

FROM 'MUSIQUE CONCRÈTE' AND ACOUSMATIC ART TO THE 'NEW MUSIC THEATER'. THE AUSTRIAN COMPOSER DIETER KAUFMANN

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SUMMARY. This article follows the way the Austrian composer Dieter Kaufmann has gone with his conceptions taken from musical and extra-musical domains, as literature, visual arts, religion and politics, describing some of his theatrical works. For him the function of music is to improve the society and therefore his works are a critic to politics or to religion. Having studied in Paris by Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Schaeffer, François Bayle and René Leibowitz, he contributed to the development of the electronic music in Austria with his creation and his teaching of electroacoustic composition at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. He went further than the Parisian 'musique concrète', which worked with sound objects, and consciously selected and worked with objects of sound ambient in order to manage the sound environment, to musically shape it. The acousmatic art deals with sound objects, which are recorded and projected in another space, the theatre scene being an ideal space of it. A large part of his works are included in the genre of New Music Theater of the 20th and 21st century, where sound (tone and word) and movement come together, each of them having the same weight.

Keywords: musique concrète, sound object, acousmatic art, multimedia, electroacoustic composition

1. Introduction

The Austrian composer **Dieter Kaufmann** (*1941, Vienna) met the electronic music in its beginnings in Paris, where the tradition of 'musique concrète' was strong, studying electroacoustic composition by Pierre Schaeffer

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and François Bayle at Groupe de Recherches Musicales. Turning back to Austria, he contributed to the development of the electroacoustic music in his country, being a pioneer of it. He was the witness of the technique evolution in time, using it in his work, but he has seen it only as a mean to help him to materialize his ideas in his operas. One can say that his works are reflections of musical, technical-compositional aspects, as well as reflections about the human in general, inter-human communication, relation human-media, religion and politics. This study tries to highlight his conceptions that are beyond his work: to manage 'sound objects' characteristic to the 'musique concrète' and to create new spaces through the acousmatic art, projecting the manipulated sound objects in his operas that are classified in the genre of 'New Music Theater', i.e. the music theater in the 20th and 21th century where traditional opera, operetta and musicals are excluded² and the use of different media – music, word, movement, image have the same weight. Before this, one needs to learn about the studies and activity of Dieter Kaufmann.

Dieter Kaufmann studied Germanic philology and art history at Vienna University, as well as music education, violoncello and composition at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. He studied composition by Karl Schiske and Gottfried von Einem. Between 1963-1967 he sang in several choirs such as in the Choir of State Opera, Volksoper and Theater an der Wien. Besides electroacoustic music at GRM by P. Schaeffer and F. Bayle, D. Kaufmann studied composition at Conservatoire de Paris by Olivier Messiaen and René Leibowitz (1967-1969).

In 1975 he founded with his wife, the actress Gunda König and the sound engineer Walter Stangl the *K & K Experimental Studio* in Vienna, a multimedia studio, where they have produced their theatre works. He co-founded the Society of Electroacoustic Music in 1984, being also president (1988-1991). 1991-2006 he was professor of composition at University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and leader of the Institute for Electroacoustic and Experimental Music. Between 2001-2004 he was president of the Austrian Composers' Union.

Further D. Kaufmann's interests, conceptions and elements related to some works will be discussed and analyzed, as they were crystallized in his *Evocation – Oratorio against the Violence* op. 11 (1968). In this piece there are those elements, which will be found in his next works and that will be treated separately in this study, even if they came together in his works, as political engagement (it was composed in the year of the 1968-Revolution, when he was in Paris), the will to manage the acoustic surrounding, the treatment of

² Salzman, Eric; Desi Thomas, *The New Music Theater. Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 5.

the voice as sound in order to evoke associations and emotions, as well as the dealing with the literature and the use of multimedia. These elements will be discussed giving examples of his stage works, a preferred genre of Dieter Kaufmann, which involves them. Here should be mention that even his works are not especially composed for a big scene, for D. Kaufmann both hearing and seeing are important. He imagines a scene using often the speaking voice and gives to his works a theatrical allure, where the singers and instrumentalists have gestures and speaking voice.

2. Compositional Conceptions and the 'New Music Theater'

2.1 *Musique concrète. Objects thinking*

Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995), the father of the electroacoustic music, changed the traditional optic about music, considering all sounds of the environment, including noises (natural and by human produced sounds), potential sounds for a composition. In his *Traité des objets musicaux (Treatise of Music Objects)*, written in 1966, he named the material, which the composers used, *object*, and did a difference between *sound object* and *music object*. The sound objects are all the sounds that surround us, while the music objects are the sounds we subjectively selected from the sound objects, basing on our hearing perception and considering them musical.³ For P. Schaeffer the origin, the context and the meaning of the music sound are not important.

D. Kaufmann has taken the object thinking from the 'musique concrète'. He used the objects not only in the electroacoustic, but also in the instrumental music. One of these objects is the tonality, which is used without its harmonic functions. Thus, in many works of him there are tonal moments. He argues this fact: "Tonality is not only something that is over, it exists acoustically and culturally everywhere around us [...]. For me the tonal element was obviously an object, which I can insert where I want, and no longer the basis of compositional work".⁴ Following these thoughts one could say that tonality belongs to the sound environment and in this way D. Kaufmann has used it in many of his works citing fragments of traditional works of many historical periods and considering those quotes sound objects. The protestant choral is an example of sound object. It constantly appeared in his works, even his Op. 1, *Wach auf mein Herz (Wake up my Heart)* for organ, used a choral.

³ Schaeffer, Pierre, *Traité des objets musicaux*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966, Introduction.

⁴ Kaufmann, Dieter, *ich gehe im himmel der pfützen [I walk in puddle heaven]*. Ed. by Sabine Reiter, Österreichische Musikzeit Edition, *Komponisten unserer Zeit*, Band 30, Verlag Lafite, Wien, 2010, p. 29.

In the microphone opera *Pupofon* (op. 19, 1971), the musical object thinking was transposed to the material objects, these being like moving sculptures, where the artificial figures produce music through their movements, which was captured and insert live into the composition.⁵ In other piece, *Konkrezia, Ton aus Ton (Konkrezia, Tone from Tone), Hommage à la musique concrete* (op. 28, 1975), there is a human figure of ceramics, which was disassembled by the actress Gunda König, D. Kaufmann's wife meanwhile she was reciting a text by Ernst Jandl. Then she recomposed a human figure of objects which lay around. She had similar objects on its body, in order that she and the figure become similar. The theme of the composition is the woman role in the society and the clichés. She breaks out and will be reconstructed.⁶

2.2 Sound environment management

D. Kaufmann also received suggestions from the Canadian composer Murray Schafer (1933-2021), who founded the "Acoustic Ecology" (study of the sounds in relation to life and society) and the "Acoustic Design" (shaping of the acoustic world). Murray's starting point is the classification of sound objects made by P. Schaeffer, but he did not isolate the sounds from their context. The sounds have a function and a meaning, because they appear in a determined place and time.⁷ He also created a map with the descriptions of sound objects from the literary and historical documents. In 1973 Schafer did a project with the students from the Simon Fraser University and went through Canadian city Vancouver for a sound study. He invented the term "soundscape" for the sonic environment.

Unlike for P. Schaeffer, for D. Kaufmann is important (as well as for M. Schafer) to recognize the origin of the sound object, the acoustic environment of the taken sound, which has an 'anecdotal quality'.⁸ It creates associations in the listeners. For D. Kaufmann sounds tell a history. Therefore, in *Ah! La nature* for electronic he avoided to manipulate the sounds, in order to not become unrecognizable and abstract. He attributed a 'literary' quality to the selected sounds, related them to their environmental context. The involving of literary elements in the music will be further discussed. Similarly to M. Schafer, D. Kaufmann relates the society to the acoustic world and wants to make the composers sensitive to the sound environment, which has to be shaped. In

⁵ Ibidem, pp. 87-88.

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 95-96.

⁷ Schafer, Murray, *Klang und Krach. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Hörens (Sound and Noise. A Cultural History of Hearing)*, Athenäum, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 171.

⁸ Kaufmann, *id.* p. 64.

his opinion, this would be a social duty for the composer: the composer has a richness of material around and this has to be elaborated to the sound environmental protection.⁹

2.3 Acousmatic Art

The term 'acousmatic' goes back to Pythagoras, who did an experiment with his students, speaking to them behind a curtain in order that they were able to concentrate on listening, without being distracted by seeing. In the electroacoustic music the acousmatic music or acousmatic art refers to the music spread by loudspeakers, fact that challenges the auditory to concentrate only on listening without seeing its source. Acousmatic art deals with the perception of the listeners, as D. Kaufmann wrote: "The situation becomes acousmatic only through the curtain, which the loudspeakers tighten between sound production and sound perception."¹⁰

In the article "*Wen küsst die 10. Muse*" oder "*Die Geburt der akusmatischen Kunst aus dem Geiste der Musik*" (*Who does the 10th Muse Kiss*" or "*The Birth of the Acousmatic Art from the Spirit of Music*"), Dieter Kaufmann places the acousmatic music among the other nine arts, being the child born from Apollo's head and Euterpe, as the tenth muse, "a banker between God and Market".¹¹ For D. Kaufmann the development of the technique may be used for artistic aims. He quoted in the same article François Bayle who wrote that the acousmatic music/art was born from the meeting of radio and music, from two different ways of hearing.¹² The characteristic of acousmatic music is that a recorded sound will be taken out of its space (a medium) and projected into other space (a new medium). The new medium is a virtual one, an imaginary space which will be created in the listener. This can be in turn projected into a real space, for example on a stage. As D. Kaufmann wrote, this can happen through a new interpretation, which gives a new dimension to the sounds.¹³ Important is the **reproduction**, which means that a sound recorded replaces a sound object by its sound image, as the photographer does. Before of the sound projecting there is the sound **manipulation** (through cut, filters, transposition, velocity change, overlapping), which D.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 21.

¹⁰ Kaufmann, Dieter, "Wen küsst die 10. Muse" oder "Die Geburt der akusmatischen Kunst aus dem Geiste der Musik" ("Who does the 10th Muse Kiss" or "The Birth of the Acousmatic Art from the Spirit of Music"). In *Musik & 1* der Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst in Wien, 1992/1, p. 144.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 136.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 141.

Kaufmann assigns literary and philosophical features, as he creatively sees the technical means. In his opinion, the effect of the manipulation makes sense, only if the listener is able to recognize the music content, the extra-musical information, e.g. the sound environment from where the sounds were taken out. Regarding the literary and philosophical features assigned to the technique and the relation object-projection, D. Kaufmann tried to make musical portraits of different well-known performers of his works, where those musicians were the model as in the fine arts. In his portraits they also represent themselves, as in *Bildnis einer Frau im Spiegel (Portrait of a Woman in the Mirror)*. In *O Santa Acousmatica: La Mer* (Op. 75, 1994) D. Kaufmann confronted the natural see (sound object), which he recorded, with Debussy's work (musical image) asking himself, which is more real? In the following work, *O Santa Acousmatica: Offenes Meer (Open Sea)* (Op. 75a) Debussy's work is seen as a sound object, which may be electro-acoustically interpreted. D. Kaufmann brings the acousmatic art in relation with the narration. In this way the three *symphonies acousmatiques* tell musically about his marriage (1st symphony, *Bridges & Breaks*), a walk between cultures and religions, where one can hear human and animals voices (2nd symphony, *Meine-Welt-Musik*), or is a sound portrait describing the steps of a dancer, Sabine Hasicka, to whom he dedicated the symphony (3rd symphony, *il pleut – passage percussif*).

2.4 The New Music Theater

According to the definition given by Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi, "Music theater is theater that is music driven (i.e., decisively linked to musical timing and organization) where, at the very least, music, language, vocalization, and physical movement exist, interact, or stand side by side in some kind of equality but performed by different performers in a different social ambiance than works normally categorized as operas (performed by opera singers in opera houses) or musicals (performed by theater singers in «legitimate» theaters)."¹⁴ From this definition results that even the used means are equal, all is musically organized after musical rules, music being the starting and the reference point. For many composers speaking becomes interesting for its sonority and less for its meaning. The vocalization is between singing and speaking language, the composers often invent sound that do not exist neither in the singing, nor in the speaking. Gestures, mimic, physical movements and

¹⁴ Salzman, Eric; Desi Thomas, *The New Music Theater. Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 5.

corporality are given to professional actors, mimes, dancers. This kind of theater could not appear without the development of the technique, especially the audio and video. Small halls are preferred and frequently the voices are amplified. A special public is required, who could be involved in the action. Music ensembles are reduced and side by side to the singers and dancers, also being participants at the action. In many works of this genre, which also includes D. Kaufmann's works, the message is to show the social and political aspects of the time, a way of critic of the authority, of the society, of the media, of the church, done in an ironical and humorous way. His music uses special sounds and effects, as well as fragments of traditional works giving them another meaning. Further will be pointed out his approach to multimedia, literature, music tradition and politics.

2.4.1 Approach to multimedia

Dieter Kaufmann does a multimedia confrontation with a theme or with a person, which he represents at a time through different media. An example is *Singular* (op. 14, 1970) for tape, actor and camera, where the theme is the communication between people, which he represented through more means, as pantomime (female dancer), music (female singer) and language (female speaker/actress). In the score, there are indications for every one of the protagonists. He treated autonomously the different media, but in a mutual relationship: he asked himself, if the language could sound emotionally and the singing could be decoded.¹⁵ For him the different media (sound and image) have to stay to each other, not each other, as '*intermedia*', not as multimedia. An example is his ballet *Warten auf Musik (Waiting for Music)*, where each one - the movement, the sound and the image – serve to the other only for the interpretation of the message. In the same way is conceived *Pupofon* (op. 19, 1971), a microphone opera, where music is produced through the sound movements of the actors and objects, which were recorded by a microphone and live involved into the composition. These sounds are in their turn impulses for the actors to create new actions. Here is the place to add that D. Kaufmann's works are mostly aleatoric, the music notation taking the shape of a picture. In the vocal theater *Die Reise ins Paradies / The Journey to Paradise* after Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften (The Man Without Qualities)* (op. 56, 1987) for actors, speakers, singers, projections and electronic, the composer was oriented toward the text, which he passed through different media: the texts are spoken, sung by

¹⁵ Kaufmann, Dieter, *Ich gehe im Himmel der pfützen [I walk in puddle heaven]*. Ed. by Sabine Reiter, Österreichische Musikzeit Edition, *Komponisten unserer Zeit*, Band 30, Verlag Lafite, Wien, 2010, p. 61.

choir and soloists, electro-acoustically processed (the passing from speaking text to the singing one is done through the electronic) and projected.

2.4.2 Approach to the literature

Dieter Kaufmann is also literate, he created poems and texts for many of his works. For him the music has to highlight the meaning of the text. As it already was said, the sounds taken from their context carry a narration. He wants to stress this narration, adding other texts from the world literature, seeing some common aspects between the texts. Finally, the different texts from different spaces and times he used are bond through their hidden message: communication, harmony, justice, peace through the people.

One of the most interesting writers and philosophers is for D. Kaufmann Ludwig Wittgenstein, whom *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* and especially its last phrase of the *Tractatus – Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen* (*What one is not able to speak about, thereof one must be silent*) inspired more of his compositions, letting space for reflection. In this way, he concluded that where the word has its limits, the music can begin. Compositions where he used this phrase are *Pan - wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber soll man singen* (*What one is not able to speak about, thereof one should sing*) (Op. 30, 1975) for 16 choir voices, where he intended to continue the word communication through music, the chorists using harmonicas. In the same time he wanted to imagine the birth of the language from vocals, with emotional content, taking words from Wittgenstein's *Dictionary for Elementary Schools*. D. Kaufmann also composed the church opera *Bruder Bohuslaw / Brother Bohuslaw* (op. 61, 1989) relating Wittgenstein's phrase to the plot of the Polish King Boleslaw, who killed a bishop and escaped to the monastery in Ossiach (Austria), where he pretended to be mute. The composer wanted to compose on his inner voice.¹⁶

Generally, D. Kaufmann's works, not only the operas, have one or more speakers. The speaking language is very important for him and for other composers of the new music theater. This was also due to the fact that his wife, Gunda König, is an actress and they have done the productions together, having their experimental studio K&K. He composed lieder for speaking voice and an ensemble or an instrument. In this way, Kaufmann used a great number of texts also by himself or by his daughter: Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Stéphane Mallarmé, Frederico Garcia Lorca, August Strindberg, Bertold Brecht, Josef Winkler, Elfriede Jelinek, Ingeborg Bachmann, Robert Musil, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Dieter Kaufmann, Katharina Kaufmann.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 130.

2.4.3 Approach to the music tradition

Dieter Kaufmann's work is a reflection about the music tradition. Apart from tonality, which he used as a sound object and as a bearer of music history, he used protestant chorals, especially as a critic to the church, and fragments of determined traditional works, which he intends to give another meaning, corroborating them with the literary text(s) he used from the universal literature. In *Brother Bohuslaw* for singers, speakers, mixed choir, tape and chamber orchestra he used isorhythmic motets in church modes. Another interest is the 12-tone technique, which he does not see as opposite to the tonality. He used the dodecaphony in combination with the tonality, doing it more accessible for the auditory. He wanted a 'reconciliation' between tonality and atonality as in *Tolleranza* (op. 167, 2016). It is related to the *Intolleranza* by Luigi Nono. By D. Kaufmann the political message was sublimed and translated into pure musical technical means. In *Tolleranza* for orchestra from the year 2017 he put together musics from different periods (Bach, Giordani, the French hymn), pointing out that as in music, in the society has to be acceptance of the *Other*. In *Tolleranza* from 2019 the acceptance has to be in the music between systems - dodecaphonic and tonal as between people. Op. 274 (2023) hints to politics, approach which be further presented: *Die Macht des Dreiklangs in Schicksal der Zwölfönigkeit (The Power of the Triads in the Fate of the Twelve-Tone)*. Op.193 (2018), *Tonal-Atonal. Studien für eine atonale Welt (Studies for an Atonal World)* shows Kaufmann's way of seeing the world through the music. Especially his last compositions are a reflection about pure musical means as symmetries (he often divides the octave in two parts, the *f* sharp being the middle or he uses the overtones' scale with its symmetrical inversion). Other compositional means which he thematized in his later works are the melody, the scale in *Etüden für eine bessere Welt IX (Etudes for a Better World)* (Op. 201, 2019) for violoncello, triads, whole tone scale in *Keine Harmonieleere (Not Void of Harmony)* (Op. 203, 2019) for Saxophon quartet, intervals in *Studien über den Ausdruck der Intervalle (Studies about the Expression of the Intervalls)* (Op. 10, 1968) for piano and in *Intervall-Studien* (Op. 235, 2021) for *Violine Solo*.

2.4.4 Approach to the politics

Politics is one of the plots frequently used in the new music theater. Composers want to show the negative aspects and criticize them in their operas. By D. Kaufmann is the political engagement more accentuated, being among the politically engaged composers in Austria, having as model Luigi Nono. With the composer Wilhelm Zobl, who was member in the Communist Party,

D. Kaufmann wanted to change the situation of the workers in the factories, using electro-acoustic means, recording and elaborating the machines' sounds. They thought that this would make aware the workers, who would freely use the sounds that their machines produce and this fact could positively affect their social condition. They concluded that this was an utopia. However, utopia is for D. Kaufmann an opposite model that the composer proposes in order to make the people sensitive to a social or political situation and to change the way of seeing or perceiving it. A play with the reality is possible through the virtual technology, which creates imaginary spaces. In *Deklaration* (Op. 31, 1975) for actress, dias, live-electronic and tape the composer used the text from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in German, French and Esperanto. The visual projection shows the face of the actress, which gradually disappears, after each phrase of the declaration, being replaced through other people, landscapes or cars. *Aus der Arbeitswelt (From Worker's World)* (op. 32, 1971/1976) shows everyday life of a worker through a film, which one sees a repeated process, the tape has manipulated sounds taken from a factory and the actress dressed as a worker speaks a text, which ends in a chanson.¹⁷

Another attempt to tie the music to politics was to organize with the composer Bruno Strobl courses of new music inviting personalities, who worked with amateur choir and brass bands, with schools, as well as with instrumentalists and singers in Carinthia (1976, 1978-1990). Finally, D. Kaufmann translated his understanding of political aging to music characteristics, as has been previously showed, his works having musical contents, but hinted title as 10 *Tolleranza*-pieces for different ensembles and 9 *Etüden für eine bessere Welt – Etudes for a Better World*.

3. Conclusions

Dieter Kaufmann is a complex personality, with many interests in music, fine arts, technology, literature and politics. He is on one side anchored in the tradition; on the other side he has been open for the new music technologies. He used multimedia for musically achieving his conceptions, which have as aim a change of the perspective of the listeners about a social-political statement. He is convinced that the music has the function of improving the society. This study tried to show his conceptual and musical development, starting from the 'musique concrète' until the new music theater. All the elements, which were treated here, are webbed in his works that have a theatrical allure, even if not all are operas in the concrete sense. The use

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 138.

of the technology in the music cannot be reduced to audio, hearing all the time music coming from the loudspeakers being boring. In this way D. Kaufmann enriched his performances with 'living' instrumentalists, speakers and singers, adding visuals as video or film. All this syncretism is named today multimedia, which fits to scene performances of the new music theater.

The use of sound objects of the 'musique concrète' leads him to another perspective of composing, being sensitive to the sound environment, which offers him not only the material for the composition, but also the content, because he takes into account the context in which the sounds are produced, their function and their meaning. He assigns literary qualities to those sounds, combining them with different literary texts. Otherwise, the acousmatic art deals with the image of the real sounds, playing with the human perception and giving the impression of other reality through their manipulation and projection. Not only the reality can be differently perceived, but also the music tradition. Therefore, D. Kaufmann wants that musics from different historic periods would be heard in a new way and to liberate musicians from a hardened way to think about music. Being also a man of letters, the text is in center of his works, the most of his works having speakers, not singers. In this way the message is more comprehensible for all the people, message which is at the end a call to "Tolleranza".

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