

Peter Ablinger

Sonata

for 2 speaking voices
2021

Version for the festival "Vielstimmige Aufklärung"

Instrumentation and setup:

2 speaking voices = 2 persons from 2 different (academic) disciplines, e.g. musicology and microbiology (etc.)

1 table, 2 chairs, 2 microphones, amplification.

The piece consists of them discussing with each other.

Duration: (of this version) about 20 minutes

"Score":

Basically, no score is necessary if the two speakers are able to talk to each other non-stop for 20 minutes without further ado. Everything that is suggested in the following can also be ignored - or only such suggestions are taken from it that seem helpful to get/keep the conversation going.

Conversely, arrangements other than those outlined here can also be made.

Topics:

The topic(s) could either be based on the professional orientation of the two speakers, and - in the spirit of "Vielstimmige Aufklärung" ("polyphonic enlightenment") - could well specifically target certain linguistic incommensurabilities. Topics could try to build bridges between disciplines, or, on the contrary, confront each other with discipline-specific "impositions". An example of a cross-disciplinary theme could be: "The Anthropocene" (proposal by Asmus Trautsch). Furthermore, the topic(s) can either be pre-arranged, or not, so that both interlocutors surprise each other.

Attitude:

The demand on the "accuracy of fit" of the answers should not be too high. Rather, a free association, a non-linear clash of different jargons, even an unrestrained-creative talking next to each other could be desirable in the sense of the intended polyphony and interdisciplinarity.

Therefore: answers/reactions not too cautious, not too secure, not too controlled; rather: free associations, quite "unsuitable"

connections, even breaks, abrupt changes of topics, things taken out of the air, surprises - everything that keeps the dialogue going. TENET OPERA ROTAS.

The basic conversational attitude could also include:
on the one hand, not too polite: by all means interrupt, don't always let the other finish what she's saying, keep up the tempo!
on the other hand also polite: e.g., by helping a term-seeker with suggestions - without immediately taking her word.

Sonata:

Both in the sense of polyphony and more generally of coherence, further musical aspects could play a metaphorical or structuring role. The title "Sonata", for example, was chosen because the classical sonata main movement has the form of a speech and its 3 most important parts are the exposition, the development and the recapitulation. Accordingly, it might be a suggestion to divide the 20 minutes or so into 3 parts of about 6-7 minutes, and articulate to that effect:

The 'exposition' would then offer itself as the introduction of the topics/themes, but also, for example, for the conscious confrontation of subject-specific problem areas and the respective own vocabulary.

The 'development' could follow the dramaturgy of an increase of incompatibilities of language and content. (It may also be argued/contradicted!). Also a "rhythmic" aspect could play a role here, by paying attention to a quick succession and a quick alternation of question and answer, interjection and comment, thought and counter-thought (- while, conversely, exposition and recapitulation could possibly also be characterized by some more closed sections).

The 'recapitulation' could accordingly (partially) bear the character of real summary, i.e. lead the motives and themes introduced at the beginning to a preliminary conclusion or résumé. But the opposite could also be the case: new themes could be called up - for instance in the sense of the insight gained in the meantime that the themes mentioned first are not sufficient to make further progress (in the future).

(Postscript on the understanding of form/progression of a sonata: the 3 main parts of the sonata were occasionally also compared with the roughly contemporaneous Hegelian dialectic and interpreted as thesis, antithesis and synthesis).

The non-understanding:

A certain 'non-understanding' is to a certain extent constitutive for a genuine polyphony, which can/may show incompatibilities not only in terms of content but also in terms of language. However, the non-understanding also becomes "concrete" in the context of the overall performance, namely when musical-performative contributions of other composers momentarily paint over the

conversation of the "sonata" and render it incomprehensible. In these moments the speakers should rather not try to counteract and speak louder (not move the microphone closer), but - without pausing for a moment in dialogizing - allow their conversation to become "music" for such a moment, so to speak, and even if still audible, no longer understandable in terms of content. (Technical details: it must be ensured that the loudspeakers are positioned in such a way that the speakers can understand each other at any moment, even if this is already no longer the case from the outside/in some distance).

Ad libitum:

An additional, freely and spontaneously selectable option is to refer to the things happening simultaneously in the room right now, or to reflect on what has happened (will happen) earlier (or later?). But also a self-referential allusion to one's own role within the overall performance could play a role. Whether such observations remain unmediated insertions or can (later?) be caught up again in the other themes and motifs is (also) ad libitum.

Indistinctness:

The brief moments when language becomes music and has to leave behind its conceptual distinctness could also be described as 'indistinctness'. In case the speakers prefer a more detailed thematic specification, but do not want to choose it themselves, I enclose a (still unfinished) text in which I try to unfold the motif of indifference in various ways ("Das Ununterschiedene" - available only in German). The text does not have to be studied carefully, it can also be skimmed, in order to take some fragments from it, in order to transfer them perhaps to the own discipline or to question them from their point of view. (Background thought: Precisely the difference between the languages and disciplines, which is supposed to appear "polyphonically" in the 'Sonata', could turn out to be something, which, although clearly perceptible as distinction, cannot be unified/compared/comprehended discursively - thus, in a certain way, must remain indistinct (in the sense of 'linguistically only insufficiently articulable').

PA.

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