... "Us, us!" And "We're invincible!"

And the self-delusion of it. So the danger of a mass movement like that.

So...*insofern* (to that extent).

CEC: Do you think I can make the jump, thinking of Berghaus and the DDR? And thinking of the '80s.

PR: Not at all.

CEC: Do you think any of this is a sort of criticism?

PR: Not in her case.

It would have been the Nazis, in her case.

CEC: Ok, right. Ok.

PR: She was absolutely to her dying day, convinced that they were much more on the right path. (in the East.) And, I mean, she was much more...

CEC: Despite, also, the constructed-ness of it. That wasn't her concern at this point. Her concern was really more the past.

PR: She really...lived under the illusion.

Even though she suffered from it.

I mean, they stopped her... they wouldn't let her complete her *Ring*. It was too radical.

They kicked her out of the Berliner Ensemble because she was too radical.

And...but...she was really schizophrenic, it wasn't mechanistic on her part, she really was convinced. And I honored her for it, in that...

you know Harry Kupfer, who was really the, he was completely...

he used it all the time! He used the power unashamedly, and afterwards

he gave these interviews where he would say...

CEC: The power of his position within the system, you mean.

PR: Yeah, I mean, he was the kingpin.

He made or broke whoever, it was... he was ruthless!

And, I mean, the DDR had made him king of the opera world, punkt. (*period*.)

And afterwards, he said, "We used to walk the streets and dream of freedom."

(*gagging noise*) He did not! But she gave an interview, to Klaus—I forgot— from the *Spiegel*, where she said...And she was just roasted for it!

But she didn't try to say, "Oh, the whole time I was longing for freedom."

No, she said, "I believed it then, and I still believe it."... She did!

CEC: Interesting!

PR: I could do a whole evening on her.

CEC: That's fascinating.

PR: Because she was just so...schizophrenic.

CEC: Well, I guess any time you're wrapped up in an ideal...

Any sort of ideal is going to at some point unfortunately get tinged with corruption.

And so if you're married to it, but you live in the real world, there's going to be that element of flipping in and out of it, back and forth.

PR: Right, right! Yeah, and she never really acknowledged that she could go in and out as often as she wanted.

CEC: She was incredibly privileged, actually.

PR: Yeah, absolutely.
She and Dessau also belonged to the aristocracy.

CEC: Right. Ironically...
So, artistic issues in the piece.
We've talked actually a lot about them,
because of course it all overlaps.
But...I'll just ask a couple of things
about some of the most particularly striking stage pictures in the piece already.
Anything particularly interesting in lighting? We haven't talked about that.
Vocal delivery or musical interpretation,
that were unusual approach-wise, or noteworthy?

PR: Well... (*pause*)

CEC: And of course, there doesn't have to be.
Not every piece is about that.
Just to make sure we haven't forgotten anything.

PR: Well...
I thought Gielen's conducting was fantastic...
I mean, I don't know how to say anything particular about it,
but it was just... it was so...but also, the colors!
I've always thought that he's a great conductor of French music,
of Gluck, for instance, and... you... this was so *zwingend* (compelling),
you come out thinking it was a great piece!
And it does have some weak moments, but you came out
being 100% convinced about the piece.
And Anja Silja as Cassandra, I have to say, was...pretty amazing.
They all were. Yeah.

CEC: Do you know any instances
of singers bringing anything in particular to the process,
other than, kind of minutia of vocal interpretation,
which are always involved.
Did singers bring any particular collaborative ideas in...

PR: Oh, all the time.
There were discussions all the time. Both vocal discussions and scenic discussions.
I mean it really was about dialogue.

CEC: From all sides?
And not just from the creative team to the performers?
It really was integrated?

PR: Oh yeah, that's what the process is about!

CEC: Sometimes more, sometimes less.

PR: Yeah, but... no, it is!

And as I think I told you last time,
what was always so important was the work at the piano.
For a normal length opera it would two days at the piano
with both the director and the conductor being there,
and the conductor taking the singers through it,
and the singers giving their two bits.

CEC: At the very beginning,
at the first readings.

PR: Yes.

CEC: Were any particular elements in the piece
expected to be provocative?
I'm thinking a little more about reception at this point.
Was forethought given to what certain people might react to,
or certain groups?

PR: No.

CEC: I want to think not just of the piece as an entity onstage,
and the audience as a very distant, divided public.
Is the audience, or critical opinion,
ever part of the creation of the piece,
thinking about what might motivate?

PR: No, never.

CEC: In none of the work?

PR: It's really divorced.
I mean, I think of Gielen when he saw the bodybuilders,
he said, "Muss das sein?" (Must that be?)
He thought that was kind of icky and embarrassing, or something.
But (*shaking head no.*)

CEC: But in terms of the...
process of creation itself, it's really,
well, at least just for this piece, even, it is really able to be divorced from
what people's reactions are expected to be to it?
It's able to be taken as an artistic piece in its own right,
not for the benefit of some motivation, or...

PR: I quite honestly, in all those years,
in any of the work that I have seen or been involved in.

CEC: The reason I ask is,
I know it might seem like a bit of an odd question,
CEC: ...but so much of what I have read has talked about
Frankfurt's reaction generally, and audience reaction
to the work during this time, that's one of the things that's talked about,
not just that the work itself was important, also,
the interplay between audience and...

PR: Yeah, but when you're in the midst of doing it

you're not thinking, "they're going to think this is horrible, or..."
No. You're going through it, working on it, at the end,
before the *Parsifal* premiere, I was expecting the audience to flip out,
in certain places, but during the work itself, that's not discussed.
"They're going to think this is provocative!" (*mocking tone*)... No.

CEC: No. Ok. Good.

It's hard, you know, when you look at this as history,
and you look at this having read reviews, and having heard people's reactions,
it's hard to know, was there any sort of influence, somehow, or expectation,
or was that a goal? Ok.

PR: Absolutely not!

I mean, in the *Aida* rehearsals, when the chorus got so upset by it,
and we had these huge day long discussions,
which were really interesting, with the chorus...

CEC: Can you tell me about that?
Please tell me about that...

PR: Yes, in the scene where...

the Ethiopians are brought in, to be civilized in front of this opera audience.
Brought back to the continent in the 19th century, and so they are taught how to eat, etc.
And some of the Ethiopian women were pregnant.
And they're given forks and knives, and then... they have chickens,
and they just start eating the chickens and throwing the chicken legs.
And the chorus went... got very upset. And were going to strike.

CEC: What did they say?
What were the complaints?

PR: Well, that this is disgusting,
and in opera we don't do this kind of thing.
So we stopped the rehearsals, and

CEC: Because of the implicit racism, or

PR: Well, to be... no.

That was not what was bothering them,
It was throwing chicken legs around on the opera stage.
And having pregnant people on the stage throwing chicken legs.
And having the opera audience was there,
and... like, they were doing this to the opera audience.
But also just that they didn't want to be
involved in anything that was this debauched.

CEC: Ok.

PR: And so... that was great,
that that happened. Because then we called off the next day's rehearsals.
I mean they were going to strike...

CEC: To calm down?

PR: No, to have discussions.
We had two long sessions of discussions,
and it was fantastic, because that turned the company around.

CEC: How so?

PR: That... we'd start talking about,
this art form. Why do we do it? What questions do we have of art? It was so existential.
If we just come out and present the clichés plastered over all the time,
then what's the point of the work that you as an individual are devoting your life to?
And we got into absolutely existential discussions with them, and by the end of...
I think it was on two separate days that we had these long discussions, and the chorus had turned
around. And from then on, they were really supportive.
"Yeah! We're here to do art."

CEC: Wow!

PR: It was absolutely a seminal thing.

CEC: That's huge.

PR: I can't remember when that was, '80?

CEC: '81.

That sounds, actually, like a very good instance
of what you were talking about before, about the importance of the ensemble,
and the ensemble work being so essential.

And actually, it's... the way it seems to me is, of course,
that's not just an issue of how people are working together,
physically, bodily, musically.

But it's also just conceptually,
how much you've educated, and you've got a troupe of people
with the same goals in mind.

And not just the creative staff, who's driving it,
but also the people who are actually executing it onstage,
and somehow bringing the group into harmony philosophically.

PR: Yeah, no, that's why it was really..
when I went to San Francisco, I decided to start with Messaien.
Because that is also a **monster** project,
for any company.

CEC: I'm sorry, which is the Messaien?

PR: *Saint François d'Assise*.

...and just what it takes to actually realize the piece, to get it onstage,
and with 110 in the orchestra and 150 in the chorus and everybody backstage
and a five-hour piece and just what it takes...

CEC: Because it's a unifying mission,
in a way.

PR: And they had never been challenged like that.
And coming to grips with something,
not just because of the length and the difficulty, but sort of, in the process.

So the whole idea of process for the first time that became something that they took on board, and from then on, they would have crawled across glass. Some more than others... but it was really important to do something that unified them like that. Really consciously that made them think about what are we doing, and why.

CEC: Why do this?... at all.

PR: Yeah, why do this.

CEC: Wonderful, thank you.
I'm really glad, that that inadvertently came up.

PR: Yes!

CEC: That's exciting!
So...*(pause, reviewing questions)*
I think, pretty much...ah, one more.
Of the artistic decisions in this particular piece, or major conceptual ideas, do you view them in contrast to parallel to any other pieces that were made around the same time?
Did it seem to work off of any other pieces other than itself?
Did it borrow ideas or contrast ideas?

PR: No.

CEC: No? You think of it more as a... one unit piece?

PR: No.

CEC: Oh, ok. good.

PR: This is that scene.
(pointing in the Eggart book)

CEC: Yes, I know that scene. Great!
Would you remind me what page that is again,
so that I can find it again later...

PR: 91.

CEC: Audience critique,
reception, of the piece, *The Trojans*.
Do you recall audience reactions in or around the time,
or anything major that was said in the press?
You don't have to recount it all,
I can look it all up, but...

PR: It was very positively received.
I mean, that also has to do with the...
the fact... it was overwhelming. And it was,
just on every level it was extraordinary.
But you could say that about the *Aida* and the *Parsifal*, too.
But there people have expectations about what the piece is.
Whereas the *Trojans*, I mean,
I think this was the first time it had been done.

CEC: It's not so entrenched in the canon.

PR: I think the last time was about fifty years ago, so it's not that they'd come with expectations. There wasn't a virulent reaction, negative reaction to it. But there wouldn't have been anyway, I don't think.

CEC: Ok.

Do people...

I mean other than basically people in the house that collect and catalog some of the press, which I do know already happens, is there any, was there any point in time where any of the press voices were discussed by the team after the fact? or is that really just left to be its own creature?

PR: It's left to be its own creature. You're already on and doing the next thing! You know?

CEC: Ok! Good. Alright.

PR: Do you have the program books?

CEC: I do. Yes, I do. Was there any political aftermath, that arose within the house, or elsewhere, as a result of the piece?

PR: No, I mean just... Not really, it was, when it was at this very precarious stage, of the thing was so massive we were not going to get it done on time, in a way, because, we were very worried politically, the ramifications... we'd never **not** done a premiere! But that did not happen.

CEC: So politically not from the angle of content, but politically because of the importance of the house in the city with providing productions!

PR: But that didn't actually come to pass. But it was almost there, and everybody was hysterical about it.

CEC: Ok, good!

PR: Nina did the costumes for *Aida*, by the way.

CEC: Right. That's why I know her name.

PR: She also did the sets and costumes for *Onegin*, she did several things. And then *The Makropolous Case*. She did various things.

CEC: Did this particular piece, and your work on it, have an effect on your work after that point? Would you say? Are there elements that you kept that resurfaced somehow, for you?

PR: (*sigh, thinking*) I don't know how to answer that directly, I don't know.

CEC: Okay, we'll wrap up the *Trojans* there.
I would love to talk about the *Ring* for a bit, actually,
or maybe for the rest of the time.

PR: I wanted to talk about *Jenůfa*.

CEC: Oh, ok!
You wanted to talk about *Jenůfa*. Then let's do *Jenůfa* then.
We can do that.

PR: Yeah.

CEC: So, let's talk through *Jenůfa* again.
Let's start with collaborative process. Who was involved...

PR: This was... oh, maybe I better not say this.
It's one of the... No, I better not.

CEC: You don't want to talk about this one?

PR: Oh I do, I do...

It was... well, Gielen again, and Alfred Kirchner, and Marco Arturo Marelli did the sets.
And I'm trying to remember who did the costumes.

CEC: I can look that up,
if you don't recall.

PR: But for me, the reason I wanted to talk about it is,
it was for me the quintessential ensemble piece.
Every single member of the cast was an ensemble person.
And it was optimal.

CEC: How so, optimal?

PR: They were such specific human beings,
and at the same time they, the typing of them was kind of universal.
I mean Bud Cochran, for instance, was the village idiot,
and you know, he was also our "Siegfried."
And to have... if you've experienced them in this other context,
and then to see them take on the characteristics of this village, of this village life,
and the... the closeness and the suffocating-ness of the interaction of this piece.
Each of them had a *skala* (spectrum) of colors...
through all the various productions they had worked on.
So they really were... he was able to play this village idiot,
who was mocked by the world, this big fat guy.
But all the levels of longing and hunger for belonging
and that he was able to actually love someone, and all of these characteristics,
and each of them had that many different facets to what they did onstage.
And so we had the great Soňa Červená, who at that point was quite elderly, and who brought
forty years of experience to this blind woman, she was played as a blind person.
She again, exuded all kinds... as if she had antennas for what was going around
while she was blind, the haplessness of Cochran, and then the brutality of him,
and then Jon Stuart, who didn't have himself under control, and becomes this drunkard,

June Card, who is just tossed about by the elements, and you had this kind of Spring in the background, that came through in the set...
(thumbing through Eggert book to illustrate.)

CEC: This is page 68-69, that you're on.

PR: By all these wooden slats,
and the snow comes through,
and you just see these small slits of light coming through these wooden slats,
so the closeness and then the longing for the outside.
I think it was really one of the great sets, as well.
And then Mastilovic, who had been one of the great Wagnerian sopranos,
had been in the ensemble for...thirty years, and had become a character mezzo.
And as the levels of bitterness and anger and anguish
—I don't know. I just thought it was psychologically one of the best things that we did.

CEC: Mm-hm! And it sounds to me
like you're attributing that to the...
lengthy and well-seasoned experience of these singers,
who were involved, primarily
and how much they brought.

PR: How much they brought,
but also Alfred Kirchner, and how much they developed together.
He was...someone who did psychological realism, much more than Berghaus,
it was a different approach. And...
but again, it was something new every rehearsal.

CEC: Right, so again...

PR: So all of these levels of shadings
psychologically and musically in this process of six weeks.

CEC: And Gielen's there, so he's really,
in touch with this kind of
conceptual, psychological, directorial dramatic apparatus,
and translating it into the music.

PR: Right.

CEC: Can you think of any particular musical moments
where that was translated well? I know it was a long time ago.

PR: I mean, I the whole thing
was probably the best Janáček I've heard.
You know, he was a fabulous Janáček conductor,
It was just... just from the opening, there's this underlying tension,
this kind of flurry of tension,
even when these characters are just standing there.

CEC: Can we talk about

the relationships with the other members of the team?
Can we just outline who's involved in that?

PR: Well, again,
Zehelein was the dramaturg,
and they really wanted to convey the closeness of the...

PR: of that kind of society,
and how every single member of this situation is...being squeezed and buffeted
by the expectations of this very reactionary village.

CEC: Ok.

Were there any sort of particularly good collaborative moments,
and/or disagreements that arose in the process?

PR: Yes, I remember,
when Cochran at one point comes, and was going to be violent, and he...
and Kirchner said, "It's way too *plump* (crude)." And then gave him a knife.
And he said... "Oh that's a nice toy." And he started skipping around like a child,
with this knife. And with his big bulk, started skipping like a child, and seemed to have
a lightness. And that gave him kind of a headiness.
And Kirchner said, "Enjoy it!" And so he then started almost laughing. And it became much
more terrifying than when he was just going around with a bit of violence.

CEC: Because it's so dissonant
from his physical reality.

PR: Yeah, and it reminded you of...
how kids can be taunting and dangerous.
Because they don't really realize how dangerous they're being with their fellow kids.
So there was something scary about it.
Because of this underlying heedlessness of the consequences.
And just the fact that he was enjoying himself so much made it scary.

CEC: Mm-hm? Ok.
That's interesting and terrifying.
No particular disagreements or problems?

PR: I can't remember...
I think there was something with Mastilovic,
when she comes in from having killed the baby, and I think she came in a little too much a la
Sarah Bernhardt. So you could see that she had done something.
And Kirchner wanted her to be much more quiet about it.
And I think they had a disagreement because she said,
if I've just killed a baby, "*Ich würde aufgewüht sein.*" (I would be in a state.)
He said, no you're probably going to have yourself much more under control,
because you did it, to save your stepdaughter from the *Schande* (disgrace).
So... and you don't want them to notice. So you're going to have yourself
completely under control. And she didn't think she was.
Yeah. And I think this is what he got her to do:

to come out really coolly, with her hands in her pockets (*demonstrating*)
and just kind of walk... with a poker face.
That was really hard for her.

CEC: How would you say that is, in general?
I mean I think... it strikes me, having also been a performer, myself.
That it's difficult when you physically and mentally
can not really be convinced of an idea.

PR: Yeah!

CEC: And I wonder if you could talk in this piece,
or even any other pieces that pop to mind,
about how that's handled,
how ultimately is it decided?

PR: Well, I mean,
if you're a good director, you're going to understand that.
They... "Du hast viel mehr davon" (You get much more out of it)
if they can really live it.
And...because, when they can't live it, you always know it.
It's not authentic, you don't feel it.
There's something... about it.

PR: And so, the good directors,
in the collaborative process, if they see that they really can't do it, then they search for
something else. And sometimes they don't search for something else,
and then... either it is not convincing,
or they will somehow force themselves to do it,
and in the course of the performances, then it gets watered down.

CEC: You just said,
"the very good collaborative directors,"
and that really jumped out at me.
Because I'm starting to hear a theme, over and over from this time period.
I mean, you were speaking generally in this instance about
dynamics between singers and directors,
but you know, we're talking about this period,
and we're talking about the '80s and what **worked**
and I think I hear you repeating over and over again that it's really about
commitment to collaboration,
successful commitment to collaboration.

PR: It's about trust.

CEC: Yeah.

PR: And... you know, when people talk about
Regietheater, and that directors have become too strong,
or in the States they talk about "Eurotrash," there are definitely, definitely productions where you
can see it!
A director has had some idea about a piece, and has just sort of thrust it upon the piece.
And I really think that great theater is...

the director and the dramaturg and the conductor really having ideas that can sometimes be startling about a piece, but that have come from a genuine reading of the piece.

There are many, many different genuine readings of the piece.

And so if it's really coming from their understanding of what is there, in the source, then...you know, it's going to be a process in the rehearsals, of bringing that to life.

And so, you know, I remember Neuenfels, when we did the *Entführung* in Stuttgart, and he said, the..."Each of you is going to have a double as an actor," and singers were outraged: "We're good enough actors, too!"

PR: But in the course of the rehearsal they became completely...convinced by it.

So it's, if there is a genuine reading of the piece, and you work to find it together, then it happens.

And then there are others who just, they have their idea of it, and..."You've got to do it!"

And usually those end up being mediocre productions.

CEC: Were there, in this period, this era, were there pieces that worked less well?

PR: Mm-hm!

CEC: That didn't have this trust element so much.

PR: Yes, there was a *Manon Lescaut*, which ended up being, what was his name? I don't remember...

CEC: It's ok, I can look that up.

PR: I don't think that worked so well.

CEC: And would you boil that down to the same trust issue?

PR: Well, yeah,, he just didn't seem to me to be someone who was into collaborating with singers, he came with the idea that he had for the piece, it wasn't a particularly deep reading of it, or whatever, And just made them do it!

CEC: So it wasn't the...

PR: There was nothing shocking about what they had to do, it was just, it was more mechanical, or something.

CEC: That would go along with the theory that you were saying before, that it's so based on collaboration and everybody getting, philosophically, an heart, mind, and soul... behind the concept, and convinced that it's correct.

PR: Yes, yes.

CEC: Or convinced that it's the way it needs to be done in this production. And if you don't have that real interactive process of, convincing and coming together over the idea,

then it becomes a less successful theatrical creation.

PR: Right.

CEC: Ok.

PR: I mean, with *Aida*, Aurea Gomez, who was the original “Aida,” it was the first thing she was singing outside of Brazil. And obviously had never been exposed to anything like Neuenfels, or (*laughing*)

CEC: Right!

PR: So she was,
“You want me to mop a floor on the opera stage?”
And so, in her... she ended up being moving doing it.
But she never really got it, in a way.
But it was ok, it was ok.
“I am on the stage...!” And she was coming from Brazil, where if you come out as *Aida*, you come out in your Egyptian costume and you do all of that.
But she ended up being really moving as the *Aida*! Nevertheless.
I don’t know where she, intellectually, ever got to the point where she was in total agreement with it.

CEC: Well it may not have hinged upon that.
That one mopping the floor moment, either.

PR: Yes.
Here where she crawls under the chair (*shows photo*)
She also thought that was...demeaning.
But that **was** demeaning!

CEC: Well, right!
That was demeaning! That’s page 94,
I’m just going to remind myself.

PR: It’s one of my great sadnesses that this *Aida* is not on video.
Cause it was one of the great *Lehrstücke* of...
what do you start zeroing in on when you want to create the world that moved the composer to write something? And the fact that, when he was writing this, it was just on the cusp of Freud, was just on the cusp of archaeology, this, looking back at layers of our past, etc, etc.
And so this whole production was informed by, by that. (*turning pages again*).
He was really amazing. You should interview Klaus about that piece, because it was one of the great *Lehrstücke*.

CEC: Actually,
I’d love to take this opportunity,
I’m thinking about something you said earlier,
when you mentioned *Regietheater* in passing.
And then also this piece, which is... I mean, it’s debatable what *Regietheater* even is.
You know...people argue about that.
How do you feel about the term?

Do you, maybe how do you define it, first of all?

PR: Well, I don't define it,
and I get upset by it, just because it seems to be a sound-byte, like a flashcard for people who
automatically assume it means something.

CEC: Because I know...

PR: I mean...

CEC: Because I know,
in my own work, I struggle to define it.
And yet if I don't mention it, you know, people would say,
"Oh, you're not talking about what's happening today!"
But I find that it's complicated!
I mean, *Regietheater* today is essential any piece that's got
any sort of conceptual apparatus put on it.
But does that mean that it has to be different?
I mean, that it has to be glitzy and not related to the original text?
What on earth does that mean.
And I honestly take the term very loosely, just to talk about...
opera theater that's being made today that essentially
isn't 100% married to a traditionalist concept of the score.
But you're irritated by the term?

PR: Yeah! Just because I think it's shorthand for...
for what, exactly?

CEC: How do you feel about productions
that don't necessarily reference compositional intent?
This *Aida* is a piece, for example, where
what's happening in this new reading
is trying to recapture some of the original creative spirit of the piece.
How do you feel about pieces that put on something else,
just kind of pasted it on to the piece? Where you don't see an obvious connection.
How do you feel about that, as a creator yourself?

PR: (*pause, thinking*)

I mean, if it, if they have worked through the piece
and these are metaphors that can translate the piece, then it's ok.
I don't know whether I've every seen something
that had absolutely nothing to do with a piece.

CEC: Well, I ask because
it's a common criticism that gets hurled
at a lot of more risqué work, frankly.

PR: Yes!

CEC: I wonder if you think that's fair criticism?
Can you think of any one particular production right now,
I don't know what you have seen, haven't seen, are aware of—
probably pretty much everything, but!
Can you think of a piece where that's been leveled as criticism?

And do you think it was fair?

PR: Yeah, I mean,

I recently saw the *Freischutz* at the Komische Oper.

And, yeah... it's very strange, I usually retain productions,

and I only have bits of it, and I only saw it three months ago.

But Max as this naked Naturmensch (nature-man) throughout the piece,

it didn't bother me. But I still didn't understand what it had to do with anything.

And there were all kinds of things thrown onto the stage that...

I didn't understand any connection at all, but... I don't have that experience very often.

CEC: Ok.

PR: And it doesn't bother me usually.

If someone has, does a reading that has very unusual, metaphors for the piece,

if it somehow, the connection is there for me.

It depends, it just depends.

CEC: It's ok, then...

PR: I mean, if they decide, this piece is about this,

and then they create kind of a corset for it,

where everything has to match up, what they've taken as the frame of reference.

That sometimes can be problematic,

but it just depends. I'm really loathe to generalize about it.

CEC: Yeah, I thought

that's why you can talk about the one in particular.

If you **could** generalize about going back to the Gielen Era in the '80s,

and talking about the interpretive direction.

Did there seem to you to be a difference of approach conceptually,

in a way that wasn't just based on collaboration and commitment.

Was there sort of an artistic ideal that was different at that house?

In terms of what reached the stage.

PR: I mean, I don't think there was...

some kind of preconceived artistic ideal at all.

But I think that there was this idealistic aspiration to...

dig into the score, ask questions of the piece, that were also informed by

—as with the *Aida*, for instance— by looking, everybody talks about the *Zeitgeist*, and...

what was the history of the *Don Carlo*, or what was the Beaumarchais,

what was the *Zeitgeist* then, the revolution just around the corner, etc, etc.

But I'm talking about really a more profound, thorough, and

maybe original questioning of the era (of a piece).

So when Klaus Zehelein started digging into archeology, Verdi goes to Cairo to premiere, why

does he choose this piece, what was going on in Cairo then,

so what was in the air that was new for him,

and the fascination with the archaeology would have led him to this, maybe?

And the psychology...

the analogy between archaeology and the new science of psychoanalysis, all of that.

Going out and looking for all that kind of thing, and then coming back, and analyzing the score and the combination of what else went into the making, it was about formulating questions to ask of the piece.

But that would come from the piece, itself.

So there it was, and it wasn't always successful in the thoroughness or in the realization, but I think that's what the ideal was. That was the idea of how to work through a piece.

It wasn't that there was going to be an overall result, or look, to everything we did, that you could recognize. I mean that the aspiration was...

CEC: It was the approach.

PR: It was the approach,

and the aspiration was

that you would try to recognize each piece for what it was,

... and actually could bring forth, on its own terms.

And again, I'm not saying that every interpretation was an exclusive interpretation.

I mean, that there would be different ways of approaching,

but this time, what we're really interested in using as aides for asking questions,

is, the role of archaeology in Verdi's time, and...

CEC: ...context.

PR: But we're not saying that was the only source for context for him.

But for this reading of it, this is what we'll delve into.

CEC: Right.

PR: Because, you know, you can look at...

Chéreau's *Ring*... they're all valuable! They're all valid, in different...

But it's about, what questions are they trying to ask of it.

CEC: And maybe also...

not just looking at the piece as a sort of insular unit reflecting inward on itself, but also from what external angle,

PR: Yeah, what radiates out, and what radiates in.

CEC: That's a great way to think of it.

PR: What was on the radar screen, and you

won't pick up all the frequencies on the radar screen...

CEC: ... but you choose one, and bring it in.

PR: Yes.

CEC: I think I'll ask you one last question, and then we'll close.

Why on earth do you think this happened in Frankfurt, in the '80s?

Do you think it was the people?

Do you think it was the place?

PR: Yeah, it was a happy combination of people,

I think that some work had been going on already,

I mean, I think that what Dohnányi had been doing there in the '70s,

that was...definitely paved the way. There were definitely some interesting productions under

Dohnányi, I mean, Mussbach started the *Ring* there...then Freyer did a *Figaro* that was, maybe not all that fascinating, but it was provocative, in a certain way.

So there was the humus somehow was there, and then what was going on in the theater. In the 70's, Germany was the most interesting theater scene, in a way. Other than in Czechoslovakia, although in the '70s that had died down, in the '60s the most interesting was happening in Czechoslovakia.

CEC: How did that particularly touch Frankfurt?

PR: Well... here and there, there were things going on, and Berghaus, in the '70s, where she did that provocative Barber in Munich. And it wasn't that it just came out of the blue. But it was Gielen definitely and Klaus Zehelein saying, "If we do opera, we want to think about it differently. And be *konsequent*. (consistent)." I mean, Gielen had done some productions in Holland with Götz Friedrich, and I think he found those provocative for him, for his head. So it was... I mean Klaus forced Gielen to be much more radical than he was. I mean, Gielen absolutely went with it, but it wasn't that his ideas were his originally.

CEC: He got a push.

PR: He got a push, and then he was excited by it.

PR: And then absolutely had the...I mean...

So, Nina Ritter was absolutely in the history books she needs to go down, as one of the provocative ones, and she worked on something with Klaus, not in Frankfurt, but somewhere else.

And he always said, she's the one who made me learn how to look at layers of pieces, and things. So it various people coming together.

CEC: So very individual driven.

PR: But! Right next door was the *Schauspielhaus*, I mean, that was a hotbed! And all of the stage directors in East Germany who were coming up who were very provocative, so there were a lot of East German trained stage directors coming out, and then there was... in '68, it happened in Frankfurt! And then next door, there was...I keep wanting to say the Free Speech movement, It's not that, it's the *Mitsprachetheater*, the debates that went on there in 1980, 1979-1980, it's a wonder they got anything onstage, because they were always in their meetings, having political discussions about *Mitspracherecht* (co-determination rights.) And so, I mean it was in the air, somewhat. And then it was someone saying... this is what we believe in doing, if we're going to do art.

CEC: Thank you,
I think we'll maybe we'll close it right there.
Thank you for sharing so much with me,
and giving me so many details.

PR: I'm sorry that I can't remember more...
(*laughing sheepishly*)

CEC: Oh, no!
Don't be silly! You've said so much!

And I'm delighted, actually.

PR: I could go through the pictures, actually,
and tell you about each scene... (*laughing*)

CEC: No... really, that's not necessary.
And I can't possibly zero in on every piece, either.

PR: Yes, yes.

CEC: In some ways the historical distance
is actually a little bit helpful.
Because the things you've retained
are the things that you find meaningful, clearly.

PR: Yes, I just don't remember
some of the reasons for certain scenes.

CEC: That's ok.
Thank you **so** much.

(*personal conversation at closing*)

END OF ROSENBERG INTERVIEWS

Appendix D: David Levin Interviews Interview #1, August 25, 2015

CEC: So let's just start off
with your work history at the Oper Frankfurt.
When did you work for the company, and in what capacity?

DL: I started as a *Hospitant* (intern) for directing and dramaturgy in 1982.
Uh, no, sorry, in summer of 1981.
And at that time I worked on the Horst Zankel production of *Die Schöne Helene*.
I don't remember if they went by *La Belle Hélène*, or *Die Schöne Helene*.
But it was withdrawn after, maybe two or three performances,
because it was...I think the opera house felt it was not up to their standards,

and it was an intensely educational experience for me.
I was a third year undergraduate, and it was my first year working in Germany.
So I felt like I learned a lot. There were some really interesting people working on that production, and that summer... it was a production that, if I recall, the rehearsal period was August, maybe July and August, in any case, so that I could work on it and then be done with the work either through the summer, such that it was premiered right before the school year began and I could return to Brown where I was an undergraduate and do, and finish my undergraduate studies. So that was the first time I worked there.

CEC: Where were you studying?

DL: At Brown.

CEC: Ah, that's when you were at Brown, sorry, I misunderstood.

DL: Yeah, so I was class of '82,
Which is why I'm convinced that it was summer of '81, before my senior year.

(phone rings, pause for personal conversation)

CEC: So yes, you were saying that, it was so you could finish at Brown the next year.

DL: Right, and I was doing an undergraduate thesis on opera, a kind of hubristic attempt to reconceptualized the history of opera in terms of production. Um, so, I was really interested in doing work in opera production, but also in trying to think about it. So it was instrumental to the work I thought I was going to be doing in the thesis as well as my aspirations to be involved in, to learn about and be involved in opera production in Europe.

CEC: That sounds...
not entirely unlike my dissertation, in fact.
Ok, how did you become aware of the company,
And how did you eventually come to Frankfurt?
Why Frankfurt?

DL: I think there are a couple of reasons that are interrelated. One is, I was... I had a strong interest in opera that, I had been studying literary theory, This was the early days, but nonetheless the heyday of the transition from post-structuralist criticism to the emergence of deconstruction. And I was an undergraduate, so you know, captive audience for that. And Brown was a hotbed of that. It was the origins of film studies, there was all kinds of theoretical work going on, and it struck me that opera would be a really interesting forum for that kind of... I guess I would say, for the kind of deconstructive thinking that seemed to be applicable

to all kinds of cultural objects, but that seemed to be applied, at the time, primarily to literature and film.

And it struck me that you know, opera was...if anything, even more appropriate, As a kind of vehicle for the terminology of the time, it was “culturally over-determined,” it was “ideologically saturated”...

CEC: *(laughing.)* Yes.

DL: You know, the buzzwords of the moment seemed to be, seemed to direct everyone’s attention to opera, but nobody was turning in that direction, and I was like “Hey, you guys, this is... super exciting and interesting,” and I was going to opera productions in Boston, and I would go down for weekends to the Met (Metropolitan opera), in New York, and you know my experience was that, not only were the productions I was seeing not the dynamics that I was interested in, but their suppression. Their active suppression. There was nothing interesting, and ... what was interesting was how there was nothing that I was seeing, I mean, Sarah Caldwell in Boston, and even... interesting repertoire. But still...it was like...so, at the same time, you know, I was reading about and learning about attempts to do exactly this, that is, theoretically informed work, in Germany. And then...so, that’s like the academic component of this, But at the same time... so, I’m from Cincinnati, and...

CEC: So am I... *(surprised.)*

DL: and I... wait, did you just say you are from Cincinnati?

(pause, personal comments.)

DL: So, as you may recall... Although it’s probably, you will not recall, but maybe your parents would, Michael Gielen was the director of the Cincinnati Symphony.

CEC: *(breath in)* Right!

DL: ...and Michael Gielen was, of course, *Musikdirektor* in Frankfurt.

CEC: Mm-hm. Yes.

DL: And he... and my father was the first violinist of the La Salle String Quartet, which was in residence at CCM.

CEC: Mm-hm.

DL: And as such, I mean, the La Salle Quartet played a lot of avant-garde music, or contemporary music, including commissioning a string quartet from Michael Gielen, but also, like, they did, Luigi Nono, Lutosławski, Penderecki, Earl Brown, those were all composers who wrote quartets for my father’s quartet. And Michael Gielen. In any case, my father and Gielen were colleagues and friends.

And furthermore, Pamela Rosenberg, who was the right hand person as part of the team of Klaus Zehelein, she was the *Referentin des Intendanten*, (Associate to the Intendant) She was, her husband was Wolf Rosenberg, a composer, was one of my father's best friends as a child, they grew up together, and Pamela was, my mother was godmother to Pamela's twins, Paolo and Sascha. So I, when I started getting interested in opera, I was sort of in conversation with Pamela about this, who was encouraging my excitement about opera, but who also said, "Look, if you really want to learn anything about this, you need to come to Frankfurt." "We're doing what you're interested in."

CEC: Yes.

DL: And...so there was both my own sense of excitement at the prospect of —how do we put this?— of having an institution that seemed to be doing what I was trying to imagine, but also having a personal connection to it, and I have to say, growing up in Cincinnati, it didn't seem all that... I was really interested in politics growing up, my parents, their world and my world didn't really overlap that much, until I went away to college, and then I think they were as surprised as I was that my interests and their interests started to reconnect. So... you need to just interrupt me if this is not...

CEC: No, no, I'm fascinated, I'll keep you on track at some point when we need to, But this is great.

DL: So, I took advantage, I think, of that personal connection, Pamela had said, "You should come and spend some time here, trying... and learn what we're up to."

So I did. I...was able to come for that summer,

DL: And then, on the basis of that summer, although I was going back to the, back to Brown, the folks at the Frankfurt Opera said, "What are your plans after you graduate?" "Would you be interested in returning to Frankfurt?" We have a season —this was then going to be the '82-83 season, where the Berghaus *Parsifal* was on tap— but not just that, I mean, Jürgen Tamchina, was doing another Offenbach production, that did end up happening in the *Kammerspiele* (chamber performance space), and Hans Gunther Heime, who was the artistic director in Stuttgart, was had been invited to do *Manon Lescaut*, you know the invitation was to come and work with and under Klaus Zehelein, who was the *Chefdramaturg* (head dramaturg) and to work on those productions, and then to see where that led, and in fact, where that led, Marco Arturo Marelli, who just did the production of *Turandot* this summer, in... what's it called? The floating summer opera festival... in Bregenz!

He was doing a production of *Un Ballo in Maschera* at Frankfurt, and we started talking, and from that conversation, he invited me to be the production dramaturg on a production of *Turandot* that he was doing in Bremen.

CEC: Ok.

DL: So that was my first production as an independent production dramaturg, which happened in March of '83 in Bremen. And then I came back, did the production of *Manon Lescaut*, and then it was like, "Ok, now what?" And during the course of that year, I decided that I was in over my head, I felt like I knew now what I needed to know, and how much I didn't know, and as you may know, Brown doesn't have a curriculum, so I sort of made up, I did this, essentially I did a major that I created, in sort of... opera as literature and as the sort of forum for poststructuralist criticism. But I decided that I wanted to go, I needed to do some serious remedial studies, so I went to Berkeley in '83 and enrolled in an interdisciplinary Masters program, so I could do the undergraduate major in Music, but Michel Foucault was teaching in Berkeley at the time, so I wanted to study with him, because I still had theoretical aspirations,

CEC: Of course!

DL: so I... **of course!**

CEC: Why not?

DL: obviously, so I did that, I went to Berkeley.

And in the course of my first semester there, I also took a course in the German department with Anton Kaes, He's a guy who does film history, and he invited me, then, Because I grew up speaking German, --I grew up bilingually speaking German with my parents— and he said look, if you'll come to the German department,

DL: instead of this paying Masters program that you're in, we'll give you a full scholarship in the German department, and I said,

"Look that's crazy, because I'm going to go back to Germany and work in opera production, you'd be wasting your money." I'm not going to do a PhD, and I'm not interested in an academic degree, and he said,

"Look, it's no problem, why don't you, just, you can come over to the German department, and we'll let you do what you want to be doing as a German Department graduate student."

And I was like... So, after my first semester at Berkeley, I switched to the German PhD program, and then I said, look, I want to do this, but I also want to go back to Frankfurt, so I stayed in Berkeley for a couple of years, and then went back to Frankfurt, because I was very keen to still be doing opera, I had met Bill Forsythe, who was, he was at the Ballett Frankfurt, but wasn't yet..

CEC: Yes.

DL: He had done his first production there that year, '82 – '83,
He was just a guest, but he's an American, and very theoretically ambitious, also,
and he and I were in conversation then, and he said,
“Look, I'd love to have you work with me,”
and at that point, then I went to Berkeley, and he went to Frankfurt, and
my thought was to go back to the opera, but also maybe to do some work with him,
so it took me until, I think 1986, so from 1983 to '86 I was at Berkeley,
then from '86 I got a grant to go back to Frankfurt,
when the work on the *Ring* was starting to happen,

CEC: Yes.

DL: to work on the *Ring*,
with Sam Weber and Klaus Zehelein and Ruth Berghaus and of course, the other members of
that team who are now... really interesting people, but also to work with Bill Forsythe, which I
did, and so...

CEC: And... just let me interrupt...
how long did you stay, then?
So you went back, did you say in '86?

DL: '86, in the fall of '86,
and I was there through January of '88.

CEC: Through January of '88.

DL: So a year and a half.

CEC: And, um, not that titles matter, exactly,
in the theater, but what was there a title?

DL: Yeah, actually...
and in Germany, actually, I think it totally matters!

CEC: Oh, in Germany it matters!
Of course!

Although there's so much overlap, in my experience working at the house, too,
I've also been working in Dramaturgy,
and there's so much flow and overlap in who's doing what work,
in my experience anyway.

DL: Well, I was,

DL: ...and I'm not sure,

I probably could find, I would love to find my contract,

because I had a contract with the opera house, when I started. I was a *Hospitant* (intern)

I know that because I had a contract as a *Hospitant*, I remember that.

When I came back for the time from '86 – '88, I remember this was somewhat tricky,

and this may be something that you have experienced as well, as one who has benefited from the
largess of granting institutions, I was on a, as I recall,

a DAAD fellowship at the time, and it was a relatively unusual arrangement, because I had
applied to work both at the University with Sam Weber, doing gender studies and film studies,
but also to work at the opera.

So we had to find a way whereby it was gonna be kosher for me to be receiving money from
the—you know, because the DAAD is a German governmental agency—

receiving money from the German government, but I couldn't double dip, you know...
by two governmental agencies. So I know that I had...
or it's my recollection, in any case, that I had a contract that said,
because I'm a Stipendiat of the DAAD,
while I am under contract with the Frankfurt opera, I will be doing...
at least this is my recollection, anyway,
I will do work at the Oper Frankfurt, but I won't be paid for it,
for the work that I'd be doing.
So it was part of my grant, the money..yeah, anyway.
So I think my title, and the program books would actually tell us this, I think,
because I was listed in the program books as *Mitarbeiter der Produktion*.

CEC: Yes, I saw your name as *Mitarbeit* in something
in one of them.
Walküre, maybe? I have to look.

DL: I wasn't there for *Rheingold* and *Walküre*
so it must have been later. *Siegfried* or *Götterdämmerung*

CEC: Then it must have been *Siegfried*.

DL: During that period, I also then did a production
actually I did two productions with Bill Forsythe,
and I think..
though those program books I definitely have,
I think I was listed as *Dramaturg* or *Konzeption*
my responsibility was, I was a conceptual collaborator.
The idea was to develop a concept for a piece
when I was working with Bill Forsythe.
I mean at the time, I would say that my work was as a collaborator and dramaturg.
And my work was with Ruth Berghaus was both for Klaus Zehelein in the dramaturgy
department, as an assistant, and for Ruth Berghaus was as

CEC:... anything she needed.

DL: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

CEC: I'm sorry, not to put words into your mouth!

DL: She had, well, there was a major structural difference
between the work that we did on *Parsifal*, where there were a couple of us
who worked with her as assistants on the production,
And the work she did on the *Ring*, where she brought Martin Schüler,
who was a *Meisterschüler der Akademie der Künste* (graduate student at the Academy of the
Arts in Berlin) with her at the time.
He has since developed a career as a director in his own right.
But the experience that the other assistants and I, at least some of them and I had, was that she
came with a personal security detail, Schüler's job seemed to be as much to served as an

intermediary between us and her as it was to actually work on the, to do the creative collaboration on the production.

CEC: I'd love to ask a question about that.
And this is what I love about this kind of interview,
is that we just throw things in as they come up.
What do you mean, then, "as intermediary?" Why?
Why does she need an intermediary?
What needed mediating?
That kind of thing.

DL: Again, I mean, obviously,
this is very much my recollection, and if you spoke with Sabine Loew,
who worked on both productions, as well as the *Ring*,
Klaus Zehelein, of course, but Zehelein had less of a sense of this because,
he wasn't in the rehearsal room at the time,
he was often in the rehearsal room, but, in terms of rank,
he had parity to Ruth Berghaus, whereas the assistants certainly did not...
Look, I would say, there's a diplomatic answer to this, and I don't know,
a less diplomatic answer to this. I think in 1982 Ruth Berghaus was more open
to the sort of **contestation** in the rehearsal room.
She was—I would even say she was more secure. And because she was more secure
—even though I know this is a paradoxical formation—
she was more open to the give and take, so basically, after every rehearsal, this is my
recollection, for *Parsifal*, we all would go out for dinner,
and we would all talk about the rehearsal we had just had, and plan the next rehearsal, and there
was a great sense of University of Chicago...
(brief interruption by his son)...
there was a kind of culture of contestation,
and I think the experience of the rehearsal process in Frankfurt with Ruth Berghaus in the early
1980s was very much that spirit of contestation. Like, the best ideas will win out,
and everyone and anyone is available...*(more with his son)*

(Skype disconnect, reconnect)

DL: So it seemed like in the 1980s, Ruth Berghaus was total committed to having as much input
from her team as possible.
When she came back from 1986 to '88, maybe because it was such a massive project, I don't
know, but maybe because of the political situation,

CEC: Right.

DL: which is to say... it felt to me like she had a handler.
Martin Schüler felt like a handler.
He felt like a private security detail.
The way we referred to him was as her personal Berlin Wall.
Her own personal *antifaschistische Schutzmauer*. (Anti-fascist protective wall).
So like, if we wanted to talk to her, we basically had to apply to him to talk to her.

It felt to me like it was a completely different situation.
So you know, I don't know whether, for instance...
Sabine and I had both worked on *Parsifal*. She definitely acutely felt that difference.
Whereas someone like Sergio...

CEC: Sergio Morabito.

DL: Right. He had not worked on the *Parsifal*,
So I don't know that he would characterize it that way.
This is all to say, this is my impression, coming from my history.
Having collaborated to the... it's overstated to say "collaborated"
but having worked on a team with Berghaus on *Parsifal*,
it felt very different. So eventually, in the course of *Götterdämmerung*,
I left the production team, and just worked with the dramaturgy, with Klaus Zehelein,
because I just found it uninteresting.
I wasn't really interested in just watching her rehearsal process.
If I wasn't going to be an active collaborator, you know, again, within the bounds of being an
assistant. But still... and you know, I actually wrote a letter to her, of protest, about this, and
gave it to her, in a hubristic... I mean, who the hell did I think I was? Really, oh my God.
And I'm sure... I don't know what I wrote in that letter,
I probably could find it, although I don't know if I could find it,
and I'm sure I would be horrified. What a little pretentious... I was...

(both laughing)

CEC: If you ever were to find it,
I would be terribly interested to read it,
if you would share, but if you don't, understood...

DL: I actually,
let me just make a note to myself, because I would be interested,
and I'm sure my wife and kids would be **really** interested to see this.

(both laughing again)

DL: Right.

CEC: We'll take this second, actually,
I didn't think we'd be here so fast,
but it does actually get right to the heart of some issues
that I'm wanting to discuss, that I am discussing.
And it's... Ruth Berghaus and the process of collaboration.
This has been so oft discussed, about,
well, both the work process of the Gielen Era productions at the Oper Frankfurt,
CEC: and also just discussed with the nature of her work,
and that it's... that it was radical in its collaborative nature.
Or that has been said,
and it was also mentioned by Pamela when I met with her,
and I am not here to necessarily dispute it or not dispute it,
but I'd like to pick apart this notion,

and consider how it was true and how it was not true.
And I'd just generally be interested in your thoughts.

DL: Um, look.

To have a couple of twenty-two year old kids
in your rehearsal room in the 1980s,
I'm now talking about *Parsifal*, and invite them to be,
along with Axel Manthey and Klaus Zehelein and Michael Gielen,
to invite them to be active contributors to the team,
I think reflects the utopian spirit, the project of the DDR, at its word.
That we're all in it together and we're all working for the same thing,
and there was a spirit of radicalism in that.
I feel like, from '86 – '88, what she was doing on the *Ring*, again, for, it's very hard for me to
know, because, whatever, I was twenty-five years old.
I mean, what the hell did I know? But it felt very different, and I guess, you know, like,
my guess is she was under extreme pressure, whatever.
This was going to be, Michael Gielen's farewell, it was the last production of an enormously
important era in opera production.
I think she was... the political situation was such that, she had to deal with a lot of resistance,
like, from stage hands, you'd go into the *Kantine* (Cantina), and...

CEC: What kind of resistance?

DL: Like, "You're a communist!"

CEC: Political, personal, philosophical...

DL: Yeah! She was here as *Gast aus der DDR* (guest from the GDR)
I mean, I think that's a very, very difficult situation. In both directions.
I think, like everybody in the DDR apparatus, she was a privileged representative,
but what did that mean? I mean how much supervision was she subject to?
And she was doing radical work in the context of the **West**!
I mean, I think Peter Konwitschny would be an interesting person to talk to about this
She was under, I think, enormous pressure...
pressure from the East and pressure from the West.
So that she didn't necessarily have as much time for the little 25 year old assistant,
and that she brought along a *Meisterschüler* from the DDR,
I can imagine a hundred reasons why she would have done so.
It's a massive project, I think you would need an assistant, anyway.
Let alone, there's so much to navigate. In the production, culturally, institutionally,
look, this kind of thing happens.
I though Ruth Berghaus... she was not a touchy-feely kind of person,
but she had integrity, and she was a very direct person, and a person of ...

DL: I think she was very serious. But you know,
Anyone who is under a tremendous amount of pressure, you get impatient,
and you get impatient with anyone and everyone, including yourself.
I think it was Martin Schüler's job to protect her from all of this:

the difficulties, the complexities, the institutional and political pressures, and just the difficulties of managing the day-to-day of this massive tetralogy.

CEC: What about *Konzeption*?

What about the idea of other people having been involved in integral elements of the productions? Do you feel that it really all came from her? I mean, of course some of it's coming from Axel and some of it's coming from others, in their particular areas, but I get the sense that with *Parsifal*, from what you've said, it was actually more... open to development, conceptually, from other people as well. Did it seem to be that she came with very pre-formed ideas to the *Ring* process and that that didn't change? Did... was it different?

DL: That's a great question...

and I don't think I'm qualified to answer it.

I think that there are others who are.

Sam Weber, for instance, would be a person to ask about that because he was integral to the conceptualization of the project and my sense is, he came and left the project,

I'm not sure if that recollection is correct, but my recollection is that...

and I just need to underscore that I'm not totally sure that this is correct...

CEC: Ok, it's your impression.

DL: ...much along the lines that you're describing.

That he was contributing to what would be a dynamic process,

and when he was in the rehearsals, or in the process itself, then he found that the process itself was not dynamic in ways that he had hoped and imagined.

Now I wasn't there for *Rheingold*, and I wasn't there for *Walküre*, so I can't say.

CEC: I may approach Sam Weber. (*thinking*)

DL: You know, and he is a very approachable guy,

So did I...I'm not sure that what I'm describing is, like.

It didn't feel to me like she wasn't experimenting in the rehearsal room,

it didn't feel like she was inflexible in the work she was doing in the rehearsal room, what it felt like was the access of the lower rungs of the hierarchy.

All the sudden, it felt like there was a hierarchy in the room... and there was!

And, therefore, we couldn't speak up. Our access was managed,

and the channels of access were managed, and therefore, like, it's not like she wasn't creative, or that process wasn't enormously interesting to observe.

But it was that I felt like my role was not that of a collaborator.

DL: It was that of a spectator on her process. And I, in my hubris, instead of recognizing how important and educational that would have been...

And I think that's what Michael Gielen's point was, he was like "Ok, so you're no longer like a collaborator? You've still got a lot to learn."

So he was, like, "turn the other cheek!"

She was yelling at a lot of us a lot of the time.

And you know, it's the assistant's job to make it work! She's not going to yell at the singers. So she yelled at us.

I sort of felt like, "Hey! We're getting yelled at all the time, but there's no dialogue here.

It's a monologue." I mean, it's not that we can't shout back.

But there's not a real conversation happening here.

I felt like, "I'm not really that interested in that kind of relationship."

So I walked away. And I went to the dramaturgy program, where Klaus and Sergio and Sabine and Juliane, which was super exciting and interesting. So I was like, ok. I was going to do this for maybe the last three weeks of the production, and then I'm going to go work with Bill Forsythe. And that's what I did.

CEC: Ok.

I'd love to link...

This one chapter is definitely on Berghaus and the *Ring*, but of course, in the context of the whole dissertation, this is one segment of several different things that I'm talking about, with respect to the Gielen era, in this part of the dissertation.

I'm curious as to how you feel Berghaus's work fits into the overall tone of the Gielen Era

because she is so oft discussed when this era is discussed.

Of course she was there as *Gastregisseurin*, although she was frequently there, and certainly therefore had some influence she was not a permanent member of the house.

I'm curious—of course, I know your position, from what you are telling me—but perhaps you can say how much her direction and her tone was in parallel or in sync with that of Zehelein and also Michael Gielen.

To what extent it was similar, and to what extent it was different, to be more direct.

DL: Yeah (*nodding*)

Please interrupt me if this isn't helpful.

I feel like Zehelein and Gielen were interested in experimentation, and in a kind of heterogeneity of experimentation.

So they invited Renate Ackermann when there were not a lot of women directing opera and her productions were also the first productions that, oh my...

my Alzheimer's takes the form of never being able to remember names of collaborators, and I always forget her name. But, pretty much the most important contemporary set designer (*Anna Viebrock*) who went to Zürich, who

CEC: I know who you're talking about, too, and unfortunately I can't remember either.

DL: We'll get back to it when we remember...

DL: she started her career in Frankfurt in opera, at least as I recall, and, which is to say, I think they were introducing people to opera who had never done opera, they were encouraging theater directors and experimentally inclined fields to come and work in opera, so the set designer on the *Trojaner*, was an architect! There was a sense that experimentation, that opera required and deserved a spirit of creative unrest. And therefore they were going to invite all kinds of voices, comedic and tragic and theatrical and, heterogeneity would be the rubric under which I would organize these, this sense of experimentation. And I think Ruth Berghaus, given the prominence... she was then given major productions, and I feel like the spirit... she was a very strong voice. But she was also a very serious, and I think a deeply collaborative voice and I was... I think thanks to my privileged relationship to knowing Michael Gielen as a family friend, and Pamela Rosenberg as a family friend, I was privy to lunches and dinners, private lunches and dinners with Axel Manthey and Klaus Zehelein and Pamela and Ruth Berghaus at the Gielen's place, and I think she was... and those were extremely interesting discussions. I feel like... you know, it was as if they were equals, and they were engaged in a kind of radical experiment together. I think some of the productions she did were more interesting than others, but I think that's always going to be true. The house was interested in cultivating a variety of voices, including prominently hers, but certainly not exclusively hers. And so, Alfred Kirchner's aesthetic is so different, and Marco Morelli's and Renate Ackermann, I think they were keen not on having a single aesthetic, but on cultivating a series of strong profiles, and hers was certainly one of them. *(pause)*

CEC: So particularly in this period of time,
or Oper Frankfurt in this period of time,
has been cast by a number of people
as an influential house in an influential period.
and that it set the tone for much of the work that followed,
in Germany and elsewhere, in the years to follow, since that time.
Do you agree that...
well, first of all, do you agree with that statement, and in what sense?
And do you think that it is just in the nature of the artistic product, that it is the case,
if it is the case?
Or do you also feel that it might have had something to do with
the work style which was created there?

DL: Hm. I'm not sure I understand that last question.

CEC: Ok, let me try to ask it again.

(pause, personal conversation on DL's side)

DL: I think the first point, ... so, to the first point, I would certainly agree, if you look at the reviews especially of the early part of the Gielen era, if you look at some of the productions, it was clearly a transition that they were attempting to affect, from an more or less conventional ... an inherited sense of what opera production should be, to a much more experimental sense of what it could be and might be. And the reviews sometimes, and the response of the audience, was extremely hostile. You know, I wasn't there for it, but I knew people who were of the *Entführung*, where this famous line: "eine Kommunistin inszeniert, ein Jude dirigiert, und eine Schwarze singt die Konstanze." (A communist is staging, a Jew is directing, and a black woman is singing Konstanze.) It felt like culture wars. And I feel like, those were ... I mean it was not pleasant to be around. And then eventually it turned. The way it does. And it became a point of pride, instead of ... I mean, there were a lot of people who were really pissed off. There were a lot of angry letters, and a lot of pressure, to, like, "What the hell, we had our beautiful opera—what happened to our beautiful opera?" So I feel like a lot of people came to opera to see what was going on, and I feel like it was enormously influential. I mean, if you look at the careers of the people who were there, and the influence that they had, but also the careers of the directors that they hired, and the breaks that they gave to those people who went on ... Anna Viebrock! That's the set designer. She got her break, at least, ... and it would be easy enough to research, but you know Anna Viebrock was nobody, and now, whatever, there are a lot of people, whose work was enormously influenced by Frankfurt, who then in turn went on to have enormous influence in the world of opera production. I think ... so I don't dispute, I think I would rather endorse the importance of the work being done there. But the second question—and I'm not sure I understand it—

CEC: I probably said it in a slightly convoluted way,
Because I'm at 11pm—sorry.
I think I'm going to ask it in a different way:
Would you differentiate between
—maybe this is the more fundamental question—
from the artistic, interpretive elements of productions as seen on stage in the productions, in the theater, as they were done at that time ...
would you separate out that artistic content
from the manner in which that work was put together.
I see these as two different things.
There's the construction process, the creative process,

that goes into building the production, and the production that is experienced.

What most of the world engages with is the work as performed.

But of course, that is influenced by the manner in which it is prepared, and put together.

And so, the question is referring to the Gielen Era and what was so unusual.

CEC: Was it just the intellectual, artistic, interpretive innovations,
or was it also how these things were put together,
how they were brought about?

DL: Well, I'm still not sure

if I total understand it...I'm not sure if this is going to be helpful.

But I feel like, what they did that was different, like, what constituted the Frankfurt signature, if we could call it that, is a sense that...you know...

Whereas other houses were conceiving of their project as

getting star singers or presenting particular works—the most important thing is getting Placido Domingo! So what does Placido Domingo want to sing? Let's do that!

Or... we're interested in doing French repertoire, so, I don't know

there's something that Gluck did...let's do that!— I think that's how houses operated!

Or “we need to do three Verdis, two Mozart, and a Puccini and a Wagner.”

Let's just fill in the slots and go about business as usual!

The difference as I understand it... and I'm worrying that I'm not answering your question... my impression is, the difference in Frankfurt is Zehelein as the head dramaturg was not just part of the conversation, but was absolutely central to the conversation.

And therefore, the program planning was conceptual! It wasn't just repertoire or singers.

But rather, it was, “What are we doing? What are the kinds of interventions we are imagining?”

And so the project of the house, as Gielen and Pamela Rosenberg and Klaus Zehelein, I mean as, I feel like, as they conceived it, was to intervene in the machinery and radically rethink it.

And I think the political constellation in Frankfurt, namely, that Gielen created this group that was making decisions, rather than acting as the dictator,

and making things on the basis of musical considerations only,

I think that was structurally very unusual, and I think

the choice of repertoire, the choice of directors, the choice of singers

their commitment to a young ensemble, all of those seemed to reflect

that political gambit that they took, that this is going to be a house that is going to be co-directed by a dramaturg. It was like, well who's ever done...

when I got to Bremen, to work with Marco Marelli, the dramaturgy department was basically irrelevant!

I thought the dramaturgy department ruled the world!

They were up on the same level —literally, on the same level—

as the director and music director.

Architecturally as well as politically.

CEC: That's changed architecturally,

but in terms of the working hierarchy, it's still absolutely true.

DL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

You know, I will say that I attribute a lot of that to Klaus Zehelein's ...you know, intelligence, imagination, and tenacity. He was ferocious!

And Gielen was tough enough to take it. Talk about a culture of contestation. I feel like they argued, like Pamela Rosenberg, and Zehelein, they fought tooth and nail. It was welcome. That was part of the project.

CEC: You've absolutely answered my question.

DL: Oh, good!

CEC: I'm sorry if I asked it in a totally convoluted way. In any case, we got to the right place. Wonderful. Ahem, I would like to jump a little bit, I think..

DL: And we should probably wrap this up relatively soon, I would think, just because... And we can then continue, whenever!

CEC: That's great, actually,

(End of Interview 1)

David Levin Interview #2

September 15, 2015

CEC: ...So, we covered tons last time, actually, which was really great. I do have a standard list of questions, so I went through, and I thought, yes, there are a few things we haven't covered, so we'll just dive in.

DL: Ok, cool!

CEC: We talked a lot about your background last time, and about Berghaus, and about how you got to Frankfurt, and interactions with the company. I'd love to speak a little more specifically, not just to Berghaus, but to the whole process, a little bit, of how things unfolded.

And I'm wondering about your experience of the production period. I know you've done a lot of other work since then, so you're familiar with how things are in Frankfurt and how they are other places.

First question is: Would you say that the rehearsal period, or the production process that you were involved in for the Berghaus *Ring* was different that others you had been involved with before, around that time period. I usually say beforehand, but I'm not sure how much you'd done prior to that point.

DL: I had! I had done a bunch, because the *Ring* was in my second group of Frankfurt...

CEC: Of course! (*nodding*) That's true.

DL: But what I would say is that... let's try to get the temporality clear, just for my mind. Like, I had only worked in Frankfurt with one exception. That is in '83, I went to Bremen and did this production of *Turandot*. But otherwise all of my experiences were in Frankfurt, and so, the comparison at that point—since then I've worked in other houses-- to that point, my only comparison would only have been to other productions in Frankfurt. So...

CEC: I'd love to hear about both, actually.

I'd love to hear both comparison within Frankfurt at the time,
and then also that point, to other houses.

DL: Right. And, tell me, when you say, the rehearsal period...?

CEC: I mean the whole production period,
from essentially start to opening, to premiere.

DL: And so I hope it won't be too flaky of me to say,
I think there were some important similarities,
and important differences. I think the Frankfurt house understood itself as
extremely serious in whatever it undertook.
So, if it was going to undertake, a comedy, it was going to be done with all possible resources,
be they conceptual, institutional, intellectual, creative,
I think there was a sense of this being a laboratory for the revolution,
and that everything was being watched with a sort of an eagle eye
by cultural politicians, I mean literally, by people who were going to give money or not,
by the press, as well as their audience.
And maybe most importantly, by their colleagues in the world of opera production.
But irrespective of who was looking, I think there was a sense
in which their own critical facilities and inclinations were such that
they were setting for themselves, and by them, I mean
Gielen, Zehelein, Pamela Rosenberg...
it felt that they were...and I use them as *stellvertretend* (in place of) for the whole house.
I mean there was a very real sense of...
a kind of missionary zeal to what they were doing.
Ok, so, I think the Berghaus *Ring* was clearly a culmination of that spirit,
so in that sense, it felt like it was a continuation,
but also because it was a culmination, because it was going to be,
it was going to mark the conclusion of Gielen's era,
and because...it was the revolution to top the revolution, right?
If the idea was this was permanent revolution because
someone of them—and for sure Ruth Berghaus—understood themselves as engaged in the
revolution, or institutional revolution, then this idea of having Ruth Berghaus
do the *Ring*, and the position paper that Klaus Zehelein developed for it,
which involved a sort of fundamental contestation of the notion of, or the commitment to,
seamlessness, wholeness, and the *gesamt*-ness of the ideology of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,
to challenge that, to create a production that had at its core
a contestation of the ideological underpinnings of the *Ring*,

CEC: Because it's so fragmented?

DL: Yeah, because of
Ruth Berghaus's Brechtian inclinations and Brechtian training,
I mean, I think there was a sense that they had that this was going to be,

it was going to be a very, a *Ring* that after Chéreau in '76, would fundamentally change the way we understand the project of the *Ring* and its aspirations, and its contemporaneity. So, that meant that it was, if all productions are special, and if a parent loves all of its offspring, this was a special offspring, and so I think... in material terms, as we discussed last time is that, I think one of the obvious differences in the rehearsal process was this sense like that Ruth Berghaus needed a handler.

That Martin Schüller was at her beck and call at all times.

So I mean it's, like, you know...

DL: when you are an assistant professor and you start teaching, and then you become a full professor and you have three research assistant and four TAs, five people to grade the papers, and I think, as a result, the relationship we experience is a different one.

Even if you remain very excited about it, and I feel like this was a massive undertaking, and I think the house was very cognizant of it being a massive undertaking, and I think Ruth Berghaus was cognizant of it, and the rest of us were cognizant of it. Of the seriousness of the project, and I think the pressure was enormous. And the sense of excitement was similarly extraordinary.

CEC: Do you have more, let me pull it back a little bit to the question again, away from Berghaus, other than the fact that she had this, mediator, basically, between herself and the rest of the creative team, or the cast as well, can you describe what other details you may remember being different about the process? Were there differences in timing, in phases, where things were rehearsed, the amount of input others had in the process?

DL: Well, look.

CEC: I know it's a long time ago.

DL: I just want to encourage you to interrupt me at any point, if we need to get back on topic.

CEC: No, it's ok... that's all relevant, what you said, but I just want to pull it to other details.

DL: Um, I don't recall...

Let me put it positively. My recollection is that there were not significant differences in the production circumstances of the *Ring*. Which is to say, Frankfurt had established early on an enormously generous rehearsal period, an enormously generous preparation process, which meant production meetings **way** in advance for the creative time, and you know, I think Ruth Berghaus... so my recollection is that the conditions had been amazingly generous and they remained amazingly generous.

CEC: So they weren't substantially more generous, or less, even.

DL: You know,

Pamela Rosenberg would know this better than I did.
Because she was, of course, intimately involved in the *Dispositionsgespräche* about... whereas I, at the time, was a, you know, whatever, I came from the outside, I wasn't there for the whole Ring cycle, but I only came for *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*,
And then therefore I think that Sergio and Sabine Loew, who were there for the whole production process, have better information for you than I do.
But my recollection.. that having been said, and those are real caveats...
my recollection is that it was...really generous, and still really generous,
but still rehearsed on the *Probebühnen* in the house,
it was part of the regular rehearsal machinery of the house.
It wasn't like we had a special castle that we all lived in,
or anything like that.

CEC: Well you never know!
You do experience some differences,
at least, from my experience, for example,
you certainly notices between some premieres and other premieres slightly,
here and there,
between who's getting more time on this *Probebühne* or that *Probebühne*,
how much of the set is actually there on the *Probebühne* and when,
When the whole cast is there, when they're absent, things like that.
But if those things aren't popping into your head,
then there may not have been any significant ones.
Or I can check with Sergio and Sabine.

DL: I do feel like one thing to keep in mind is,
and you know this better than I do. The participants were at the top of their games, and the top of their careers. So, Axel Manthey...
it feels to me like all of them had assistants, where previously maybe they didn't have...
or something like that. It's conceivable that not just Ruth Berghaus had...
but you know, Klaus Zehelein had —we were a **team** of dramaturgs!
Assistant dramaturgs that were with Klaus...and Juliane Votteler
was one of them, who's now intendant in Augsburg, and Sergio, and me,
and Ralph Waldschmidt, who's now, I think, t the Staatsoper,
which is to say, it's this sort of all-start cast...and those are just the assistants!
I mean, it was sort of amazing, and I think Pamela would know,
You know, I'm spacing out now,
am I right to recall that Axel was the designer for the *Ring*?

CEC: Yes, yes.

DL: I'm not, totally...

CEC: No, no, no! You're right.
I would have jumped in and said something.

DL: And as I recall,
he always had excellent, like **really** excellent assistants.
Highly professional. And my recollection is that...

that the assistants that he had for this were extremely good.
But that's not helping us, really.

I think for *Parsifal* they were lower level, but also very good.

CEC: Yeah, so,
let's spin it in another direction now,
since I'm actually writing about the house in this period,
and not just about the *Ring*.
Even if the *Ring* is a quintessential example, you might say,
of what was going on in the period.

I am curious about the production period in comparison to your experiences elsewhere,
you mentioned another *Turandot*,
also, other houses since then.

DL: Ok, yeah. Look, so...

I think it's sort of like if you grow up in Lichtenstein or Kuwait,

DL: ...and you think,

all people are wealthy, and content, which is to say,

I started my career in... trying to imagine a house that would be dramaturgically driven, sort of theoretical engagement with the material, and determination to rethink the material was paramount, and I searched out the Frankfurt opera as a sort of utopian experiment for that project!

So I sort of figured, having grown up there, you know, that that's what was happening!

So when I got to Bremen to work with Marco Arturo Marelli, who had been the designer on the production of *Ballo in Maschera*, the fall of when I got there.

That was the Alfred Kirchner production in the 1982 season.

Anyway, he had been engaged to do a production of *Turandot* in Bremen, and when we got to Bremen, we had... it was a very young group of us working with him.

And we had some really inspired and off-the-wall ideas, about *Turandot* as an allegory about the collapse of opera,

a sort of fundamental allegory of the piece is the inability to reconcile

what had become hyperbolically oppositional figures of the tenor and the soprano.

And as we know, Puccini dies unable to finish it, so we wanted to do a production that renders that allegory in historical terms, we set it in a bombed out opera house.

And this is 1983, so the Bremen public, which I think was used to their theater--

if I'm not mistaken, Bremen had become a kind of hotbed of theatrical innovation.

But the opera house had not been so inclined. And the house was like "what?"

"You want to, what? Like really, what? Do we have to?"

You know, I kind of felt like the consensus that had been hard-won in Frankfurt,

the same is true of Bill Forsythe when he came to the ballet, they lost 75% of their subscribers! I mean, he had to basically build it up from scratch.

When Gielen started, there was a lot of disquiet. And the public was not happy.

And eventually, by the time of the Berghaus *Ring*, all of Europe was coming to Frankfurt.

But that was a ten-year process, and I feel like I walked in when the consensus had already been formed, and therefore in Frankfurt, there was a sense of

"This is how we do what we do, this is how we roll," and they were rolling!

Whereas in Bremen, the dramaturg was more like an American dramaturg, press relations and outreach, and education and... there was certainly no sense that that dramaturg, at the opera house in Bremen, I mean, he was phoning it in, he could not have been... The rest of us were like, fresh from the front, and all we wanted to do was talk about imagined productions, what we would do. And this guy was like, whatever. I just want to go home and kick back. And this was not a kick back group. And Frankfurt was... my God, it was 24-7, it was obsessive, I guess, is the way to put it. And I thought, like, friends who then went to other theaters and you know, would report that this was the exception. And we figured that we were the rule! Done! And then, you know... working at Lyric Opera of Chicago, which I did much more recently, the dramaturg is not in the rehearsal room at the Lyric Opera. You know it's like the American model for this is... I think it's changing!

DL: But certainly back then, it was very, very different. Dramaturgs were maybe program annotators, or they would help maybe with historical context, but that was... So you know, the experience—And now, most recently I was at the Bayerische Staatsoper, and there the group of dramaturgs are... it's like what to some extent started in Frankfurt has now become doxa. Radical productions are the norm! I think the discussions among the dramaturgs in Munich sound to me like familiar discussions. Whereas previously, Frankfurt was an isolated outpost, and I think for the most part it was, but it has trickled down such that the culture of opera production in Germany, and most of Europe, there's much more of a consensus about the need for a kind of critical engagement and for... in the sense that opera as a vital art form needs to be continuously rethought. But I think that conviction was, if it wasn't born in Frankfurt, it was certainly reshaped and refined in Frankfurt.

CEC: Total spontaneous question—
Why do you think Frankfurt?

DL: Hm.

CEC: Just your opinion!
There are lots of takes on this.

DL: Yeah, yeah, yeah!
You know look, I think it's like with almost all of these things, I imagine it's a combination of luck and determination, which is to say, the cultural officer, who I think was Hilmar Hoffmann,

CEC: Yes.

DL: ...was responsible for hiring Michael Gielen, was willing basically to take that chance. And Gielen was a visionary, and you don't necessarily know these things, but it turned out that... you had...

I mean, it's the same thing with Bill Forsythe!
You had... why did Bill Forsythe end up in Frankfurt?
And he stayed! He had offers to go anywhere, to take over New York City Ballet,
and he wanted to stay in Frankfurt, in part because rehearsal conditions...
And now, to get back to the Frankfurt opera,
it's both on the radar and it's under the radar.
You have enough time, you have an ensemble that is dedicated and present,
so if you have an 11-week rehearsal process, you have singers available to you
for 11 weeks. That's inconceivable, right?
And now, in Munich, maybe they have six weeks or seven weeks, but the difference between six
week and ten or eleven weeks is a big difference.
So you had the ensemble, where the singers are really good,
but they weren't always on the road,
they were present and there was an ensemble, and you could work with people.
You had the time, and then you had this amazing constellation of personalities,
that is, that Gielen had Zehelein and Pamela Rosenberg.
It just so happened that they knew... that the synergies of their commitment was such that... it
was possible not just to inaugurate a revolution,
DL: ...but then to continue to rethink and refine it,
with support of the city. Which is to say, the cultural apparatus,
the political apparatus of the city, to allow this sort of experimentation amidst,
I think vociferous protests from Wagner stalwarts. But not just that.

CEC: Could I stop you right there to inject a question.
I'd like to know if you have any specific memories related to
that sort of resistance?
Either to this piece or to other pieces.

DL: I do.
I mean the famous one is the one that everybody talked about...
we may have talked about it last time.
Which is around Berghaus's production of the *Entführung*.
Where at the premiere, there was... I mean, there was...
This is before crowdsourcing, when cabals had to be organized in much more cumbersome
ways! Where a guy stood up at the premiere
—and you'll have to ask Zehelein or Pamela about this, cause they were there—
but got up with her whistles and said:
“*ein Jude dirigiert, eine Kommunistin inszeniert, und eine Schwarze singt die Konstanze, das ist
eine Schweinerei.*” (a Jew is conducting, a communist is staging, and a black woman is singing
Konstanze, this is a disgrace!)
And I think that sense... I mean, in this country, that is in the United States we speak of culture
wars. But that was, I mean, I think the sense of that...
of an institution being embattled, I think was palpable, I mean people were pissed off!

When we were in rehearsals for Parsifal, and... you know I think a lot of the members of the Chorus, in particular, resented being directed by a, as she was officially known, a "Guest" from the DDR.

And certainly were extraordinarily resentful of the notion that an atheist socialist would be directing a production of this most sacred of Wagner's works.

And I think some of them saw it as such.

So I think they found her directing,

which involved the kind of ritual suitcases that they had to put down,

it was all very ritualistic, but I think a number of them felt like

opening up these suitcases and taking these things out with a kind of reverence and care,

I think they felt like she was making fun of Wagner.

Which I think is completely wrong. There was no evidence to support that, except a kind of dunderheaded realism, which said, well why we are carrying suitcases, this has nothing to do with Wagner.

And that kind of literalism in 1982-83 was still certainly in play,

and they there were a number of occasions where they were like "No...way. No way."

CEC: The chorus?

DL: Members of the chorus.

And you know the stories in Frankfurt around Hans Neuenfels

and the production of *Aida*, I think Hans Neuenfels thrived...

and arguably still thrives on that kind of opposition.

DL: And at the time, it wasn't at all clear that he was going to win,

but there was a sense of both attacking the audience and taking on chorus or...

and even members of the cast, yeah.

(*pause*) with *Aida* in particular.

Others.. you know, I think part of it is personality.

You know... Alfred Kirchner is a really sweet guy...so even if he was doing crazy...

I don't think people were inclined to, you know, to declare war on him!

He was such a sweet guy. But he was doing crazy stuff, and you know...

I think part of it was the sense of battle was somewhat personality driven, understandably.

Ruth Berghaus was not a relaxed person,

but I think part of it was also the fact that people were like,

don't mess with my sacred culture!

CEC: I mean we're talking about

the pinnacle of German culture in the *Ring*.

It is the epitome in so many ways, absolutely.

If something is going to cause *Aufregung* (agitation), it's going to be that!

Yeah...

DL: Great, right.

CEC: Understood.

So, then thinking about...primarily **audience** reactions this time,

not chorus reactions,

was thinking about the audience, from the inside a part of the process?

Well I guess this can go in two direction.
Was thinking about anticipated audience reaction a part of the process at all,
that you remember?
And...the second piece to this question is,
as the cycle went on, was there discussion of actual audience reaction,
press reception reaction,
in how future elements were planned?

DL: (*thinking*)

No, in general,
and we're talking now specifically in the *Ring* productions?

CEC: I'm talking now
about the *Ring* particularly, yes.

DL: I remember one instance where
where there was a discussion around
you know the scene between Hagen and Alberich where
essentially the question was,
if Alberich is sort of hanging out, how is he hanging out?
Just like...because the scene opens, and Hagen comes upon him,
what does it just mean for him to be on the scene?
And Berghaus's idea was that he's sitting there reading a newspaper.
He's just sitting there, because that would be an instance where somebody would be sitting, and
otherwise occupied.

Such that, you know, you're reading, you don't notice that somebody's coming upon you,
DL: and there was a big discussion at that point which included a consideration of the audience,
where the conversation took the form of,
"Well if you do that, you're historically circumscribing the time, the represented time of the
production."

That is, in a production that otherwise was hedging its bets, historically,
all the sudden, we're in a real where somebody would be reading a newspaper!
In a culture as well as time period, so...
and then you would have to figure out what kind of print there would be
on such a newspaper. Is it old German script, or

CEC: It suddenly makes it very specific.

DL: Yeah! So I should also back up and say,
fundamentally and basically, Zehelein, Gielen,
and in this case Ruth Berghaus were not interested in pandering.
That is, I think they were interested in cultivating a new and different audience for opera
than the audience that they had inherited.
And audience that, like them, was committed to opera not as a form of recycling familiarity, but
rather propagating new ideas about... and thus, I think they had a sense that these cultural
objects, like all complex cultural objects, they were Adorno-esque in that sense, are documents
of contestation and not of consensus.
And therefore, because what they were doing was fundamentally contestatory,

they were not preoccupied, as, say, the house in Bremen was! with pleasing their audience. I think they (Frankfurt) had a sense that their responsibility as artists was to formulate as rigorously and as cogently as possible an... a vision of opera that was adequate to the genre, and to their revision of the genre.

Rather than replicating what everybody already believed!

So, I feel like audience...

I mean I think they were interested in the extent and the way in which, the extent to which and the manner in which their productions expressed thinking cogently.

But they were very, very rarely were they inclined to incorporate to that thinking a consideration of, well, "Will our audience like it?" Or "Will our audience get it?"

"Will our audience...will this offend them?"

CEC: So that was not a piece of it?
and it's also not the reverse?

Because that's what I found myself wondering when you were talking,
was...was there a consideration of...

ok, this may be deliberately a provocation against what the anticipated reaction will be.
If indeed this is a revolutionary project.

DL: (*nodding, understanding.*)

Yeah. Well, I think, that too depending on production team.

It depending on the production team. Like, I think Neuenfels understood himself.

There are *Spiegel* interviews from the period in which he is firebrand and he's at war with the conservative audience that he... and I think he still more or less is!

Um, and I don't think that Ruth Berghaus...that that was her intention!

DL: I mean I think she would have been delighted to be super popular,
but she was not going to compromise her aesthetic vision for the purposes of popularity.

I just... I don't know if she was capable of it.

And Gielen certainly wasn't, and Zehelein.. had no interest.

I don't think he cared, except in a complicated way, about being popular.

I don't think any of them did. I think they cared about getting it right.

And they had ferocious debates about that.

But I don't think they felt that their audience was a proper adjudicator, of what was right.

I think that they felt that they... and the people around them,

for the most part, not the singers per se,

not the chorus members, not the members of the orchestra, I mean,

there was a select group...of critics or friends or whatever,

who were you know... I think as with any serious artistic enterprise, those were the people they listened to. They cared about them. And then they figured, the rest of the world would follow.

And if...but it was worth giving it a shot, and I think that's what they understood themselves to be doing.

CEC: Ok, good.

A question that popped into my mind
as you were talking about this just now, which I hadn't thought of before.

Why....do you have any sense

—and maybe you don't,
because maybe this is a programming decision more than anything else,
and part of the dramaturgy but the whole artistic administration of the house,
with this sort of dramaturgical revolution, this sort of revisionary project with opera
that was going on at that time with the house—
do you have any sense of why so many of the operas
still continued to be canonized texts?

DL: By texts, you mean the operas?

CEC: Yes, excuse me—
the operas themselves.

... there really wasn't much new happening at all!

DL: Well, there was the Nono.

And they did the Joyce opera that they commissioned,
there were a few very new things, well yeah!

I think, and I think that was true in Stuttgart, as well, although they created the side house,
Stuttgart for Contemporary Composition, I feel like, I think Zehelein would be the better person
to ask about this, because my response to this is conjecture.

Not just conjecture—we **talked** about this.

I feel like they felt that the...

that the German cultural industry, if we can call it that,

I think that there was that spirit of critique that informed the project.

That the *Kulturindustrie* (cultural industry) was doing to opera what it did to anything,
which was formulating a false consensus.

And the false consensus in this case meant that works that bore within themselves,
the traces of contradiction and enlightenment and a kind of revolutionary energy,
were being presented as if they were saccharine pieces of cultural consensus.

DL: So I feel like they were...

If I say they were messianic, the project of messianism was to convince people that,
not that old opera was dead, therefore, "long live contemporary composition!"

But that opera is dead because the cultural institutions that have been entrusted with its
cultivation have been killing it!

And that therefore, what we need to do is understand opera differently,
through production, in order to gain access to the vitality that is at its core.

Which is a revolutionary vitality.

Although, you know, look, that's not to say that there aren't
important differentiations between their production of *Manon Lescaut*,
which—when they reluctantly did Puccini, they did *Manon Lescaut*—

I think they had a sense that there were lots of works,

like Janáček, that were hardly being produced, and needed to be produced;

works that were very familiar, like Verdi and Wagner, that needed to be rethought;

and there were works that...around who, where the consensus about what they were- Mozart—
was entirely incorrect.

And therefore, this was a new Verdi, a new Mozart, an unknown Janáček, yeah!

And so I think the project—the reason it was canonical—

was to suggest that the common understanding of the canon was completely misguided.

CEC: So it was a sort of resuscitation,
in a way.

DL: Yeah! And..

I think they would be unhappy with that term, though.

I think they would say they were wresting control of these works

away from a model of consensus, and reviving them with a sense of their contestatory core.

Something like that.

CEC: Ok, that makes sense.

Yeah, that's good.

It's just occurred to me that it's really two separate projects.

It's occurred to me recently,

because I'm actually away from this chapter right now,

and I'm writing about some contemporary things

that are happening at the Bockenheimer Depot at the moment,

and basically one of the conclusions that I'm finally getting to in this moment

is that the present level of experimentation,

and how it's approached here in the present day,

is much more about new works and experimentation through new texts, new operas

in a very, sort of, future-driven look at compositions themselves

and what should be included within opera, and within the canon,

that, in itself, is also radical, in a way.

But in a different way than what was going on in the '80s.

And it's just occurred to me recently

how fundamentally different the two projects are,

although both are forward-looking in their own ways.

DL: Yeah...I just wanted to...

I think you're right. I just wanted to remind us both that

their production of Zimmermann's *Soldaten*, I think,

was enormously important to... the position of Zimmermann,

in a sense... he was recognized as an important composer, but surely

that production was really important to that process.

It got a lot of attention and was enormously difficult to pull off.

And I think that Gielen had conducted the premiere in Cologne prior to that,

but still, it was not yet a work that was canonical,

to the extent that any 20th century work is canonical,

that production was instrumental in that process. Anyway...

CEC: Oh, it's a good thought!

And I hadn't been thinking about that one, so...

(pause)

So, just a couple of other form questions here,

that might launch something good.
What do you remember about marketing around the cycle?

DL: I remember very little about that. I think, because the artistic and the...
in this case, the artistic team had very little to do with,
very little contact with what was going on in marketing.

CEC: Let me ask it a different way.
Not necessarily the strategies that they were discussing, in marketing.
But just you, as a person, in Frankfurt at the time,
experiencing the cultural world.
When you pass by on the street, and whatnot.
Was there externally,
was there a buzz?
Was there a lot of talk, was there a lot of publicity?

DL: There was.
Especially around the *Ring*.
You know, because there was a sense, a palpable sense that
the world was coming to Frankfurt!
This was...it was a huge deal. I mean...so, like, in the posters in the U-Bahn,
and in the kiosks around the city, there was a sense of ...
and also by this point, the Frankfurt opera was a big deal.
It was a big deal in Europe, and so...
And the final set of operas, for the *Ring*, if I'm not mistaken,
coincided with a kind of retrospective of the Gielen era.
And so, there was a sense there, too,
that all of these productions that had defined this house were being brought back.
And so, I remember Tom Sutcliffe coming from London,
there were like all of these journalists from publications around Europe
coming to Frankfurt to relive—or experience for the first time—these productions.
I feel like the sense of the buzz in the city was palpable.
Gielen, despite—or maybe because of his sort of resolute refusal of a kind of popularity—was
something of a rock star, in his dourness and his militancy.
And you know, I think he had a big following at that point,
and the opera house had a big name, so it felt like to me...it was a big deal.
But look, I was also in it! So it felt exciting to me,
and I've certainly been in productions where it felt like there was no buzz at all!
This felt like a big deal.
As for whether people in Frankfurt who weren't interested were noticing...
yeah, I'm not sure.

CEC: All right.
Were there other public or semi-public events
that surrounded the premiere?

DL: Yes, yes, as I recall,

Frankfurt always did a *Publikumsgespräch* (audience discussion.)

CEC: Yes, yes,
there's always a talk.

DL: And those I feel like there were,
as I recall, there were a number of those,
and I wonder if there aren't transcripts or something,
because it would be really interesting to see.

CEC: I haven't found any,
and you know, the sad thing is,
as recent as this all is, so few records remain about it,
even within the opera house.

Some recordings remain, some publicity remains,
and at the Goethe Universität,
there's an archive from the city stages there.

But they don't have much more than a couple of *Programmhefte*.

I mean, I have all of the *Musiktheaterhinweise* from the time,
and I've been able to interview a couple of people, but there's just not much.

It's amazing how little paper record there is of it all.
And I guess it was in a time before everything was digitized, as well.

It's not like, I can just say,
oh, can I have the rehearsal schedules from X, Y, and Z,
the way I have with my PDF files of all my rehearsal schedules
that got emailed to me every day while I was working.

So a lot of the information is just missing.

DL: You know, if you need any program books from then,
I, of course, was extremely interested in whatever they were doing,
I'm pretty sure ... whatever, if I promise you I have them, I won't.
Because you'll think of the one production I don't have one for.
But if there are any productions for which you would be...
for which you would need a program book from the period,
it's certainly possible that I have it.

CEC: Thank you!

I **think** that I have what I need.

although there was something I needed at one point,
where I couldn't get my hands on them.

Although those they've been pretty good about saving.

They had tons of extras and as some point,
people were just giving me things.

You know I was talking to the office manager of the dramaturgy
a couple of years ago, and she was like...

"Just take these home. Just put them in your bag."

DL: Good!

(both laughing)

CEC: Which is nice... it pays to know people.
You can't do that in an archive!

DL: Well, hopefully not!

CEC: No, well...
I wouldn't do that in an archive.
So, let's see. Back to you.
Do you feel like working with this group of people,
with this particular team, and I would say loosely, not just with the *Ring*,
but also with your earlier experiences, as well.
Do you think that working with that set of people
has influenced how you work today?
And if so, how?

DL: Well, hugely, I would think!
Both positively and negatively, I think.
Look, I have had the great, good fortune,
to grow up in a household where a sense of... or maybe also the misfortune!
Where my father was a violinist, and it was absolutely clear
that it was the undisputed priority that nothing was more important than his art.
So I grew up with that sense, and then returned,
I think when I went to Frankfurt that... whereas my father's commitment was to chamber music,
which was not something I shared with him.
My own...and also when you're in college, I don't know, I, in any case, was something of a
hothead, and I felt like, to be authentic you had to be complete preoccupied and obsessed, and so
we were all partisans for whatever we were engaged with,
and then I found myself surrounded by people who were equally obsessed,
if anything more obsessed!
And certainly much more knowledgeable about opera than I am.
And it was super challenging! And very, very exciting. To feel...
well this ...it seemed like I was in my world.
And that's an enormously exciting experience!
When I was in college, and I was interested in opera,
and trying to rethink what opera might be, and look like, and like,
"if we are to understand what opera is..."
People looked at me like I was a total loony!
Like, what are you even talking about?
And to do so in a world where everybody else was more nuanced,
more convinced and committed, this was SO exciting.
So I had—that emboldened me, then.
I shuttled back and forth between working in Frankfurt and going to graduate school,
but my sense of what I would do in graduate school was very much informed by that.
Well, at Brown, as an undergraduate, you could make your own major,
so you do could do whatever you wanted, because it was so free.
Whereas now in Berkeley in a PhD program, it was much more circumscribed,

but I was doing this because it was something that I needed to do,
and job market be damned! I was going to write on opera and film,
and to try to continue to think about sort of, opera and performance as text.
And I was in the German department, and the German department was like, “What are you
doing? You’re never going to get a job.”
Like, I think the sense of being emboldened to do—to pursue a passion,
and to maintain standards of rigor and of excitement in the face of a more general sense of its
lack of any traction, I mean why would you do that?
In Berkeley there weren’t a lot of people to talk to about this.
I think it felt to me like, “So what? If it’s right it’s right!”
It doesn’t have to be popular, you just do it because your convinced of it,
and I think the Frankfurt model was, if you do it well, people will come.
You don’t have to wait for someone else to model it.
I feel like, I sort of lucked into a career, as I probably...
As I think I told you, it’s like, I applied for a few jobs.
It wasn’t like I was going to be an academic! And then, since,
So it feels like that sense in Frankfurt, what I’ve been calling a missionary zeal,
The fervor and... you know, like it was a life calling, doing this kind of work.
I feel like it was hugely influential. And... what would we call it?
Emboldening.
I felt like I was warranted, and I feel like these people modeled a form of culture making,
but also a form of ethical engagement with culture that I admired greatly,
and I continue to admire to this day.
And to the extent that they modeled that engagement, I would hope that I
would in turn model that also to my students.
And... I feel like it informed my interests, and it informed my practices, yeah!
It was amazing.

CEC: And have you felt that your...
your nonacademic work, your artistic work since that time
—in the pieces that you’ve been involved with—
have you attempted to retain what you did there, or did you retain that sort of spirit?

DL: (*nodding affirmatively.*)

CEC: Or have you felt it go in different directions?

DL: I think both.

I mean. Look, I feel like the commitment to... constant change,

DL: ...that I feel like the people in Frankfurt were modeling,
is a commitment that I try to carry with me.

And so... in some sense, if that’s all we did was that, what we did in the 1980s,
I think it would be tiresome!

So I feel like, both because I’m based in the United States and also because,
I think the sensibilities are entirely different, it feels like I’ve got that inheritance, but also,
hopefully and ideally doing other kinds of work.

Although I will say, the work I’ve been doing in the rehearsal room has been modest.

I mean, I've been in the seminar room much more than I've been in the rehearsal room. So, I don't think... if you want to talk to artists about the influence that their work had on them subsequently, I'm not an artist. So, I can talk about my limited experiences, but I think other people were fundamentally shaped by this. I think Sergio was fundamentally shaped by it. I think Juliane was fundamentally shaped by it. And they're very much still in the... in that world, and have been so, not exclusively, but 95% of what they do is art-making.

CEC: I actually wanted to know both from you, and I think it's good that you answered the academic part first. But as you say, it's a commitment to change, and questioning, and rethinking. This is something that happens in more than one context.

DL: (*nodding*) Absolutely!

And I think... I remember, Ruth Berghaus, when we were in rehearsals and there were **really** intense protests about the Stadtbahn West that were happening in Frankfurt at the time, I mean...street protests! It was intense. And I said to her, because some people were like, "We're not coming to rehearsal, we're going to protest." I said to her...and whatever, I was a young guy, I was like, "What do you say to them, what about you? Do you feel a pull to go out and protest?" And she said, "Look, I feel like I have very limited capacities. I don't feel like I'm a very good protestor. But I'm a good director, so I'm going to stay here, and do what I do well. And ultimately if I do it well enough, it will serve this cause as much as it will serve that person, who understands his or her calling to be also as a protestor to go out and protest." And I remember thinking that was a really wise answer. I think the revolution, if that's what it is, or whatever it is one is committed to, can take place in any number of forums. And I think the classroom is a place where... the kind of critical thinking that they were modeling in Frankfurt the commitment to trying to uphold standards of interpretation, and of rigor, those are terms that are very familiar to me, in the classroom, and in the academy! So I felt like ultimately, I was probably better off doing what I was doing there. So... and not trying to be an artist in the academic, **DL:** but doing academic work in the academy, and doing artistic work in an artistic forum. And respecting, I think, the difference between the two.

CEC: That's an interesting point. One more straightforward question, here: Have you worked with any of the collaborators that you worked with there

in other contexts past Frankfurt?

DL: Oh, that's a good question!
And I have to think about it for a second.

CEC: No problem!

DL: (*Slowly*) Yeah...
but...but I feel like that process...
So the guy who was the assistant for set design in Bremen,
when we were working on the production, on *Turandot*,
he had been the assistant in Frankfurt, we were...
but obviously, otherwise, I think... no...
(*pause, to himself*) Is that...? No, I don't think so.

CEC: That's all right.
Good. I... let's see...
just want to make sure I'm not missing anything.
We may be at the end.

DL: Cool!

(*both laughing*)

CEC: I think that's all I've got right now.
I would like to maybe reserve the right,
if I have a couple of extra questions at the end, to follow up?
I'd love to say...hm. I might want to do a follow up.
But I think this is enough for now, and it's been certainly
extraordinarily helpful.

DL: (*nodding enthusiastically.*)

CEC: And a nice conversation, as well.

DL: Likewise!
You know, you know where to find me.
So if you have follow-up questions, yeah, really!
Informally or formally, please, just let me know.
But otherwise, good luck with all of this.
And be in touch if there's any way I can be of help.

CEC: Thank you!

(*End of Levin Interviews*)

Archives Consulted

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