

Narrative and Performative Modalities in the Swedish Opera-in-the-round *Drömmen om Thérèse*

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1. Introduction

In recent decades scholars have paid attention to the narrative-disrupting spectacle that an opera performance invariably offers (e.g. Ridout, 2012, pp. 159–176), and to the music's performative and disruptive functions, both from the perspective of examination of particular genres (e.g. Feldman, 2007; Calcagno, 2003, pp. 461–497), and from more general critical-theoretical positions (e.g. Kivy, 1994, pp. 63–68; Abbate, 2004, pp. 505–536)¹. This article explores the narrative and performative roles of music in a Swedish opera experiment carried out in the early 1960s, *Drömmen om Thérèse* (1960–64). This was a site-specific opera production that attracted both national and international attention for its inventive approaches as an opera-in-the-round. The performance space 'imposed by traditional theatre [and concert] layouts' (Santini, 2012, p. 81) was a much-debated subject during the late 1950s and 1960s, and composers, musicians, directors and actors created works that challenged the conventional division between stage and auditorium with 'flexible placing of interpreters and equipment' (Santini, 2012, p. 103).² The production of *Drömmen om Thérèse* offers an example of how contemporary ideas of theatre-in-the-round, music in space, instrumental theatre and pluralism of styles were incorporated into the opera genre.

Writing about the opera *Drömmen om Thérèse*, Joakim Tillman concludes that musically it belongs to the post-serial tendency of the early 1960s, as it is characterized by traits such as textual music, indeterminacy, live-electronics and the use of spatial factors (Tillman, 1999, pp. 13–14). When it comes to pastiches and allusions to pre-existing music, the opera has been seen as modernistic rather than postmodern, as the pluralism of styles does not serve as the main element, but is framed by modern devices (Tillman,

1 See also Goehr's reading of how this function of music is transformed in *Mahagonny*, which she sees as the last culinary opera (Goehr, 2008, pp. 3–37).

2 See Luigi Nono's writings and musical works, which are treated from this perspective in Santini (2012, pp. 71–106). See also Forser (2007, p. 434 and p. 464); Stockhausen (1958/59, pp. 11–15); Hambraeus (1958/59, pp. 8–10); Runsten and Werle (1962/63, p. 19).

1999, pp. 8–24). Moreover, in accordance with the hegemony of narrative opera, the music has primarily been viewed as a means by which to represent a text and narrate a story (cf. von Heijne, 2007, pp. 62–70; Bergendal, 1971, p. 78; Jensen, 1976). Even in contemporary times, opera music was supposed to have this function. In his review of the opening performance, music critic Folke Hähnel opposed the notion that the role of the music was narrative rather than dramaturgical (Hähnel, 1964).

This article is an attempt to capture the musical playfulness that characterizes the opera, when it comes to both the representation of the fictive world and the 'apparatus' of the production. I will highlight how the music functions on two levels: the narrative and the theatrical. In this way the role of the music can be seen as in line with contemporary aesthetics. The study is based on the score to the opera *Drömmen om Thérèse*, composed for performance in Stockholm in 1964, and on a recording of an adaptation of the opera for Swedish television from 1987. In its score and libretto alike,³ *Drömmen om Thérèse* is related to contemporary ideas and performance theories, which also were important in Sweden in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Placing the opera into the cultural context of its production in this way serves the purpose of capturing its performative level (Cook, 2001). Ultimately the opera is also related to the performative aesthetics of German theatre theoretician Erika Fischer-Lichte (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

2. *Drömmen om Thérèse*: Production and Libretto Text

Drömmen om Thérèse was a collaboration between director and librettist Lars Runsten (b. 1931) and composer Lars Johan Werle (1926–2001). It was an opera experiment that was carried out in the circular room, 'Rotundan', that had been created on the third floor of Kungliga Teatern (today the Royal Opera) in the early 1960s. The first performance was given at the festival 'Stockholms festspel' in Stockholm on 26 May 1964. The audience was positioned around an arena stage in four rows divided into four sections. They were surrounded by a small orchestra, which was divided into groups and placed in a symmetrical pattern, and by speakers installed along the walls and under the stage floor.

The base instruments, double bass, horn, trombone and double bassoon, were placed in the room so as to form a square. The three winds (flute, oboe and bassoon/double bassoon) formed a triangle, as did the three clarinets, three brass instruments (trumpet, horn and trombone), three percussionists, three grand pianos and three string trios (violin, viola and cello). To this came a harp that was located at one side of the room (Score, p. 6).⁴

3 A copy of the first version of the libretto is preserved in the Lars Johan Werle collection at the Music and Theatre Library of Sweden. It is a copy that once belonged to Werle. This copy contains sketches of text and music that probably were made by Werle (Runsten, 1960).

4 See also Werle's own explanation of this placement of the orchestra in Johansson (1968, p. 50).

Because of this arrangement, two conductors were required. Microphones were set up to make it possible for the strings to be amplified, and an electric bass guitar was positioned in the centre of the room with an amplifier. Two of the instruments were performed from the stage, the violin and the guitar.

The production of *Drömmen om Thérèse* attracted much attention for its opera-in-the-round staging (Hähnel, 1964; Hellquist, 1964; Thoor, 1964; Brandel, 1964).⁵ The opera was performed 35 times from 1964 until the 1967/68 season. It was staged in two new versions in 1974 and 1984. It was also adapted for television and, in a shorter version, for radio, an adaptation that also was recorded. The opera was performed throughout Europe by touring troupes from Sweden as well as by local groups (von Heijne, 2007, p. 72). Ralf Liebermann, manager of the Hamburg Opera, commissioned an opera based on the same spatial principle, and the collaborators' second opera, *Die Reise* (The Journey), was performed for the first time at the Hamburg Opera in 1969.

Apart from its theatre-in-the-round format, the production of *Drömmen om Thérèse* was innovative for its use of multichannel diffusion. The loudspeakers had two channels with panning possibilities, which enabled sound manipulations during the performance. A two-channel tape had been prepared at Sveriges Radio (the Swedish public radio corporation) with the help of sound engineer Karl-Otto Valentin (von Heijne, 2007, p. 61). Sound and music diffused through the room from the six pairs of loudspeakers positioned along the walls, and the two pairs beneath the stage floor.

Drömmen om Thérèse is a chamber opera in two acts and seven scenes, and is based on the short story 'Pour une nuit d'amour' (For a Night of Love, 1876) by Émile Zola. Runsten's libretto is a free adaptation of the short story. Situations in the story have been prolonged to serve the function of 'lyrical enclaves' (Carner, 1985, p. 95), where the narrative pace of the action is slowed down and the music is in the foreground.⁶ The libretto also takes liberties with regard to the sequence of events and characters. Three of the twelve characters are not found in the short story: the speech role the Street Sweeper, and the mute roles the Stranger and the Blind Man.

Thérèse	mezzo-soprano
Julien	baritone
Colombel	tenor

5 See also Hellquist (1966, p. 15). For the international interest that this opera generated, see also the letter from Runsten to Werle, Gentofte, 15 November 1966.

6 For example the encounter between the Factory Girls and Julien in act I, scene 3, the piety of Thérèse in act I, scene 3, Françoise's preparation for the wedding in act II, scene 1, and the encounter between Julien and the Drunken Officers in act II, scene 6. Often these situations consist of pastiches and allusions to historical music.

Françoise	lyric soprano
Two Factory Girls	soprano, mezzo-soprano
Three Drunken Officers	tenor, baritone, bass
The Street Sweeper	speech-role
The Stranger	mute role (guitarist)
The Blind Man	mute role (violinist)

The libretto also includes four quasi-independent scenes: a prologue, two intermezzi and an epilogue. On stage here are the Street Sweeper and the Stranger, and the Street Sweeper stands in the church door describing Thérèse's wedding, which is taking place inside the church.⁷ Her observations generate associations that in turn give rise to the story of Thérèse, Julien and Colombel.

Act I

Prologue: the Street Sweeper, the Stranger

Scene 1: Julien

Scene 2: Françoise, Thérèse

Scene 3: the Blind Man, two Factory Girls, Julien

Scene 4: Julien

Scene 5: Françoise, Thérèse, Colombel, Julien

Intermezzo: the Street Sweeper, the Stranger

Scene 6: Julien

Scene 7: Thérèse, Julien

Act II

Scene 1: Françoise, Thérèse, Colombel

Scene 2: Thérèse, Colombel

Intermezzo: the Street Sweeper, the Stranger

Scene 3: Thérèse, Julien

Scene 4: Julien, Thérèse

Scene 5: the Blind Man, Julien

Scene 6: Julien, three Drunken Officers

Scene 7: Julien

Epilogue: the Street Sweeper, the Stranger

⁷ In the radio adaptation, these scenes are to be excluded and replaced by a narrator (see the letter from Runsten to Werle, Gentofte, 23 February 1965).

The synopsis of the plot is as follows: The clerk Julien is a shy and lonely person with a passion for playing the flute. One day he catches a glimpse of his neighbour's daughter, Thérèse de Marsanne, and becomes obsessed with her beauty. Thérèse has just returned from convent school and resumes a two-way sadomasochistic relationship with her foster-brother, the hunchback Colombel, who is the son of Thérèse's wet nurse Françoise. In the course of a sexual encounter Thérèse inadvertently kills Colombel. She begs Julien for help in doing away with the corpse and promises to give herself to him if he will throw it into the river. He does so, but jumps in after the corpse, prevented by his conscience from fulfilling his longing for Thérèse (see brief synopsis in Werle and Runsten, 1964).

An intriguing aspect of Runsten's adaptation is the way he has transformed the narrative of the short story.⁸ The opera is characterized by split-level dramaturgy using the flashback technique. Zola's naturalistic short story has been transformed into a fragmentary construction without a clear chronology. The story world consists of three levels of events that often are set off against one another. The first consists of the prologue, the epilogue and the two intermezzi, where the Street Sweeper narrates Thérèse's story to the Stranger. This episode functions as a frame for the second level of events, which concern the characters Julien, Thérèse, Colombel and Françoise. The third level comprises events that take place in the minds of the characters (above all Julien). The narrative constructions of the second and the third levels of events lack chronology and unity of place.

The interiors of the characters are of principal importance in the story world. Zola's short story was chosen for the libretto because of its psychological depth (Wallner, Runsten and Werle, 1963/64, p. 14), and according to Werle the flashback technique of the narrative served to enhance the psychological level of the story world (Johansson, 1968, p. 54). In his review of the opening performance in *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden's foremost broadsheet newspaper) Folke Hähnel emphasized how well suited the chamber-opera medium was to the drama's psychological character (Hähnel, 1964).

3. The Cultural Context of the Opera Production

In an article on the nature of contemporary opera 'Opera och operainscenering idag' (Opera and the staging of opera today), published the year following the opera production (1965), Lars Runsten describes *Drömmen om Thérèse* as a new musical-dramatic form that had been highly effective. He writes that two devices, which fascinated contemporary directors and composers, were of importance in the experiment: the intimate

8 In his review of the opera's opening performance, music critic Per-Anders Hellquist posits that the most interesting device of the opera is not the theatre-in-the-round form, but this innovative construction of the narrative (Hellquist, 1964).

theatre-in-the-round form, on the one hand, and the spatial playing with sound made possible by contemporary music, on the other (Runsten, 1965, p. 12). Zola's short story was chosen for the libretto because of an ambition to bridge the gap between stage and auditorium. According to Runsten, the short story had the concentrated course of events and psychological depth of characters required by the intimate form of theatre-in-the-round (Wallner, Runsten and Werle, 1963/64, p. 14).

The production of *Drömmen om Thérèse* must be viewed in the context of the limitations of peepshow theatre layouts and the architecture of concert halls, which was a much debated topic in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁹ Directors and composers wanted to create buildings that were adapted to the spatial challenges that contemporary theatrical and musical events posed.¹⁰ The theatre-in-the-round enabled great flexibility when it came to action and sound distribution. Runsten's idea was that this theatrical form could vitalize the genre of opera by bringing it more into line with contemporary aesthetic ideals (Runsten and Werle, 1962/63, p. 19; Runsten, 1965, pp. 11–13). Runsten already had some experience of working with the theatre-in-the-round form in the early 1950s,¹¹ however it was in the early 1960s, as a director with experience of chamber opera, that he got the idea of using the theatre-in-the-round form as a means by which to enhance the intimacy between stage and auditorium in an opera context. An important source of inspiration was the circular room created at that time at Kungliga Teatern where Runsten held the post of director (Johansson, 1968, pp. 3–14).

A starting point in producing the opera was to create experiences that, in accordance with contemporary performance theories, were based on intimacy, equality and reflection.¹² Constructing the drama around the flashback technique was also in line with the contemporary idea of triggering a new kind of attention and active engagement on the part of the audience.¹³ Runsten's intention with the open-stage construction of theatre-in-the-round was to focus on the actor as a human being and on the transformative process that made the audience experience him/her as a fictive character (von Heijne, 2007, p. 58). Because of the arena-stage design, the performance did not have any walls and the actor revealed him-/herself completely in front of the audience. This way of affecting the audience by using the actor's body as a material rather than as a medium was an

9 Compare with Forser (2007, pp. 433–434). See also Hähnel (1964); Hellquist (1966, pp. 15–16); Runsten (1965, p. 4). For Nono's discussions about this subject see Santini (2012, pp. 80–81 and 103).

10 Articles on this subject attracted attention in Stockholm during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Among those were Stockhausen (1958/59, p. 12); Janszen (1961/62, p. 6).

11 Director and librettist Per Edström figured prominently in the experiments with the theatre-in-the-round form in Sweden at this time, see Forser (2007, p. 434).

12 See Forser (2007, p. 464); Fischer-Lichte (2007); Santini (2012, p. 72). See also Runsten (1965, pp. 11–13).

13 Statements by Werle confirm that this idea was the basis for the use of this technique in *Drömmen om Thérèse* (Johansson, 1968, p. 54). Compare Nono's ambitions in the 1960s, as described in Santini (2012, p. 86).

important part of the aesthetics of contemporary theatre groups (Forser, 2007, p. 464). The actors were self-referential and signified what they accomplished (cf. Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 21).¹⁴ Fischer-Lichte has described how the audience's experience of an actor in a performance invariably oscillates between two levels, experiencing the actor as a character in the fictive world and experiencing the actor as a performer (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 148). She has shown how, in 1960s theatre, the latter was stressed at the expense of the former, and how this second 'material' level was a means by which to generate a 'feedback loop' between actor and audience.

Theatre was no longer conceived as a representation of a fictive world, which the audience, in turn, was expected to observe, interpret, and understand. Something was to occur *between* the actors and the spectators and that constituted theatre. It was crucial that *something* happened between the participants and less important *what* exactly this was. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 20–21)

Also in line with this fascination with the self-referential is the fact that the audience of *Drömmen om Thérèse* was not given the possibility to follow the story line in a programme (von Heijne, 2007, p. 62), but was supposed to experience and react directly to the performance. The acting was not confined to the arena-stage, and the performance space was expanded by passages leading from the stage behind the audience.¹⁵ Runsten described this phenomenon as 'theatre in space', that is to say, as an extension of the contemporary idea of 'music in space', where music and sounds surrounded the audience (cf. Stockhausen, 1958/59, p. 13), to the acting process (von Heijne, 2007, p. 57; Runsten, 1965, p. 12).

In the preface to the first version of the libretto, Runsten wrote that his attempt to create a musical drama for theatre-in-the-round would differ from traditional opera, especially regarding vocal and instrumental techniques (Runsten, 1960). The theatre-in-the-round was developed aurally through the positioning of instruments and loudspeakers in space (Connor, 1971, p. 148). In accordance with contemporary 'music in space' ideas, the direction and movement of sounds were important parameters of the composition (Johansson, 1968, p. 49; cf. Stockhausen, 1958/59, p. 12). By means of spatially separated groups, sounds should be made to move around in space (cf. Stockhausen, 1958/59, pp. 12 and 14). However, the dominant technique of sound distribution in the opera involves combining groups of the same instrument category to produce fixed

14 See also Fischer-Lichte's discussion of materiality and mediality from the perspective of the appearance of the actor as singer in opera as presence versus representation (Fischer-Lichte, 2003, p. 297).

15 See Santini's description of how expanding the action space was used in contemporary political theatre to integrate the audience into the performance and create an 'engulfing experience' (Santini, 2012, p. 74).

bodies of sound that envelop the audience with only minor interjections of sound movements.¹⁶

An idea connected to the notion of music in space was that of instrumental theatre (cf. Kagel, 1961/62, p. 2).¹⁷ Before the performance began, the instrumentalists circulated around the audience tuning their instruments. This combination of theatre and musical performance can be compared to Kagel's view of instrumental theatre (Kagel, 1961/62, p. 2). In an interview about the opera, Werle labelled the 'play around the play' (created by the instrumentalists during the performance) a 'show', and also stated that this visual positioning of the orchestra was important in creating the effect of alienation (Johansson, 1968, p. 54). The ideas of instrumental theatre and alienation also lay behind the appearance of the two characters who performed music live from the stage: the Blind Man and the Stranger (Johansson, 1968, p. 55; cf. Kagel, 1961/62, pp. 1–5).

The devices pluralism of styles, spatial sound distribution and instrumental theatre can be seen as in agreement with the idea of creating a new kind of attention from the audience, one that was based on intimacy, on the one hand, and reflection, on the other. Due to these elements the opera performance was characterized by discontinuity and diversity, traits that were important for enhancing audience attention, according to Werle (Johansson, 1968, p. 54).¹⁸ The opera also contains parts where vocal gestures and sung language are means by which to generate sound rather than create semantic meaning; that is to say, the text is self-referential,¹⁹ this too being a device described at the time as a way to create a certain kind of attention from the audience (cf. Berio, 1958/59, p. 7).

4. The Narrative and the Performative

Drömmen om Thérèse adheres to genre conventions when it comes to the role of music as a narrative means. In a 1965 article Runsten writes that, in opera, music is a medium connected to the drama (Runsten, 1965, p. 12).²⁰ Werle, in turn, often said that, in opera,

16 The technique that Werle uses is comparable with that observed by Bengt Hambraeus in Luciano Berio's *Allelujah* (Hambraeus, 1960/61, p. 17).

17 See also Johansson's interview with Werle, where the latter states that the idea of instrumental theatre could be traced in the production (Johansson, 1968, p. 55).

18 Compare how the Brechtian alienation effect aimed to sharpen attention by means of interruption (Eiland, 2003, p. 56). See also Kagel's description of instrumental theatre from a psychological level (Kagel, 1961/62, p. 3). For the use of the technique of music in space as a means by which to activate the listening see also Hambraeus' description of Berio's *Allelujah* (Hambraeus, 1960/61, p. 17).

19 See Thérèse's vocalises in act I, scene 5.

20 He sees drama as a play with human conflicts that creates affects and makes the audience evaluate and reevaluate human qualities. For him the drama is not word, but situation, conflict, and course of events that sometimes can be interpreted in words.

music was a means by which to communicate through expression and representation.²¹ Music should add something to the meaning conveyed by visual and verbal media.²²

In *Drömmen om Thérèse* Werle's ambition was to combine expressive and melodic features with a modern idea of sounds (Wallner, Runsten and Werle, 1963/64, p. 15). A fragmentary sonic world, with modernistic outbursts, sudden interruptions and unexpected changes of sound constellations, emphasizes the fragmentary construction of the narrative. The placement of the orchestra in groups around the audience and the use of multichannel diffusion enable different action levels to take place at the same time, and realistic action to be combined with interior monologues. However, sound and music also create continuity through recurring motifs, themes and sounds, and in this way appear to reveal the chronology behind the overall action. Moreover, music has the narrative roles of reinforcing events, representing feelings and characters, and creating atmosphere, and it functions both diegetically (music that is heard in the fictive world) and meta-diegetically (music that is in the heads of the fictive characters) (cf. Gorbman, 1987, p. 22). Music is also a means by which to represent movement and time, and serves as a component of stage design.

Of principal importance for the role of music in this opera, however, is the combination of narrative and theatrical elements.²³ The theatrical level of the performance is manifested by Runsten's and Werle's ideas about creating contact with the audience. In the above-mentioned article from 1965, Runsten shows an interest in Brecht's ideas about the alienation effect ('*Verfremdungseffekt*'), that is, communication by way of estranging the audience (Runsten, 1965, p. 11; cf. Brecht, 1979, pp. 202–203).²⁴ He emphasizes the ability of the *unique scenic shape* of an opera to create interest, convince, move and entertain (Runsten, 1965, p. 12).²⁵ In a statement about music's role in opera Werle suggests that the creation of direct contact with the audience is of principal importance in the theatre event:

[...] quotations or similar allusions may be a way to make contact with the listener, and direct contact with the listeners certainly is what one needs to establish in a theatre event, where everything happens at once and all kinds of new impulses follow quite quickly one upon another. I have always been partial to this kind of means – the ballad in *Drömmen om Thérèse* being the first example. (Hedwall, 1987, p. 299.)

21 See for example Petersén (1980, p. 19).

22 This was an important ambition of Werle in the opera *Tintomara* (1973) (cf. Johnson and Werle, 1977, p. 50).

23 See Werle's description of these two levels in Johansson (1968, pp. 54–55).

24 For accounts of the interest in Brecht's dramas and ideas in Stockholm in the 1960s, see Forser (2007, pp. 425–464).

25 Compare Brecht's ideas about creating alienation through separation of situations and constellations of action (Brecht, 1979, p. 214).

In accordance with genre conventions of opera, *Drömmen om Thérèse* is a manifestation of the narrative as well as of the performative. The role of music is to narrate a story, on the one hand, and to attract audience attention, on the other. However, the performative role of music is not, as in the conventional manner, primarily manifested through the singer's voice and vocal ability. Of principal importance for the narrative-performative binary is instead the theatricality created by the devices pluralism of styles, music in space (and the theatre-in-the-round form) and instrumental theatre.

Pluralism of Styles

In the above statement, Werle mentions the use of quotations and allusions as a way to make contact with the audience. Although the opera contains only a few pastiches and allusions, these particular numbers are important as they are long and amount to a considerable stylistic deviation from the modernistic musical style that permeates the opera as a whole.²⁶ Often their place in the narrative is diegetic; this is music that also has the status of music in the story world.²⁷ However, the length of the numbers in combination with the stylistic contrast they create make them stand out as theatrical moments.²⁸ In this way they create distance in relation to the narrative of the fictive world.

Act II opens with a scene based on a pastiche of a folk ballad (act II, scene 1). The wet nurse Françoise performs the song to the Stranger's accompaniment on guitar (he is on stage but does not appear as a character in the story world),²⁹ while she polishes Thérèse's bridal crown (Music example 1). The scene as a whole is constructed as a flashback with a combination of various action and time levels. Françoise's actions are combined with the succession of three events from historical time that depict a sado-masochistic relationship between Thérèse and Colombel. During these events the audience is enveloped by a modernistic sonic world consisting of a fragmentary construction of clusters, tremolo and glissandi. The ballad's six stanzas are performed in alternation (and finally simultaneously) with these events.

By virtue of its stylistic, medial and spatial deviation, the folk ballad surpasses the role of diegetic music. It creates a time level and a tempo that differ from the continuous development of the erotic game. This formally closed number, which has a – for the opera as a whole – unique musical language, creates another level of experience. It serves as

26 The opera contains four pastiches: a nursery rhyme in act I, scene 3; a ballad in act II, scene 1; and a march and a drinking song in act II, scene 6. Hähnel discusses this device in his 1964 review.

27 These musical situations are not, however, included in Zola's short story (the Drunken Officers in act II, scene 6 are mentioned briefly, but Julien manages to escape before being confronted by them) (cf. Zola, 2002, p. 41).

28 Compare how the interruption created by the montage technique has been seen as a way to create critical distance, for example by Brecht (Eiland, 2003, pp. 53 and 56).

29 The accompaniment changes with each new stanza and is successively expanded to include instruments from the orchestra (strings and harp).

mp Prin ses san gick i sin ro sen gård hon gick i dju pa tan kar, prin

Music example 1.

a contrast to the unpleasant context of Thérèse and Colombel. Whereas the role of the modernistic music is to narrate the action in interplay with visual and verbal media, the clearly autonomous structure of the ballad, with its recurring melody, gives unity to the scene. Through it, the scene is endowed with a unique form that attracts the attention of the audience (cf. Runsten, 1965, p. 12; Brecht, 1979, pp. 200–201).

The device of pluralism of styles, as indicated by Werle's statement quoted above, appears in this scene to manifest a meta-perspective on the part of the composer. The composer uses it to communicate directly with the audience through the music. In this way the ballad's role is comparable to Brecht's use of ballads as commentary, a technique he used to create alienation (cf. Brecht, 1979, pp. 38 and 85; Eilert, 2003, p. 54; Goehr, 2008, pp. 8–9 and p. 14; Runsten, 1965, p. 11).³⁰ Through it, the broader musical consciousness of the audience is taken into account (cf. Connor, 1971, p. 149).

In act II, scene 6, the pluralism of styles appears to serve a similar purpose. In the middle of the night, hidden by darkness, Julien wanders to the river with the corpse of Colombel. The gloomy atmosphere of the situation is represented by a differentiated modernistic sonic world alternating between movements of sound around the room and enveloping bodies of sound, live performance on violin by the Blind Man, and transformations of a nursery rhyme (from act I, scene 2) on the loudspeakers. All of a sudden, however, a cohesive musical number interrupts this medial and auditory diversification. A distorted march, performed by woodwinds and brass, accompanies the entrance of the three Drunken Officers. The instrumentalists are stationed behind the door through which the officers make their entrance, causing the music to be heard from a distance. As the officers walk around the room their movements are forcefully emphasized by each of the three percussion groups placed in a triangle around the audience (Score, p. 112). Eventually the march turns into a drinking song arranged as a three-part canon (Score, pp. 113–114). The song has the character of a waltz, and has a traditional texture with melody and accompaniment (Music example 2).

30 Compare also musicologist Björn Heile's interpretation of Kagel's 'intertextuality' technique as a kind of 'indirect speech', that is, a way for the author to make a point of his own. (He sees the referential music as such as objectified, creating aesthetic distance, and states that it is how the music is used that is important.) In this sense, musical quotation is to be seen as a technique that has a distancing function (alienation) rather than an engaging one (Heile, 2006, pp. 109–110).

$\text{♩} = 76$ Andante tranquillo

Flautone
1 *p*

Clar. basso
mp

Fag.
1 *mp*

Officerare I (Med koncentrerat fylleallvar)

2 *mp* Hjälp — mej bro der, hjälp — mej bro-

Officerare II

Officerare III

3

5

der, hjälp mej hjälp mig att hit ta hem, ty jag mås te

mp Hjälp mig bro der

Music example 2.

The theatrical effect of the music is enhanced by the way in which the march and the drinking song create contrast in the scene as a whole. Through the allusions, the music emphasizes the status of the episode as metadrama, that is to say, as a play within the play. According to theatre theorist Richard Hornby, for the audience the metadramatic experience is a dislocation of perception, which may vary from mild to disruptive (Hornby, 1986, p. 32). The narrative frame is further challenged through the manifestation of music

as performance. Rather than drawing the audience more deeply into the fictive world, the performance puts the theatricality into focus, which creates distance.

According to the score, the officers should make their entrance 'in single file with clanking sabres', and the canon should be performed with a concentrated 'drunken seriousness' (Score, pp. 112–113). The comical dimension of the march and the drinking song is already highlighted in Runsten's first version of the libretto, and the copy of this libretto that belonged to Werle contains sketches describing the scene as comic, burlesque and macabre (Runsten, 1960, p. 42).³¹ This unexpected and independent episode, the opera's only comic moment, can be compared to the entertaining comic episodes in early baroque opera (cf. Bianconi, 1987, pp. 208–209).³²

Music in Space

In the scene described above, sounds are made to wander in space to emphasize motion, which is in line with the contemporary fascination with intermedial play with conventional roles of art forms and expressions (cf. Berio, 1958/59, pp. 1–7). Space is a parameter in the narrative.³³ Moreover, in the opera, sound and music emanating from clear and fixed positions serve as substitutes for visual effects (cf. Connor, 1971, p. 148). The stage setting is mainly done by acoustic means. Buildings, such as the church and the Hôtel de Marsanne, as well as actions, are represented through sound and music that emanate from certain points in space.

The scene with the officers also exemplifies how the spatial distribution of sound and music may create a performative level that, in this instance, has a comic effect through exaggeration of performance. At the opening of the opera the effect of this narrative-performative combination is somewhat different. The opera opens with a dissonant organ sound (tape-recorded and amplified) that diffuses through space and surrounds the audience. It begins even before the lights are turned off in the auditorium. Initially low, the volume gradually increases to a maximum and when the lights are turned off the volume decreases and the texture is fragmented by movements in various directions.³⁴ Eventually the sound comes to rest at the place meant to represent the church. Accordingly, the organ-sound is finally diegetic, as it belongs to the fictive world. At the same time it has a fictive status as it represents the church in which Thérèse's wedding is taking

31 The use of quotations to create comic effects also appears in Werle's later operas. See for example how he uses quotations from Mozart in *Die Reise* and *Tintomara* (Connor, 1971, p. 149; Ethnersson Pontara, 2013; Ethnersson Pontara and Tillman, 2010, pp. 204–218).

32 See also Kagel's comparison of instrumental theatre with the parodies in *Hoffnung-Music-Festival* in 1961/62, p. 3.

33 See the use of this device in Arnold Schönberg's *Die Jacobsleiter* and *Moses und Aron* (cf. Santini, 2012, p. 75).

34 See Werle's own description of this musical event in Wallner, Runsten and Werle (1963/64, p. 14). This musical event is already described by Runsten in the first text of the libretto (Runsten, 1960). See also von Hejine (2007, p. 62).

place. The music's diegetic status is emphasized by the Street Sweeper's humming along. As the Street Sweeper begins describing what is happening inside the church the sound continues, but with a new character, it is now more clearly defined (melodically and rhythmically).

Werle claimed that the initial diffusion of sound in the room had the purpose to make the audience accept the modernistic organ sound as belonging to the historical reality of the fictive world, and more specifically, as representing the church (Johansson, 1968, p. 52; cf. Hellquist, 1964).³⁵ Eventually, the sound had to be fixed in place in order to serve as a component of stage design. Also important for this representation were certain recurring sounds coming from the same direction. The melodically and rhythmically profiled organ sound returns in the first and second intermezzo, and in the epilogue the sound of church bells comes from this direction. The opera ends with a sonic diffusion reminiscent of the opening.

The opening's combination of 'mobility of acoustic space' with 'stillness of visual space' (cf. Santini, 2012, p. 95) can be related to contemporary performance practices of, for example, director Erwin Piscator.³⁶ This playing with sounds coming from different directions, before the narrative context is set, appears to serve the purpose of effect.³⁷ In this way the mobile sound diffusion is also a manifestation of the music's performative level in the opera. However, the effect is one of alienation rather than intoxication.

Combining narrative and performance through the mediation of sounds in space is important throughout the opera. In act I, scene 1, the principal character, Julien, plays the flute on stage. This diegetic music is represented by flute music emanating from the loudspeakers positioned under the stage.³⁸ However, this music is successively combined with the sound of Julien's voice being disseminated in the room. Even if the spoken parts of these sounds have a text that makes them appear to be Julien's interior monologue (see also Hähnel, 1964; Hellquist, 1964), the resulting soundscape also has a distancing effect. Just as at the beginning of the opera, media technology mainly serves as a means by which to create distraction and alienation (cf. Eiland, 2003, pp. 55–56).

35 The sound of this situation differs from Runsten's original intentions. In the first text of the libretto he writes that the surrounding sound should consist of 'festive organ music' (Runsten, 1960).

36 Compare Nono's experience with Piscator. Piscator was also engaged as guest director in Sweden. See Santini (2012, pp. 89 and 95).

37 Compare Stockhausen's description of *Gesang der Jünglinge* (Stockhausen, 1958/59, p. 12).

38 The music was played in another room with microphones – Hellquist gives mention to this performer in his review (Hellquist, 1964). This use of live-electronics for Julien's playing of the flute is in line with Runsten's initial intention (Runsten, 1960). According to the score this music could also be tape-recorded.

Instrumental Theatre

The device of instrumental theatre is manifested throughout the work, through the audience being surrounded by the orchestra. In many scenes the music also requires unconventional playing techniques – like alternately pressing the strings on the piano with the wrist, three knuckles and nails while striking the keys (Score, pp. 116–117) – that could have had some visual effects. This applies both to instrumentalists (this is especially prominent in act II, scene 7) and vocalists (the vocalises of Thérèse in act I, scene 5).³⁹ Furthermore, the two characters who perform music live on stage, the Blind Man and the Stranger, have ambiguous positions in the narrative.

The Blind Man performs a violin melody that is repeated several times during the opera. The melody first occurs in the opening scene, in which Julien is alone in the fictive world. A modernistic sonic world that alternately envelops the audience and moves around the room is suddenly broken by the violin melody that is intense and rhythmically and melodically profiled (Score, p. 12) (Music example 3). Two scenes later (act I, scene 3), the Blind Man is on stage, dressed as a beggar, and performs this melody at the same time as Julien encounters the two Factory Girls. Because Julien hears the melody in this situation, its appearance in act I, scene 1 seems to have been in his mind. In this way act I, scene 3 precedes act I, scene 1 (and also the prologue) in the fictive world.

Violin

5

> *pp* < *ff* *f* *p* < *f* > *p*

Music example 3.

A further transformation of this melody occurs in act II, scene 5. The Blind Man performs the melody on violin from the stage when Julien makes his entrance carrying Colombel's corpse. When Julien suddenly begins thinking about Thérèse, the melody acquires a new, strong expressiveness and eventually combines with a transformed tape recording of the nursery rhyme performed by the Factory Girls in act I, scene 3. It is also at this moment that Julien takes notice of the Blind Man. When Julien comments on his

³⁹ See Hänel (1964), who relates Thérèse's vocalises to Kagel.

performance, the Blind Man responds with an expressive transformation of the melody. In combination with the nursery rhyme these responses appear as expressionistic transformations within Julien's mind.

The violin melody of the Blind Man accordingly appears as a means of narration occupying a diegetic and a meta-diegetic position, and it appears to guide the audience through the flashback technique of the narrative. However, Werle himself did not describe this music primarily as means by which to reveal the chronology of the narrative.⁴⁰ Moreover, in both scenes where the Blind Man performs music on stage, he initially appears as a character who is not participating in the fictive world. His performance is separate from the narration. He is a performer for the audience, performing a solo piece on violin.⁴¹ First after a while can he be understood as diegetic, when characters in the fictive world take notice of him in his beggar's clothes.

The fact that a professional violinist performed the music of the Blind Man is significant. In this way the music as performance is given priority over the embodiment of a character. The movements of this person on stage belonged to a musician rather than to an actor performing a character on stage. Making an instrumentalist appear in the guise of a theatrical character in this way is in line with the combination of instrumental performance and theatricality in Kagel's instrumental theatre (cf. Kagel, 1961/62, pp. 1–2).⁴²

Also the character of the Stranger is realized through instrumental theatre. Just like the Blind Man, the Stranger serves as a guide through the narrative and his music creates continuity between scenes through musical performances on stage (for example from the prologue to act I, scene 1). In the framing scenes (the prologue, the intermezzi and the epilogue) he is a character in the fictive world.

However, it is the theatrical level of the character that is most apparent. In the prologue, the Street Sweeper labels him a poet, and later she comments on his performance on the guitar by saying that he is a dreamer (Score, pp. 8–9). Although he is mute, he seems to communicate through his instrument. The Stranger appears to comment on the narration through his music, and even the story seems to be created by it. In the fictive world of Thérèse and Julien he accompanies the other characters. According to Runsten, the Stranger has the function of a mute narrator, and is present throughout the drama as an artificial commentator. Representing fantasy and poetry, he is a contrast to the pro-

40 The scenes with the Blind Man and the nursery rhyme are described as separate entities rather than as parts of the narrative. Werle sees the scene where the music of the Blind Man is combined with a tape-recording of the nursery rhyme as a counterpoint to the scene where the Blind Man performs music at the same time as the nursery rhyme is performed live (Johansson, 1968, p. 53).

41 That the scenes in which the violinist is present on stage are based on interplay with the audience is indicated by the fact that Runsten planned to omit them in the adaptation of the opera for Sveriges Radio (see the letter from Runsten to Werle, Gentofte, 23 February 1965).

42 Werle himself related the role of the Blind Man to this contemporary phenomenon (cf. Johansson, 1968, p. 51).

saic Street Sweeper. One possible interpretation, according to Runsten, is that the drama takes place in the mind of the Stranger, either as a fantasy based solely on the information he was given by the Street Sweeper, or as a picture of the actual happenings, as revealed by his clear sight (Wallner, Runsten and Werle, 1963/64, pp. 13–14; cf. Hellquist, 1964). Werle compared the Stranger to the choir in ancient drama, which commented on the overall action, was identical with both the audience and the auteur of the work, and was a projection of ideas and traits of the characters (Johansson, 1968, p. 55).

Hence, the Stranger opens up a meta-perspective within the opera. Through this character the author of the opera is present in the performance, giving the audience the impression that the opera is being created at the very moment it is being experienced. This reading is confirmed by the fact that his performance on the guitar should have an improvised character. It is particularly important that the Stranger should be played by a professional dancer. Werle explained this use of a non-professional musician and actor for this part as a way of creating an experience of intuition (cf. Johansson, 1968, p. 51). The stranger calls attention to the very activity of composing, as an action taking place during the performance (cf. Snickare, 2012, p. 77). Because a dancer is playing an instrumentalist, the performance deviates from conventional acting. This attracts the attention of the audience and has a distancing effect in relation to the narrative (cf. Kagel, 1961/62, p. 2; Brecht, 1979, pp. 38 and 200–201).

5. Final Reflections

According to Runstens's article 'Opera och operainscenering idag' the aim of *Drömmen om Thérèse* was to give opera a place in contemporary cultural consciousness (Runsten, 1965, pp. 11–13). Although in this article he states that opera is theatre and drama, and that a drama should affect the audience and 'force them to reevaluate human qualities' while the music should play a major role in creating this effect in opera (Runsten, 1965, p. 12), it is not music's narrative-seductive role that is of principal importance in this opera's production. Space has a main function in the performance as a means by which to differentiate between media, and in this way enhance experiences of intimacy, on the one hand, and alienation, on the other (cf. Runsten, 1965, p. 13; Brecht, 1979, pp. 200–201). It is the way in which the audience is integrated into the performance at the same time as it is distanced from the illusion of the fictive world that is of principal interest with the opera.

Through its emphasis on intimacy and self-reference *Drömmen om Thérèse* can be related to what Fischer-Lichte has described as a 'performative turn' in the 1960s (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 38–39), an important aspect of which is the new relationship it established between performers and listeners.

Contingency became a central aspect of performance with the performative turn of the 1960s. The pivotal role of the audience was not only acknowledged as a pre-condition for performance but explicitly invoked as such. The feedback loop as a self-referential, autopoietic ['self-generating'] system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process emerged as the defining principle of theatrical work. (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 39)

In her discussions of the performative aesthetics of the 1960s, she also takes into consideration the experiments with self-reference and unpredictability in the musical performances of Cage, Kagel and Laurie Anderson (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 19–20 and 122–137).

In *Drömmen om Thérèse*, the production's emphasis on the visual side effects of unconventional solutions when it comes to the casting and placement of instrumentalists and actors is also in line with this aesthetics. The performative role of musicians and singers was as important as the narrative.⁴³ Although this performative level is in full agreement with conventions of opera, *Drömmen om Thérèse's* combination of innovative techniques of theatre-in-the-round, music in space, pluralism of styles and instrumental theatre generates an effect of alienation rather than of intoxication and 'hypnosis' (cf. Eiland, 2003, p. 55).

The intensification of synchronicity between stage and auditorium of which this opera production is an example was a method of performance that often had political and ideological dimensions in the 1960s and 1970s (cf. Forser, 2007, p. 464). When it comes to the staging of the event as ones based on intimacy, equality and reflection, this political dimension also appears to be present in *Drömmen om Thérèse*.⁴⁴

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43 'These spectacles are not so much about the transformation of the actors or, even less so, the spectators. They rather seek to demonstrate the unusual physical and mental powers of the performers, and are intended to elicit awe and wonder from the audience.' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 14)

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Abstract

The Swedish opera *Drömmen om Thérèse* (Dreaming about Thérèse) attracted national and international attention in the 1960s for its inventive approaches as an opera-in-the-round. Although this staging influenced the music's functions, so far the music of this opera has been evaluated in accordance with the hegemony of narrative opera. *Drömmen om Thérèse*, however, offers an example of a contemporary fascination with exploring the spaces between borders, for instance, high versus popular culture and event performance versus recording. This article shows how the performative level of music in opera here acquires a particular quality through the incorporation of the devices of pluralism of styles, music in space and instrumental theatre. Rather than intoxication, the narrative-disrupting effect consists of a theatrical alienation. A relationship between performance and audience based on intimacy, equality, and reflection contributes to this effect.

Keywords

Opera, performativity, narrativity, musicology.

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