

Peter Ablinger

Sonata

for 2 speaking voices

2021

Version for the festival "Vielstimmige Aufklärung" ("polyphonic enlightenment")

Instrumentation and setup:

2 speaking voices = 2 people 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: (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 any problems. Everything that is suggested below can also be ignored - or only those suggestions are taken from it that seem helpful to get/keep the conversation going.

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

Topics:

The topic or topics could either be oriented towards the professional specification of the two speakers, and - in the sense of "Vielstimmige Aufklärung" - deliberately target certain linguistic incommensurabilities. Topics could try to build bridges between the disciplines or, on the contrary, confront each other with discipline-specific "impositions". An example of an interdisciplinary topic could be: "The Anthropocene" (suggestion by Asmus Trautsch). Furthermore, the topic/topics can either be pre-agreed - or not, so that both discussion partners 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 encounter of

different technical jargons, even an unbridled, creative side-by-side discussion could be desirable in the sense of the intended polyphony and interdisciplinarity.

Therefore: Answers/reactions should not be too cautious, not too secure, not too controlled; on the contrary: free association, quite "inappropriate" connections, even breaks, abrupt changes of topic, out-of-the-blue ideas, surprises - everything that keeps the dialog going. TENET OPERA ROTAS.

The basic conversational attitude could also include:
on the one hand, not too polite: by all means interject, don't always let your partner finish, rather ensure tempo!
on the other hand, also polite: e.g. by helping a person searching for terms with suggestions - without immediately taking her word for it.

Sonata:

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

The 'exposition' would then offer itself as the introduction of the topic/s, but also, for example, for the deliberate juxtaposition of discipline-specific problem areas and their typical vocabularies.

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

The 'recapitulation' could accordingly (in part) have the character of a resumption, i.e. bring the motifs and themes presented at the beginning to a provisional conclusion or résumé. But the opposite could also be the case: new themes could be invoked - for example in the sense of the insight gained in the meantime that the themes first mentioned are not sufficient to make further progress.

(Postscript on the understanding of the form/process of a sonata: the three main sections of the sonata have occasionally been compared with Hegel's dialectic of the same period and interpreted as thesis, antithesis and synthesis).

The non-understanding:

A certain 'non-understanding' is to some extent constitutive of a genuine polyphony, which can/may exhibit incompatibilities not only in terms of content but also in terms of language. However, non-understanding also becomes "concrete" in the context of the overall performance, namely when musical-performative contributions by other composers momentarily paint over the conversation of the "sonata" and make it incomprehensible. In these moments, the speakers should not try to counteract this and speak louder (not move the microphone closer), but rather - without pausing for a moment in the dialogue - allow their conversation to become "music" for such a moment, so to speak, and even if it is still audible, it is no longer understandable in terms of content. (Technical aspect: it must be ensured that the loudspeakers are positioned in such a way that the speakers can understand each other at all times, even if this is no longer the case from outside/in some distance).

Ad libitum:

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

The undistinguished:

The brief moments when language becomes music and has to leave its conceptual distinction behind could also be described as 'indistinction'. In the event that the speakers prefer a more detailed thematic specification, but do not want to choose it themselves, I include a text in which I try to develop the motif of indistinction in various ways. The text does not have to be studied carefully, it can also be skimmed over in order to take a few fragments from it and then perhaps transfer them to your own discipline or question them from your own perspective. (The ulterior motive: the very difference between the languages and disciplines that is supposed to emerge "polyphonically" in the 'sonata' could prove to be something that, although clearly perceptible as a difference, cannot be unified/compared/comprehended discursively - i.e. in a certain sense must remain undistinguished (in the sense of 'linguistically only insufficiently articulable')).

(English translation un-edited)