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> The stretched, rhythmic text declamation and the music, each consisting of long-lasting crescendo phases, form a closely interlocked 'Gesamtkunstwerk' whose aesthetic of effect presents itself as suggestive, maelstrom-like overwhelming theatre.[1]

Every major city theatre in German-speaking Europe has been influenced by director Ulrich Rasche's mechanical stage structures: slow and rhythmic textual performance; newly composed, live, continuous music; and minimal dramaturgy. His singular aesthetic has garnered a cult following in contemporary theatre circles and has been labeled 'machine theatre,' 'techno opera,' 'treadmill theatre,' and 'choir theatre,' (see Figure 1). Rasche's all-encompassing style has spawned an original genre where many theatrical elements merge into digitally sound-immersive theatre.[2] Philosopher Harry Lehmann attests that "Rasche's theatre fuses post-dramatic text, art music, a minimalist stage set and a hyper-expressive language into one context of meaning. In doing so he creates the greatest counter-world imaginable to the post-modern contingent play with content and form."[3]

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1 Burkhardt, "Theatermusik", 31. ("Die gedehnt rhythmisierte Textdeklamation bildet mit einer Musik aus jeweils langanhaltenden Crescendo-Phasen ein eng verzahntes Gesamtkunstwerk, dessen Wirkungsästhetik sich als suggestives, soghaftes Überwältigungstheater präsentiert." Translated by the author).

2 The use of the terms 'digital' and 'immersive' in the context of this case study do not refer to audience participatory theatre in digital realms (i.e., theatre incorporating virtual reality or other artificial intelligence) but are used to describe the use of digital tools and elements on stage and the submersion of audience into a crafted sound design.

3 Lehmann, "Musik im Sprechtheater", 51. ("Rasches Theater integriert einen postdramatischen Text, Kunstmusik, ein minimalistisches Bühnenbild und eine hyperexpressive Sprache zu einem Sinnzusammenhang und schafft damit die denkbar größte Gegenwelt zum postmodernen kontingenten Spiel mit Inhalten und Formen." Translated by the author.)

Figure 1 Scene from Ulrich Rasche's *4.48 Psychose* by Sarah Kane. Musicians: Carsten Brocker, Thomsen Merkel, Špela Mastnak, and Katelyn Rose King; Actors (Left to Right): Elias Arens, Jürgen Lehmann, Toni Jessen, Justus Pfankuch, Thorsten Hierse, and Yannik Stöbener, Deutsches Theater Berlin, 2020, © Arno Declair.

Rasche began his career in the 'Off-Theater' and government-funded theatre scenes in Germany, assisting and directing his own productions at independent and state theatres. However, since 2015, he has worked in the state and city-funded theatres in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.[4] One of the most defining elements of Rasche's productions is his implementation and formation of choirs, as well as their performative styles. The choir performances require a rhythmic and unison pronunciation and thrust the actors forward through the required language with rigid body movements. Live music, newly composed for each production, energises the actors on stage and creates a ripple effect: sound emanating from the live musicians flows through the physical bodies of the choirs and is ultimately reproduced in the language itself. Rasche's

4 Also known as 'Freies Theater' in German, Off-Theatre refers to theatre that takes place in smaller venues that are run independently from the state, which often have no fixed ensemble of actors, smaller budgets and nontraditional modes of theatre-making. In 2022, Rasche confronted the operatic genre for the first time with his production of Richard Strauss' Elektra, at the Grand Théâtre de Genève.

immersive and embodied music theatre begins with these interactions between performers and, with substantial help from the sound design, ultimately envelops the audience itself.

I am a musician–performer who has been intrigued by the conceptual and process development witnessed during my time behind the scenes in Rasche's productions since 2015. Thus, I have developed a case study around my own artistic perspective of Ulrich Rasche's work, which has morphed from theatre with music, to music theatre. This case study examines three productions from 2015 to 2020 and examines the recurring theme of language and music immersion. The questions within this study reflect the changing relationship between music and text in these works; the choral and musical elements are used as variables to highlight developments between the works. How have the two disciplines—language and sound—along with text and music, developed with and in response to each other in Rasche's productions? How have digitalisation tools affected the language and sound immersion, as well as the performer's experience and performance? What conclusions can be drawn from such music theatre productions on classical theatre stages? My thesis concludes that while Rasche's earlier city-theatre staging can still be considered contemporary spoken theatre with music, by 2020 music had become a part of the drama itself. First, a focused outline of the history and state of research of the choir and music within theatre practice is needed to contextualise and situate Rasche's work in current theatre sciences and understandings of creation and composition.

Music and Choir in German Contemporary Spoken Theatre

The extant research on music in spoken theatre constitutes a broad but sparse set of studies and theory, a situation that is partially attributable to the wide range of potential intersections between music and theatre. Scholar David Roesner has become an expert in addressing contemporary theatre works through the lens of music, framing his analyses as an understanding and description of theatre as music.[5] Performing theatre analysis from the perspective of musical analysis is help-

5 See Roesner's publications such as *Theater als Musik* and *Musicality in Theatre* for more on his insight into music in and as theatre.

ful, as it frames different theatrical elements—such as light, staging, dramaturgy, movement, etc.—within a broader framework that binds all actions by time, as is normally implemented in music composition. Consequently, considering the sound qualities of the above-mentioned visual elements offers a new dimension to analyses of theatre-making and theatre consumption.[6]

When positioning the term 'music' in the Metzler Lexicon on Theatre Theory (*Metzler Lexikon Theatertheorie*), Clemens Risi and Robert Sollich highlight the ever-present yet varying, role of music in theatre. Risi and Sollich divide this complex relationship into four subgroups:

1. Music and Theatre: Music Theatre – Facets of a Concept
2. Music in Theatre – Theatre Music [or Acting Music]
3. Theatre as Music – Musicalisation of Theatre
4. Music as Theatre – Theatricalisation of Music[7]

A preposition-centred taxonomy is limited in its ability to encapsulate the enormous, colourful world of theatrical and musical works. That said, these categories are helpful within the context of this case study, as they enable a closer examination of these dimensions in relation to the performing venues of the city theatres, where Rasche's works are situated. Of the above definitions, the relationship typically practiced between music and theatre in Germanic city theatres is that of the second category, 'Music in Theatre.' In this approach, music typically supports the drama and, as described, generally constitutes the background noise to the actions on stage. The third category, 'Theatre *as* Music: Musicalisation of Theatre,' is a phenomenon in the city-theatre performance culture; however, it is where the later works of Ulrich Rasche, presented in this paper, can be situated.

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6 See also Salzman and Desi's *The New Music Theater* and Rebstock and Roesner's *Composed Theatre,* for more information on the history and practices of composing theatrical elements.

7 Risi and Sollich, "Musik", 220–25. ("Für jede Ausprägung von Theater spielt Musik in irgendeiner Form eine Rolle. Um die verschiedenen Bezugnahmen von Musik und Theater beschreiben zu können, lassen sich vier Dimensionen ausdifferenzieren, die im Folgenden näher ausgeführt werden: (1) Musik und Theater: Musiktheater – Facetten eines Begriffs; (2) Musik im Theater – Schauspielmusik; (3) Theater als Musik – Musikalisierung des Theaters; (4) Musik als Theater – Theatralisierung der Musik." Translated by the author.)

Roesner's theorisations constitute the foundation of Risi and Sollich's third category, as they describe a form of theatre performance that can be viewed through a musical lens. Examples of this approach can be seen in the works of contemporary theatre directors such as Robert Wilson, Einar Schleef, and Christoph Marthaler, who have paved a way for a different relationship between theatre and music:

> [...] Robert Wilson, Einar Schleef, and Christoph Marthaler, whose works are clearly based on certain principles of construction that follow more formal than narrative logics. Instead of plot and psychology, here it is primarily rhythm and motivic work—with musical as well as extra-musical elements—that organise the dramaturgy of the performance; even when the staging sometimes refers to dramatic texts as material and certainly engages in figuration and narrative dispositifs.[8]

While the above-mentioned directors—Rasche's contemporaries—synthesise music and text in various moments throughout their works, I argue that Rasche's oeuvre in its entirety constitutes a complete synthesis of sound and language. Narratives (and their modernised interpretations) are foregrounded, but expressions of language are nonetheless inspired by motivic and rhythmical gestures. Non-traditional elements, such as speech performance and sound design, are used to create a new text without deconstructing the original.

Schleef's play with the form and musicalisation of a text evidently inspired Rasche's work; however, these are not the only ways in which this influence is evident. The choir—combining its ancient historical connotations with a modern abstraction of purpose—is a further way in which Rasche continues to develop upon Schleef's practice. In the *Metzler Lexikon*, Ulrike Haß notes that the:

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8 Risi and Sollich, "Musik", 224. ("[...] Robert Wilson, Einar Schleef und Christoph Marthaler, deren Arbeiten deutlich bestimmte Konstruktionsprinzipien zugrunde liegen, die mehr formalen als narrativen Logiken folgen. Statt Handlung und Psychologie organisieren hier vornehmlich *Rhythmus und motivische Arbeit – mit musikalischen wie außer-musikalischen Elementen – wie Dramaturgie der Aufführung; sogar dann, wenn sich die Inszenierungen bisweilen auf dramatische Texte als Material beziehen und durchaus auf Figuration und narrative Dispositive einlassen." Translated by the author).

first exploration of the chorus as the great other figure of the theatre before and alongside the story of its protagonists, starting for the first time from the problem of form in the theatre alone, is available in the theatrical work of Einar Schleef (1944-2001)[9]

Schleef uses his choirs to explore individuality, collective, sound, movement, and, above all, rhythm. His choirs can be seen chanting in unison while also performing choreographic pieces.[10] Actor and collaborator of Schleef, Jürgen Lehmann, met Rasche early on in their careers and has become a connecting link between the overlapping styles of both directors. Lehmann and Rasche began building a performative style that expanded on the militaristic and monophonic techniques that Schleef created with his choirs.[11] The works of Ulrich Rasche considered in this case study reveal a choir style that is similar to Schleef's emphasis on unified rhythm and a contemporary exploration of protagonists' characters. However, Rasche further develops these techniques (as well as incorporating others) in order to synthesise music and theatre—sound and language.

Role as Active-Participant and Subconscious-Observer

I have a unique and illuminating perspective on Rasche's work, as a current performer and active participant in his productions. I first participated in the production of *Das Erdbeben in Chili* at Konzert Theater Bern in 2015 as a marimba player and most recently in *Leonce und Lena* at Deutsches Theater Berlin in 2023 as one of two percussionists. My participation offers an insider perspective on production workings, as well as the chance to consider the broader development of the interplay between text and music. My performance in Rasche's productions began without the intent of finding research goals. Only

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9 Haß, "Chor", 52. ("Eine erstmals von der Formproblematik des Theaters allein ausgehende Erkundung des Chores als der großen anderen *Figure des Theaters vor und neben der Geschichte seiner Protagonisten liegt in der Theaterarbeit Einar Schleefs (1944-2001) vor" Translated by the author).
10 Examples include Schleef's famous productions such as Elfriede Jelinek's *ein Sportstück* (Wiener Burgtheater, 1998) and Goethe's *Faust* (Schauspiel Frankfurt, 1990).
11 Lehmann, Private interview.

after the production process of *4.48 Psychose* in 2020 did the possibility of researching Rasche's works develop. I argue that this experience enables a more profound understanding of the connection between choral and music performers.

This unique perspective as a participant in these productions allows me to adopt an approach inspired by auto-ethnographic research. The double principle of 'going native' and 'coming home' provides an original methodological structure. My methodology included field research as a participant, allowing for an ethnographic and phenomenological perspective, and, most importantly, a praxeological analysis. Interviews with team members, actors, composers, and musicians who speak of creative details that can only be fully understood by an insider *as well as* performer, are a key aspect of this case study, and constitute one approach to understanding the broader artistic movement toward interdisciplinary practice in state-funded city theatres.[12]

Heinrich von Kleist's *Das Erdbeben in Chili* at Schauspiel Bern (Konzert Theater Bern, 2015)

> Rasche radically reduces the means: black clothing, hardly any facial expressions or gestures, purposefully placed effects, sparse light changes. All of this benefits the musicality of the text.[13]

The starting point of this study is the 2015 production of Heinrich von Kleist's *Das Erdbeben in Chili* at Schauspiel Bern, formerly Konzert Theater Bern. The stage is minimal, a single circular disk set at an angle, upon which the actors constantly walk. It is only gravity and the tempo of their steps that control the speed and direction of motion, as the stage is not electronically operated. There are five actors, who exchange roles: they constitute individual characters, as

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12 The development of various research methodologies, especially those that include the researcher participating in their own environment, is crucial to gaining more knowledge in our attempt to understand how interdisciplinary art is created. A useful example is outlined in Dick's paper "Music Theatre as Labyrinth", and Quick's paper "The Quality of the Relational."

13 Moser, "Das Erdbeben in Chili" ("Rasche reduziert die Mittel radikal: schwarze Kleidung, kaum Mimik oder Gestik, gezielt gesetzte Effekte, spärliche Lichtwechsel. All das kommt der Musikalität des Textes zugute." Translated by the author.)

well as chorus members. On either side of the stage are two live musicians: a marimba player stage left (myself), and an electric bass player (Thomsen Merkel) stage right. The 90-minute evening begins and concludes with music composed by Ari Benjamin Meyers; there is no intermission.[14]

When analysing *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, a term such as 'scored theatre' springs to mind.[15] Here, the simplicity in Rasche's theatre aesthetic—a complete through-composed work with a formal musical structure—is highlighted. The piece begins at a relatively low intensity and shifts between constant build-ups, peaks, and drop-offs. There is no end to the evening until the last peak of the longest crescendo in sound and tension has been reached. In terms of compositional structure, the entire play follows one staggering trajectory of increasing tension. Both the music and the narrative flow in the same direction and are 'composed' to support one another. While there are breaks in the textual performance, the music is ever-present. In opera and traditional musical theatre, through-composed works are characterised as having continuous music, with no breaks between songs or scenes. While through-composed music is also non-repetitive in a formal sense, Ari Benjamin Meyers' composition for *Das Erdbeben in Chili* is structurally grounded in repetition. Each theatre scene is given what Meyers called a module, and within each module are patterns to be repeated. Certain modules were predetermined by the number of repetitions (these usually occurred in moments of transition between scenes), and other moments were left to be cued by the timing of the actors' speech. The music was not timed in any directly rhythmical way to intentionally engage with the actor's speech or movement but only to signal the completion or beginning of sections of text. For example, Merkel not only read his own musical notation, but also the actor's text in parallel. He made marks for each textual cue, which would then indicate when to move on to the next pattern.

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14 The trailer for *Das Erdbeben in Chili* from Bühnen Bern in 2015 can be seen at the following Youtube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLoA6k93jgo. The video excerpt also includes short interviews with the practitioners on the creative and aesthetic goals (accessed March 28, 2023).

15 I like to imagine an aesthetic style in between David Roesner and Matthias Rebstock's term 'composed theatre'—a type of contemporary music theatre which is literally musically notated in score format—and through-composed musical scoring for film (Rebstock and Roesner, *Composed Theatre*).

The music creation process for this production was quite typical for a dramatic theatre production incorporating live music. Meyers had already composed all the music before rehearsals began. During stage rehearsals, communication between performers was achieved by trial and error. Initially, the goal of the production was to identify a way in which the music and text would be able to fluently and spontaneously affect one another. However, to find a way to communicate through continuous, strenuous musical performance, alongside a very distracting stage setup with the loud performance of the actors (whom we also had to follow), proved to constrain the musicians more than imagined. Small light cues from a person at the soundboard following along with the text proved to be a solution, as well as talk-back communication established between Merkel and myself during the performances. For the actors, the constant controlling of the stage speed as well as virtuosic unison text passages, made direct interaction with the live music challenging. Familiarising themselves with the music during the rehearsals (during the many listening sessions included in the schedule) offered a solution to ease their performance by gaining a sense of anticipation within the musical composition; however, as a result, the music remained in its traditional, secondary, role.

Nevertheless, these solutions found during the rehearsal process would be crucial steps in the development of performer communication in Rasche's theatre. Before *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, this style of through-composition had already been adapted for his theatre, but the journey of musical development in Rasche's work begins here with a performing collaborator and co-creator, inspired by dance.

A Dance-Influenced Choir Language

A later important figure in Rasche's aesthetic and development of the choir is the actor Toni Jessen. Although Jessen had worked with Rasche prior to 2015, *Das Erdbeben in Chili* was the first production in which Jessen composed the work's unison choir sections. Here, Jessen focused on the choir's pronunciation, approaching language, breath, and, most significantly, the movement of the actor's bodies through rhythm.

Throughout his training and professional career, Jessen has always been inspired by dance and, more recently, the concept of a 'faceless'

artist.[16] He is not interested in using language to support a character's development in the traditional theatrical sense, but prefers to consider how language affects the role of the character. Thus, the physicality of language is demonstrated in and through the body before ultimately embracing a performative take-over of the body corporeally.

> I used to ballroom dance, that's a big part of where my musicality comes from. That's where my inspiration comes from, where I hear rhythms and how I can use expression with my body. I use that vocabulary for language work. I began to investigate how dance vocabulary could be useful for analysing language. For example: what's the flow and rhythm of the text? Where does the text jump? Where does it land? What happens if you speed up? What happens if you slow down?[17]

Jessen was heavily influenced by the acting method invented and practiced at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art in Berlin: 'gestural speaking.'[18] *Gestisches Sprechen* (the German term), explores the body's power as an actor in communication with others. Speech pedagogue Victoria Schmidt tells her students, "Motivated and intended behaviour with body, breath, voice, and speech in concrete communication situations is gestural speaking. It is directed, whole-body speaking behaviour."[19] Actors are used as instruments. They perform with their bodies, using their mouths, feet, legs, torsos, breath, tongues, and eyes to find the rhythm of the speech in the text while listening; they are in dialogue, interpreting the body language of their fellow actors and the audience.

Using minimal body movements and non-traditional rules of language pronunciation and inflection, Jessen infuses the choir performances in *Das Erdbeben in Chili* with abstraction and sonic diversity.

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16 The performance phenomena of a 'faceless DJ' for example, provides anonymity to the artist in order to create a different identity that can be completely controlled by the artist. This adds the artist's persona to a part of their total aesthetic, as the person's mysterious presence becomes a part of their performance.

17 Jessen, Private interview.

18 Schmidt, *Mit den Ohren Sehen*.

19 Ibid., 32–33 ("Motiviertes und intendiertes Verhalten mit Körper, Atem, Stimme und Sprache in konkreten Kommunikationssituationen ist gestisches Sprechen. Es ist gerichtetes, gesamtkörperlich sprechendes Verhalten." Translated by the author).

Drawing on his influence of gestural speaking and musical rhythm from dance, Jessen's 'compositions' within the production did not yet have a methodical notation system; rather, he composed them from intuition and then taught the actors from memory. *Das Erdbeben in Chili* can be seen as a compositional experiment involving speaking language and body language, as well as an investigation into the play between singular bodies and the choir figure.

Formally, in Rasche's work, the choir embodies more abstract language than the protagonists. Further, the choir is not relaying emotions; instead, it is used as a social structure unto itself. These two forms of disembodying distance the characters and performers from a narrative reality and their physical selves. This extends into the musical band as well, creating an overall conflict on stage. Rasche's work highlights this struggle: the actors fight to create unity with the performance of the text while maintaining their own individualism, and the musicians impose themselves upon their instruments while battling to stay musically connected.

In addition to his reframing of the role of the chorus, Rasche aims to musicalise an entire play with *Das Erdbeben in Chili*. He achieves this by using continuous music alongside a deconstructive approach to the textual pronunciations. This deconstruction maintains its original chronological order, but the pronunciation of syllables and vowels, pauses in the middle of sentences, and non-traditional word intonation are all used to create a different listening experience and further abstract the meaning of the play. In this sense, the text is not so much deconstructed as the language is re-structured; using new rules and guidelines set by the body creates the performative outcome. This poses a further question regarding Rasche's forthcoming plays: what meaning does the language itself have?

Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* at Theater Basel (2017)

Rasche's production of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* at Theater Basel in 2017 is a mid-way point in this case study as well as in the trajectory of textual and musical synthesis change within his work. While Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* was staged at Residenztheater in Munich in 2016, integrating developments by Jessen, Meyers, and Rasche, *Woyzeck* is

an important stepping stone as ideas that were previously experimental become central to Rasche's formation of a new sound-immersive theatre in *Woyzeck*.[20]

Here, the featured stage structure has become mechanical, larger, and has grown into a protagonist in itself within the dramaturgy. Able to raise and lower itself, it cracks, creaks, breathes, and has a transformative power: it may either support the actors or devour them alive and take over the production.[21] In *Woyzeck*, the musicians have grown in number and significance; they now consist of a larger band of five (piano, bassoon, viola, electric bass, and percussion). Instead of the minimal amplification of two musicians in *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, the larger band is not only amplified but also digitally manipulated in order to achieve a less acoustic blend of sound. Electronic triggers have been added, which are performed by the violist from a computer on stage, to add another digital layer to the overall sound. Accordingly, the intensity of the sound has now become a key element in the production. Rasche and the sound engineer push against acceptable limits to impose an extremely loud level of sound onto the audience.

The composer Monika Rosch composed all the music before rehearsals began. However, unlike Ari Benjamin Meyers, Rosch composed new music specifically for the text and revised the score during rehearsals with Rasche and the actors. The rehearsal process was similar to that of *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, with very little music altered during the final rehearsals. Most of the music development in the production was created by sound engineering.

Here, the steps of the choir and the solo actors are now in rhythm with the tempo of the music. This is a significant development because it places the actors in bodily contact with the music, giving their speech performance a more rhythmic and musical emphasis. Added to this deepened connection between text and music is the invented language of composition that Jessen began to develop. For this production, Jessen created a system of notation for the choir sections, which he used to teach and rehearse the actors. This notation has since proved to be an integral part of the creation in each of Rasche's productions.

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20 Rasche's 2017 staging of *Woyzeck* has since been re-performed at Residenztheater in Munich (2020-22) and has been filmed by ZDF/3sat and published by Naxos (2021).

21 The trailer for *Woyzeck*, created by Theater Basel in 2017, can be seen at the following YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzHUhbzJ1Og. (accessed April 10, 2023).

As seen in Figure 2, Jessen employs various traditional musical notation symbols to compose pieces from which the actors can learn and which all participants can constantly reference. The most familiar symbol is the repeat sign, which Jessen uses in its simple form for the repetition of lines. Each line of text is also concluded by a number, which indicates the number of steps or 'beats' of rest before the next line of text starts. Jessen has added in his own notes in pencil: the slashes indicate where the steps fall, and the small 'v' indicates where specific breaths are taken. All other inflections of text are very specifically determined by Jessen and then rehearsed repeatedly with the actors, who receive and memorise it. In part owing to, and influenced by, the larger band and stage design, active choir body and Jessen's solution for composing and teaching unison sections, a weightier sound and sound design concept was needed.

Figure 2 Score example of choir section in *Woyzeck*, Toni Jessen, 2017, Basel, courtesy of Toni Jessen.

For one, the actors have become amplified over an extensive speaker system projected into the audience seating. This amplification, and that of the musicians, in turn necessitates greater intensity of performance from the actors in the piece. As each action is seemingly more intense than the previous, structural escalations continuously build the sound. During the choral sections in the performances, Jessen must shout out cues such as 'UND!' and 'FÜNF!' to maintain the unison of the actors. The ensemble's performance requirements thus increased in numerous ways: in duration, intensity, and meaning. The piece, now twice the length of *Das Erdbeben in Chili* at three hours plus intermission, also requires some patience on the parts of both the performers and the audience. This form constitutes an astounding, exhausting experience for all involved; however, catharsis is intentionally used to manage the resulting weight of Woyzeck's story. In the final climactic choral section, the actors, attached to the stage with safety harnesses, reveal Woyzeck's murder of Marie. They march up, down and sideways across the stage, while directing their speech toward Woyzeck, who stands in the centre. The extreme physicality of performance is synthesised with the intensity of the combination of the staging, music, textual meaning, and sound design. In *Woyzeck*, Rasche integrated another vital element into his aesthetic corpus—a sound designed to create sonic immersion.

Choir as Social Structure

Collective identity and social behavior are significant elements of choirs. Rasche references the ancient Greek choir, while simultaneously critiquing its value and function from a contemporary perspective. In *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, the choir's function was the telling of a story by a collective of individuals. Each choir member, while still participating in the unified group, had a unique character as well as a unique manner of performing and speaking the text. In *Woyzeck*, Rasche reveals the fine line between the community as a collective and the community as a mob. The choir no longer highlights individuals from the group, instead, the notion of the group itself is foregrounded.

Intending to comment on the fragility of social democracy,[22] Rasche's plays thematise the extreme isolation experienced by individuals and the disassociated mass. The mechanical structures that Rasche designs for each of his plays indicate the strong presence of mass society theory, a theory that conceptualises society as a singular driving force composed of exploited and disconnected individuals who are manipulated by a capitalist idea of wealth.[23] The mass, represented by the choirs in Rasche's works, act as a detached and manipulated collective, who are instigators of extremism. As individuals, the soloists are often victims of this mass and suffer throughout the text until their ultimate death or self-destruction. In this way, the context of Büchner's text—its military setting, with the main figure himself being a traumatised soldier—perfectly aligns with this shift in the choir's role in *Woyzeck*. An expansion of choir and music is notable in this production: the choir is no longer small and intimate; in *Woyzeck* it is larger, a more bombastic fusion of body and sound. The political messages communicated by Rasche's works continue to develop through the change in the communal aspect of the choir in the modern play: multiple individual voices become repetitive choirs canonising a harrowing tale.

Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychose* (*4.48 Psychosis*) at Deutsches Theater Berlin (2020)

Finally, I consider Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychose* (*4.48 Psychosis* in English), directed by Rasche at the Deutsches Theater Berlin in 2020. As one of the final productions before the first wave of COVID-19, the staging of Kane's agonising last play was one of unforeseen political importance, considering the social times to come. The text, which was Kane's final work before she took her own life, is abstract in form and content. It confronts its audience with the very real proximity of struggles with mental health and how standard treatments tend to

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22 This can be seen best in Rasche's production of Euripides' *Die Bakchen* (*The Bacchae* in English) at the Burgtheater in Vienna, 2019. See an interview with Ulrich Rasche on the production: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JH2FE8V23_Y (accessed April 10, 2023).

23 The sociologist Charles Wright Mills differentiates between the mass and collective (which he terms the public) in his seminal work *The Power Elite*.

focus on medicinal aids. For Kane, this approach results in a cold and meaningless conceptualisation of human life itself. In the play, Kane often positions herself as an individual against the rest of the world, and Rasche treats this juxtaposition artistically in different ways. Three female actors on stage represent what we might superficially assume to be Kane herself; six male actors who constitute the majority of the choirs and individual 'doctor' roles, represent the 'other' in the performance. These male actors judge and misunderstand Kane while empathising with her hopelessness. Loss of meaning is textually underlined throughout the performance. Simultaneously, the inclusion of live music on stage, coupled with its techno-like sound design, contextualises the piece in the contemporary period: the audience is immersed in an underground electronic club; grim text and dark sound textures wait to be released at the dawn of a new day.

Choir and Music Meet in A Digital Realm

In *Theatermusik. Analysen und Gespräche*, David Roesner develops ten theses on the development of music used in theatre and the potential of what roles, effects, and meanings it has in contemporary theatre today.[24] Thesis three, "Digitisation allows theatre music to be more interactive and flexible in dialogue with the production,"[25] is of notable importance to Rasche's *4.48 Psychose* because digitalisation is key to the success of the evening. Lehmann highlights that its creation with the medium of music is a unique aspect of the play, and the flexibility achieved by digitalisation is primarily attributable to the music composition:

> The performance of *4.48 Psychosis* seems so extraordinarily musical because it was created in the medium of music. Through the option, which did not exist until recently, of rehearsing with sample compositions and ePlayers, trained composers are gaining access to theatrical stages, and from this synthesis of drama and art music,

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24 Roesner, *Theatermusik*.
25 Ibid., 21 ("Die Digitalisierung erlaubt der Theatermusik, im Dialog mit der Inszenierung interaktiver und flexibler zu sein." Translated by the author).

a theatre genre of its own will most certainly develop in the com-
ing years: a musical theatre that comes from spoken theatre rather
than opera.[26]

Digitalisation and creation within the medium of music in *4.48
Psychose* are resulting factors of a music compositional approach
developed by the composer over multiple working experiences with
Rasche. The self-defined practice of 'pressure composing' is the fore-
most experimental aspect of the compositional process of Nico van
Wersch. To bring the music into a more flexible form for rehearsing,
Van Wersch composed very little material before the rehearsals with
the actors began. Instead, for the first two months of rehearsals, he
attended with only his computer and prepared sound samples/record-
ings. Then, in a matter of weeks, Van Wersch took his 'electronic com-
positions', the text with dramaturgical notes, and his own music notes
and transformed it all into a notated score meant for live performers
and instruments. Audio Example 1 (see Appendix) is an excerpt of one
of Van Wersch's electronic compositions used during early rehearsals
without live musicians. To compare the phases of composition, Au-
dio Example 2 (see Appendix) is that of the same scene but performed
with live musicians.

The examples above show the breadth of change that occurred during
the rehearsals. This does not traditionally occur within theatre pro-
ductions involving music, as rehearsal conditions and practicalities
do not usually follow a parallel composition process. Although musi-
cal material might be adaptable to scene changes during rehearsals,
a complete change in music material is normally too time-consum-
ing and stressful for both the musicians and composer. Although ex-
tremely fatiguing and stressful for Van Wersch, the adaptability he
achieved enabled something normally impossible on the large stage
of a city theatre: the composition of three hours of new original mu-

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26 Lehmann, "Musik Im Sprechtheater", 50. ("Die Aufführung von 4.48 Psychose wirkt deswegen
so außergewöhnlich musikalisch, weil sie im Medium der Musik kreiert worden ist. Durch die
Option, die es bis vor kurzem nicht gab, mit Samplekompositionen und ePlayern zu proben,
gewinnen ausgebildete Komponisten einen Zugang zu den Theaterbühnen, und aus dieser Syn-
these von Drama und Kunstmusik wird sich in den nächsten Jahren ganz sicher auch ein eigenes
Theatergenre entwickeln: ein Musiktheater, das aus dem Sprechtheater und nicht von der Oper
kommt." Translated by the author.)

sic in direct congruence with and parallel to the stage and language work; music that was notated and rehearsed so as to be performed by live musicians on stage.

Van Wersch's composition process would not have been possible without a sense of established trust with his musicians. The continuity of working with Rasche and Van Wersch helped create a working environment that was not only relaxed, but also fostered a secure environment for experimentation, improvisation, and free exchange. The final result is a musical score consisting of a series of cell patterns, similar to the modules of *Das Erdbeben in Chili*. However, Van Wersch no longer coordinates the number of measures between the different instruments. Where the keyboard player might have a 5-measure passage, the bass player may have a 9-measure passage. The score then consists of layered developments across time, which are individually cued from Van Wersch at the sound desk at the back of the theatre during the performance. Van Wersch transcended his role as composer, becoming an in-ear audio conductor.

Two audio engineers sit alongside Van Wersch, one overseeing music and the other the actors. Their roles have become irreplaceable, as this production emphasises total sound design. Thus, the sound engineers and composer are crucial members of the ensemble. Like Jessen in *Woyzeck*, the roles of the music 'creators' developed during the working process and also shaped Jessen's own composition and position in *4.48 Psychose*.

Working alongside the early stages of Van Wersch's compositional process, Jessen began developing the choir sections from small musical fragments provided by Van Wersch. His composition now included a further stretching of pronunciation, including more or less emphasis on consonants and vowels, and the non-traditional inflection of words even more frequently.

In principle, Jessen's score notation mirrored the system he developed for *Woyzeck*; however, markings have been added, as seen in Figure 3. As in Figure 2, the accent marks above the words indicate where the step and tempo of the music falls. The numbers correspond to the number of steps or beats before the next word is spoken. Here, it is interesting to note that Jessen's composition consistently follows an eight-beat phrase, even though the corresponding music might have a juxtaposing time phrase. This means that each performance of *4.48 Psychose* is

different from the last, and that the choir and music align in unique combinations. (For example, when Van Wersch composes sections with a time signature of 5/4 or when repeated sections total to odd measure numbers such as nine or thirteen, Jessen's constant composition of essentially 4/4 never finds itself in the same 'place' as the music.) Jessen's notation has become more precise, with the letter 'l' placed before a number signifying where the actors finish their previous syllable by 'landing' on step, and that the subsequent length of pause should begin after this beat has landed. In general, the spoken rhythm of the text is not musically composed, but Jessen approaches such musicality with his use of 'mountain' markings: these are evident over the first line 'Schau dir die Sterne an.' This marking indicates that every syllable is to be rhythmically 'in time' to the music. The rhythm is set by Jessen during the rehearsals and taught to the actors and internalised with repetition; however, it is never written down.
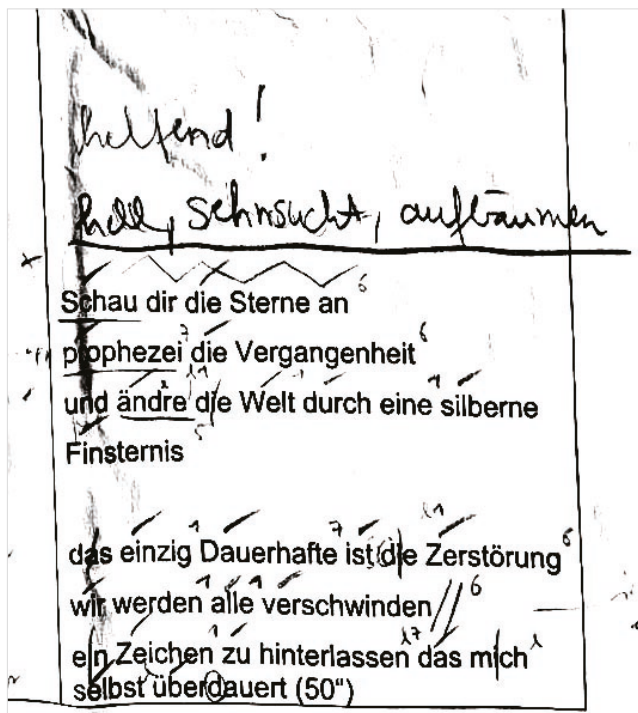

Figure 3 Score example of choir section in *4.48 Psychose*, Toni Jessen, 2020, Berlin, courtesy of Toni Jessen.

These phrases of rhythmical speaking constitute the development of different performative styles within Jessen's choirs. Now, a performance practice is established (i.e., the downbeats and steps are assigned to certain words, while the rest of the text flows over and in between the tempo) which is juxtaposed with more consciously rhythmic lines. The underlining of words evident in Figure 3 is a cohesion of the performative intent that has developed within Rasche's work until the present: verbs in the text are meant to be activated. This activation does not reflect an increase in intensity or the sound of vocalisation, but the resonation of a word. Resonation comes not from bodily gestures, but from the sounding of the core of the body itself. Each actor must internalise the text and body resonation and present to the audience a hyperanimated speech, but with minimal body movement. The music and the tempo are crucial to the actors, as the energy they receive from their steps becomes the only physicality in the whole play that grounds their language.

Unique to *4.48 Psychose* is Jessen's expansion of the role of the choir leader into choir conductor (see Figure 4.) As he teaches the actors, Jessen speaks and breathes with them, and marks inflections of words with his hands. He shows them the tempo with exaggerated steps while conducting at the same time.

In addition to conducting, Jessen provides his acting choirs with learn-along recordings, which they also use as a reference during preparations for the performances. These speak-along tracks are essential parts of the score, as Jessen's visual markings in the text are insufficient to achieve a full understanding of the interpretation. Audio Example 3 (see Appendix) is an audio excerpt of one such track by Jessen from *4.48 Psychose.* He can be heard counting pauses, similar to *Woyzeck*, which he also reproduces during the live performance. The outcome of this practice is evident in Video Example 1 (see Appendix), where the actors, surrounded by dystopic sound and light information, can perform in unison, with a unified approach to the language.

Video Example 1 shows how music and text have now become completely fused in *4.48 Psychose.* The musicians and actors exchange performative energy, impacting the overall musicality of the performance. The choir members now join the musicians in having an in-ear metronome, which fosters their individuality instead of the identity of the collective. All details of performing in unison, including the step

Figure 4 Photograph of Jessen conducting a choir rehearsal on stage, Toni Jessen and Actors: Yannik Stöbener, Katja Bürkle, Jürgen Lehmann, Kathleen Morgeneyer, Thorsten Hierse, Linda Pöppel, Elias Arens, and Justus Pfankuch, 2021, Berlin, photograph © the author.

and security of pause counts, are fed to the performers' in-ear monitors in the form of multiple sets of information: a click track, Jessen's voice, and others' voices. New to *4.48 Psychose* are the actors' own in-ear mixing of the ensemble: they have their own individually selected mix of music, vocal and metronome levels which act as a live perform-along track. While choirs have traditionally represented the mass, Rasche has transformed the choir into a mixture of individuals, each a separate complex being, who come together to achieve a common goal. With the help of digitalisation, each actor performs in response to their own sonic reality. This individualised performative experience also contributes to the trance-like state of the performers. Owing to the deconstructive style of language, this trance-like state is welcomed in order to achieve the performative meaning, as well as the practical sustainability of performance (the duration of a single monologue can often be up to 20 minutes). The fourth wall here is the audi-

ence itself, and the performance, for the actors, involves transcending the audience—performing over and beyond the audience. The actors must be careful not to be too musical in their pronunciation or in their movement, otherwise the text loses meaning and it could appear that the actors are dancing or rapping on stage.

The musicians also enter a trance state, as the piece, three hours without intermission, has continuous music that constitutes a physical challenge for the players. A certain individualisation has taken over, and while it may seem that the performers are more disconnected owing to the digital headspace to which each player is bound, these actually enable a higher degree of freedom in the performance. With the help of the metronome, which provides the pulse of the music, the actors are confident in their unification of their walking and are able to focus also more on the musicality of the textual performance. With Van Wersch as their online conductor, the musicians are able to focus less on visual and textual cues and can immerse themselves in the physicality of their performance. The musicality the actors permit inspires the gestural speaking possible by the band. The percussionists, in particular, can float and move seamlessly between drums and accent the gesture of their hits, as they feel more confident in their timing and place from their in-ear guide. Rather than focusing on listening and eye contact for cues, the performers are now able to truly exhibit their own character within this mass wall of sound-immersive theatre.

Conclusion

Although performed in traditional city theatres, Rasche's works are not classic dramatic theatre works. Rather, on the post-dramatic theatre spectrum, they fall somewhere between theatre incorporating music and music theatre. Music is not used to support drama but has become the foundational element that connects all other aspects of Rasche's pieces and is an integral part of the overall stage design. The meeting point between language and sound is most profoundly synthesised in choral sections, where the choir and musicians are bound together by tempo and digital aids such as in-ear monitoring and amplification. While the individuality and intimacy of choirs may have been abandoned, Rasche's choirs have transformed from large

masses to finally, individuals joined together, only to be separated by digitalisation. Off-stage, the productions have become extremely individually centralised.

Through production 'exceptions' made by Germanic city theatres hosting Ulrich Rasche, the director can develop his concepts with the same 'team' and performers to create extraordinary, multi-disciplinary productions on large stages. Such scale is usually only achievable in opera. Crucial is the role of the individual, and the trust and reliance Rasche has on his team he has developed over the years. Now more accurately described as his theatrical 'troupe,' they have become integral to the developmental process as experiments and growth continue with each new production in all facets: sound, stage design, language performance, and choir work. Key members such as Jürgen Lehmann, Toni Jessen, and Nico van Wersch, as well as other musicians and actors, have become an essential part of Rasche's team.

With his shift into the classical operatic form (see footnote four), there is certainly proof of aspects shared with music theatre in Rasche's work, as well as attempts to musicalise language and text. His works are not ground-breaking in their experimentation and deconstruction of text, but Ulrich Rasche offers us a glimpse of where theatre could go when typically 'secondary' elements such as music and choir develop together over time and influence the working process.

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Appendix

Audio Examples

1. Excerpt of Van Wersch's Ableton Live composition, 2020, courtesy of Nico van Wersch. Available at: https://doi.org/10.48620/391.
2. Excerpt of same musical moment, transcribed for live musicians, 2020, courtesy of Deutsches Theater Berlin. Available at: https://doi.org/10.48620/391.
3. Jessen's learn-along track for the actors, final choir scene, 2020, courtesy of Toni Jessen. Available at: https://doi.org/10.48620/391.

Video Example

1. Excerpt of *4.48 Psychose* final choir scene, 2020, courtesy of Deutsches Theater Berlin. Available at: https://doi.org/10.48620/391.