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Mauricio Kagel: Filmed Music/Composed Film

This article is the text of a talk given in the Waterloo Room of the Royal Festival Hall on November 13, 1978. The talk was preceded by a showing of the film of Match; *later in the evening* Ludwig van *and* 1898 *were performed by the London Sinfonietta under Kagel's direction in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.*

Approaching the work of Mauricio Kagel, the commentator or critic is immediately confronted with a distressing lack of homogeneity. He must pick his way through works for both standard and unheard-of instrumental combinations, pieces of instrumental theatre, and theatre where music as conventionally defined has almost evaporated. He must come to terms with numerous radiophonic productions, and more than a dozen films and discs which are anything but simple documentations of musical performance.

Kagel wrote in 1968 that 'Europeans have as a time-honoured custom been in the habit of codifying musical history far too quickly.'[1] In innumerable manifestos and articles, after the illusory solidarity of Darmstadt serialism broke down, composers and academics have relentlessly defined schools, assigned influences, and attached aesthetic labels to phenomena which grow ever more distant from the comfortable, conventional terminology. This profusion of descriptive and critical language aims at masking (but is actually a symptom of) a basic impulse: the desire to construct categories into which the musical phenomenon can painlessly disappear. What is dynamic is thus made static. Transient oppositions are converted into permanent ones, but on the other hand objective contradictions can be conveniently obliterated.

All of Kagel's output stands opposed to such classification and to a large extent eludes it. This is in no way, as for example in the case of Cage, the result of an attempt to erase memory, to begin afresh. Each of Kagel's works is inseparably bound to tradition, more specifically to a musical one. But whether working with a genre (such as opera or the string quartet), re-examining another composer (such as Bach, Beethoven, or Brahms), or analysing the mechanisms of ensemble playing or the role of the conductor, Kagel neither blindly perpetuates nor contemptuously dismisses this tradition. The large-scale *Staatstheater* (1967-70)[2] is certainly no opera, nor an anti-opera in the spirit of dubiously resurrected Dadaism. *Ludwig van* (1969)[3] is significantly subtitled 'homage from Beethoven'. The conductor of the film *Solo* (1966-67)[4] conducts to no one except, occasionally, the mute and inanimate musical instruments resting in their places on the stage in front of him.

This resistance to categorisation, then, is an index of Kagel's compositional attitude, which might be described as the radical and meticulous dissection of musical conventions. And insofar as these conventions have become formalised and frozen to the point where they are taken for granted, the compositional method that seeks to expose and transcend them cannot be dictated by some higher theory which itself threatens to become ossified.

Kagel, though he writes and talks extensively about music, has frequently made clear his anti-theoretical bias. If one sees that as an anti-authoritarian mark, then maybe also as a lasting reaction to the political conditions of his native Argentina, where he lived from 1931 to 1957. Ten years ago he wrote of the 'uninterrupted political catastrophe that has choked Argentina for almost 30 years . . . the series of miserable régimes and dictatorships . . . the endless chain of miscalculations, self-pity, betrayal, deficiencies and imperfections accomplished by those men, unworthy of humanity, who surround themselves with jack-boots and hierarchically polished metal, whom one simply terms "the military".'[5] But more than this, Kagel's residence in Cologne for more than 20 years can only have deepened his empathy with a characteristically German mode of thought. In Germany (more than in France, and in direct contrast to Anglo-Saxon countries) dialectical thinking has since Hegel been an official (if not always *the* official) philosophical tradition whose hallmark, from Marx to Marcuse and beyond, is the refusal to accept the existing order as the only and permanent one. But in an increasingly administered society the inherently anti-systematic character of dialectical criticism grows more pronounced. Adorno's aphoristic collection *Minima Moralia* is perhaps the most extreme expression of this tendency. There Adorno writes:

> Limitation and reservation are no way to represent the dialectic. Rather, the dialectic advances by way of extremes, driving thoughts with the utmost consequentiality to the point where they turn back on themselves, instead of qualifying them. The prudence that restrains us from venturing too far ahead in a sentence, is usually only an agent of social control, and so of stupefaction.[6]

It is, I think, in this context that Kagel's often startling musical formulations are to be understood, rather than as a perverse celebration of the irrational or as the wilful pursuit of novelty. What might be termed Kagel's 'systematically unsystematic' approach is evident in each invidual work. His works generally display indifference towards the traditional categories of unity, stylistic purity, absence of inner contradictions. Musical analysis whose conventional role is the uncovering and confirmation of precisely those categories can find no foothold, or at best a precarious one. Each work rejects a situation that Kagel had already described in 1964:

> The preparation for composition has lost the character of a sketch and is already burdened with the character of the subsequent analysis. The work thus becomes the realisation of the analysis that preceded it. Analyses of such pieces rarely actualise the theoretical preparation since the dismantling of

1 Mauricio Kagel, 'Über J.C.', *Tam-Tam: Dialoge und Monologe zur Musik* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1975), p.87.

2 Mauricio Kagel, *Staatstheater* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1971), UE 15197.

3 Mauricio Kagel, *Ludwig van* (London: Universal Edition, 1970), UE 14931.

4 Mauricio Kagel, *Solo* (Hamburg: Norddeutscher Rundfunk, 1967). The author acknowledges with thanks Mauricio Kagel's loan of the shooting-book for the film.

5 Mauricio Kagel, 'Denke ich an Argentinien in der Nacht', *Tam-Tam*, p.11.

6 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), p.86.

the composition has already taken place. In this case not an analysis but only a description is possible.[7]

The form of each of Kagel's works, on the other hand, is defined only in the highly detailed working-out of a specific, concrete situation or complex of issues. But the need to examine each work on its own terms can obscure the fact that, as Dieter Schnebel pointed out in 1969,[8] 'the individual pieces of Kagel's output increasingly tend to be stations of an overall compositional process, are parts of a kind of "work in progress" '.

But when, in a section of *Staatstheater* called 'Repertoire', an actor appears on stage with a gramophone record in front of his face and proceeds to scratch it viciously, the very concrete nature of the action can provoke a one-dimensional analysis, such as that the audience is shocked when the disc is scratched because society is only concerned with consumer products. Kagel's response to this is characteristic:

> Well, I will never make an interpretation of my actions in this way. I will never be so concrete to make prose of my poetic, because I don't think you can translate the poetic metaphor which I have composed into prose — and prose with a license . . . Of course, when you see a man who has no face but a record as a face, you start thinking of the problems of the consumption of music . . . And I will say that this plays a role in the theme of my work, but it's not exactly this. I will not be so narrow, because the actions are more complex than one meaning.[9]

If it often seems appropriate to discuss Kagel's work negatively, in terms of what it is not, it is because, working with the means of the culture industry, he aims to find the holes within it that might allow a temporary space for a criticism which that industry continually threatens to neutralise. This constitutes an explicit attempt to draw his audience out of the conventional mode of passive contemplation and consumption into one of active criticism of the ways in which music is usually produced, transmitted, and received. If my discussion of the films *Match* and *Solo* is provisional, speculative, and incomplete, that is an acknowledgment of such an attempt and a consequence of it.

The film *Match* was made in 1966 for Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Cologne. Its model is the concert piece of the same name, written in 1964, for two cellists and percussionist.[10] Kagel has described how he dreamt this piece three times in ten days, in remarkable aural and visual detail, and interrupted his other work to write it in seven days.

Match is a further development of the notion of 'instrumental theatre' with which Kagel has been concerned for some time. This 'instrumental theatre' may be regarded as a reaction to the deterministic traits of both integral serialism and the mechanical reproduction of sound on disc and tape, both of which aim at the reduction of music to pure acoustic result. Kagel is well aware of the ideology of such a reduction, with its implications of so-called 'objectivity' and the 'definitive' musical performance, but he does not seek a return to pre-technological innocence. He might, I think, acknowledge Walter Benjamin's classic observation that 'for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipated the work of art from its parasitical dependence on

ritual'.[11] Mechanical reproduction robs the work of art of its 'aura', which it has by virtue of its uniqueness and authenticity. The musical work, it is true, appears through repeated mechanical reproduction to lack this uniqueness of the visual art object. Conventional musical performance responds by reconstituting and confirming the aura of the musical work in the ritual of each concert. Kagel's instrumental theatre penetrates musical performance and breaks up its homogeneity, aims therefore at demystifying the ritual.

The interpersonal and psychological relations of musical performance are brought to light as ambiguous and often involuntary theatre. This fact marked in the early sixties a crucial shift of compositional focus from pure acoustic result to the actions of sound-production. In the music of *Match* the notational pursuit of the sounds of Kagel's dream results, in spite of itself, in the composition of actions. As an example (by no means the most extreme one) — at one point one of the cellists must play, *tremolando*, a number of harmonics articulated by continuous bowing transitions from *sul ponticello* to natural position, from *col legno tratto* to normal bowing, all at a dynamic of *ppp*, while continually varying the density of the tremolo.[12]

Superficially, therefore, Kagel seems to perpetuate the virtuoso tradition, but in fact he makes a direct attack on it. This he does not only by exposing, in the performers' struggle to produce the denatured sounds of *Match*, the conflict between virtuoso performance and the ideal of euphony — implicit 150 years ago, incidentally, in Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*; more fundamentally, he demolishes the myth that the elaborate gestures of the virtuoso are essential for the transmission of musical meaning. In Kagel's instrumental theatre the gestures are the inseparable consequence of the process of musical production, rather than gratuitous superimpositions upon it. But the falseness of the virtuoso tradition, with its mélange of gesture and sound, can only be overcome by according to each its full value. That is why in the concert piece, and even more in the stark black and white of the film, gesture and sound almost demand to be perceived separately. Only then can their truly integral and reciprocal (i.e. dialectical) nature be grasped.

It is evident that *Match* has extra-musical connotations, relative to earlier pieces, though these are not as fully fledged as those, for example, in the large-scale music-theatre piece *Tremens*, which was completed in 1965.[13] Both concert version and film characterise the cellists as sporting combatants and the percussionist as umpire. But the axis of conflict rapidly swings round to the point where the cellists form a more or less united opposition against the percussionist. This shift is brought about by the unstable character of the percussionist umpire, by turns dictatorial, deliberately misleading, absent-minded or simply incompetent. That the resolution of conflict is spurious is conveyed at the end of both concert piece and film by the obverse of sporting convention: cellist and percussionist shake hands left-handedly.

It was this complex and equivocal role of the percussionist, the epitome of irrational authority, that forced Kagel, as he says, to 'make the formal construction of *Match* dependent on genuine musico-dramatic situations'.[14] The unity of music and drama in *Match* is to be understood as a dialectical one, since each is at the same time product and instrument of the other.

[7] Mauricio Kagel, 'Analyse des Analysierens', *Tam-Tam*, p.56.

[8] Dieter Schnebel, *Mauricio Kagel — Musik, Theater, Film* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1970), p.314.

[9] 'Mauricio Kagel, Interview with Adrian Jack', *Music and Musicians*, vol.22, no.12 (August 1974), p.42.

[10] Mauricio Kagel, *Match* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1964), UE 14543.

[11] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), p.224.

[12] *Match*, p.17, cello I, system 2, bar 2.

[13] Mauricio Kagel, *Tremens* (London: Universal Edition, 1973), UE 13505.

[14] Quoted in Schnebel, *Mauricio Kagel — Musik, Theater, Film*, p.158.

Now film, as Schnebel has pointed out, 'stands both in a closer and more distant relationship to music than theatre does'.[15] Basically, Kagel sees no great distinction between his activities as composer and film maker. That is a result, as he says, 'of the specific condition of the visual medium, which is the articulation of *temporal* processes'.[16] For a composer who has worked in the electronic studio (as he did to make the earlier works *Transición I* (1958-60) and *Antithèse* (1962) the techniques of editing, montage, superimposition, slowing down and speeding up, etc. lend themselves equally well to the transformation of sounds or images. But whereas, as in *Match*, drama may be directly drawn out of music by the intensification of the always latent theatre of performance, film (or television) in itself has neither stage nor performers and as a medium its visual configurations cannot be immediately deduced from a musical continuity, even where, as in *Match*, musical performance provides its image material.

The horns of this dilemma have speared music, film, and television directors from the earliest days of the visual mechanical reproduction of music. Thus the first television performances employed discreet camera work, long static shots, presumably intending to avoid the disturbance of aural concentration with visual clutter. Most directors seemed to be unaware of the significant psycho-physiological differences between aural and visual perception. Perhaps also they did not care to acknowledge that, at least since McLuhan, there is no question that the perception of the message is largely conditioned by the intrinsic nature of the medium, whose structure is itself manipulated by the administrators of communications technology. It was soon realised that insufficient visual massage does not create more space for the ear, but on the contrary produces a discomfort that usually results in distraction.

So, working with the principle of pointing the camera where the action is, one arrived at a filming of music where every musical theme, every drenching cymbal clash was conveyed in loving close-up. In accommodating themselves to the dominant media conception of experience as a sequence of edited highlights and action replays, film and television directors usually seemed oblivious of the fact that the logic of a musical work is rarely one-dimensional and is often being worked out at less obvious levels than that of first and second subject.

The recognition that even this distorted grasp of musical continuity does not automatically produce a coherent film continuity leads to further musical mangling, where the film or television director, equipped with the entire technical arsenal of the medium, transforms the shots of musical performance into visual pyrotechnics which he then hopes to mould into an autonomous and coherent sequence. The result is perhaps inevitable: the package is consumed as a rich visual cake with atmospheric acoustic icing.

As Kagel says, the fact that in approaching *Match* as a film director he did not need to consider the feelings of the composer of the piece did not in itself answer the question of how the filming of music was to be tackled. Eventually 'I decided on the mise-en-scène of the musical continuity and thus on the dramatic interpretation of the instrumental continuity.'[17] Almost all details of the concert version remain intact, but are raised to a higher power, as it were. For example, towards the end of the piece, the two cellists are reduced to silence and complete apathy by the hopeless inconsistency of the percussionist, and fall asleep as if shot by the crisp snare-drum stroke.

Their rebellious indifference is evident in the next image, of the cellists with instruments reversed, so that only the backs can be seen, without fingerboards or strings.[18] At another point in the score the percussionist is required to use the Chinese clatter-drum on all available instruments and surfaces. In the film this broadening of activity is visually inverted in a shot where the percussionist remains static while various instruments converge on him as if drawn by invisible threads.[19]

The camera's ability to intensify musical contexts, its capacity to focus the ear by visual selection, is rarely used in *Match* for the tautological purposes of conventionally filmed music. Even where individual actions are filmed, they are often shot in such close-up that the relation between sound and image can only be grasped in a conscious act of synthesis. As often as not, the camera draws attention to the origin of an action sequence, or its eventual outcome, or ignores obvious musical gestures altogether. The dissociation of aural and visual factors, which is latent in each instrumental action, thus becomes the principle underlying the entire film: the continual conflict between what the spectator hears and what the listener sees.

At this point, I think it is important to realise that the musical and dramatic dimensions are integral, but not, however, synonymous. The double meaning of the title gives a clue: 'Match' can imply similarity (as of a pair of cellos) or conflict. The opening bars of the concert version and the ping-pong soundtrack of the film's title sequence set up a clear dramatic situation of sporting combat which strongly conditions the listening viewer's response to all that follows. I shall make the rather generalised point that in *Match* an alternation of musically similar material forms a gesture of antagonism only by virtue of the theatrical situation that determines it.

This distinction between musical and dramatic levels is pursued in matters of timing, for example in the castanet sequence.[20] Here the musical material is quite capable of sustaining a duration of some 70 seconds but by the criteria of theatrical convention such a build-up to a punch line would probably seem over-lengthy. At this point in the film Kagel somewhat alleviates this tension between musical and dramatic pacing by varying the shots, though these themselves re-establish a conflict between sound and image with distorting-mirror effects, facial close-ups, even a leisurely glide around the pages of the score.

The non-identity of musical and dramatic levels is made more complex in the film by the manipulation of cinematic time. On the one hand time may be suspended by the use of one film-frame of an action as a still shot; on the other the several frames of a continuous action may be superimposed onto a single, punctuating frame, which is the technique (now illegal) of subliminal advertising. Eventually film time seems to break through the limits of the piece itself and one sees photos of the performers in adolescence, or their images are distorted or disintegrating. The states of Innocence and Experience, as it were, separated by the trauma of *Match*.

Since in *Match* musical time is articulated extremely precisely, it would have been inconsistent to superimpose a relatively independent visual continuity onto the musical one. On the contrary, as Schnebel says, 'the images of the film seem to well up from the music as if they were its visual expression'.[21] This expression is of course highly mediated, and the Surrealist quality of much of the film is undeniable. One might detect echoes of Cocteau, René Clair, possibly Buñuel. Bearing in mind the dream origin of *Match*, what the French poet

15 Ibid., pp.301-302; see also Dieter Schnebel, 'Sichtbare Musik', *Denkbare Musik* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972), pp.326-328.

16 Mauricio Kagel, *Über 'Duo' und 'Hallelujah'* (unpubd manuscript).

17 Mauricio Kagel, programme note on *Match* for the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, 1970, p.1.

18 *Match* p.23, system 1, bar 1.

19 Ibid., p.19, system 2, bar 1.

20 Ibid., p.11, system 1, bar 1.

21 Schnebel, *Mauricio Kagel — Musik, Theater, Film*, p.304.

Supervielle wrote in 1925 seems very apt: 'Until now we have never known anything that could so easily assimilate the unlikely. Film does away with transitions and explanations, it confuses and makes us confuse reality with unreality. It can disintegrate and reintegrate anything.'[22]

But the undoubtedly subjective character of most of the film shots should not lure the listening viewer into the belief that the visual continuity is an arbitrary flight of fancy. As always Kagel is in rational control of his imagination. The transformation of a closed musical work into an autonomous filmic one could be accomplished, as he says, 'only by the application of a strict compositional principle to both film scenario and montage. This compositional principle structures all the filmic elements according to musical criteria and moulds the movements of camera and performers, changes of camera angle, visual form of each image, and the synchronisation or non-synchronisation of hearing and seeing into a formal unity.'[23]

But the nature of this unity must be precisely understood. *Match* does not seek the fusion of film and music in the conventional sense, which as Brecht well understood with regard to the theatre arts can only result in their equal degradation. Nor does it aim at their peaceful co-existence which, for reasons I have already given, is a fiction based on false assumptions of visual and aural parity and the alleged 'objectivity' of the reproductive medium. Rather, film and music achieve through rigorous composition a unity whose dialectical nature can only be preserved in their dissociation, which in turn results in a continual tension between them.

To return finally to Surrealism, I would like to quote René Clair who wrote in 1925 'What interests me in surrealism are the pure, extra-artistic values it unveils. To translate it into visual image, the purest surrealist conception, one would have to submit it to cinematic technique, which would entail for this "pure psycho-automatism" the risk of losing a great part of its purity.'[24] It is as if Kagel had taken Clair's reservation as a premise, since the subjective images of *Match* are the product of rigorous composition. But at the other extreme, since in *Match* filmed music is only actualised in the composition of film, the neutral, documentary character of the medium is undermined.

The startling result of these processes is that in the film of *Match* the distinction between dream and concert version is liquidated. As Kagel wrote: 'The reality of the performance may appear to be normal or completely distorted: the difference remains entirely imperceptible.'[25]

Solo is, as the credits state, 'a free adaptation of the graphic score "Visible Music II" by Dieter Schnebel'. *Visible Music II* (also entitled *Nostalgie*) for solo conductor, and *Visible Music I* for conductor and instrumentalist were composed between 1960 and 1962.[26] In 1966 Kagel staged and directed both these pieces in Munich, with the actor Alfred Feussner as the conductor. As a result of these performances Kagel was commissioned by Norddeutscher Rundfunk to make films based on the two Schnebel pieces. *Solo*, made in 1966-67, and *Duo* (1967-68) are the third and fourth films in Kagel's European output.

If in *Match* Kagel films music, then in *Solo* he films

its absence, since Schnebel's *Nostalgie* is a highly detailed topographic score for conductor alone, comprising 22 gestural complexes. The conductor projects his gestures onto an imaginary screen erected between him and the audience. Each page of the score defines a certain area of this screen within which the conducting movements are very precisely located. Using a symbolic notation, Schnebel meticulously choreographs the movements of fingers, hands, and arms. Written instructions further define changes of tempo, bodily posture, eye movements. Lastly, the musical character of each gestural group is defined by Italian nomenclature as is customary in traditional music.

Schnebel distinguishes five different methods of conducting which in *Nostalgie* he has composed as if they were pure music.[27] Since the gestures of the conductor in *Solo* are to be understood in this context, I think they are worth mentioning:

> First, the pure and somewhat unconductorlike painting of music — of pitches, time-values, intensities, sounds.
> Second, painting of music which turns into conducting — where gestures of a conducting nature are woven into the pure painting of music.
> Third, conducting movements that are inspired by the music, e.g. conducting in the swaying movement of a waltz, projecting the stillness of an adagio — as if the conductor were directing and surveying a large ensemble.
> Fourth, conducting movements of a stimulating and even authoritarian nature towards an ensemble at some distance.
> Last, conducting as self-indulgence — fanciful movements with closed eyes.

In describing the relation of the film *Solo* to Schnebel's score, Kagel said: 'I behaved like a typically irresponsible film maker: I took the idea from the composer Schnebel, and orchestrated it in many directions, sometimes metaphorically, sometimes with a fundamental alteration of the visually conceived continuity.'[28] *Solo* replaces the absence of decor in *Nostalgie* by a dense clutter of objects and ornaments. Whereas Schnebel's conductor is rooted to the spot, Kagel's is almost always on the move. The 22 gestural groups in Schnebel's piece, though interrelated at many levels, do not form a linear or narrative continuity. *Solo* on the other hand moves inexorably if erratically towards its apocalyptic climax.

The immediately striking aspects of *Solo* are the space in which it is filmed and its decor. A surprisingly small studio, some 60 feet square, is decked out in the style of Art Nouveau, crammed with statues and pictures of the female nude, characteristically coy and yet sexless, with ornately framed mirrors and a huge, obtrusive chandelier. After the opening sequence the camera leads the viewer into a small auditorium, reminiscent of a turn-of-the-century concert hall, with neat and empty raked seating. But this decor does not remain static. The footage for *Solo* was shot in 22 blocks (the numerical correspondence with Schnebel's gestural groups is perhaps coincidental), and for each block the elements of decor were repositioned. Moreover, the actor in *Solo* assumed a different role on each of the five days in which the film was shot, with a corresponding change of facial appearance and dress.

In Hollywood, the obsessive attention paid to continuity of props and costume serves the illusion that a given sequence was shot in real time, naturalistically therefore, rather than having been painstakingly assembled from dozens of separate takes. Just as in other works Kagel redefines the limits of a musical space for

22 Quoted in Jacques B. Brunius, 'Experimental Film in France', *Experiment in the Film,* ed. Roger Manvell (New York: Arno Press, 1970) p.93.

23 Programme note on *Match*, p.1.

24 Quoted in Brunius, 'Experimental Film in France', p.94.

25 Programme note on *Match*, p.1.

26 Dieter Schnebel, *Abfälle I* (Mainz: Schott, 1970), Edition Schott 6484 (*Visible Music I* is part 2 of *Abfälle I*); *Nostalgie* (Mainz: Schott, 1970), Edition Schott 5704.

27 Schnebel, *Nostalgie,* pp.6-7.

28 Quoted in Schnebel, *Mauricio Kagel — Musik, Theater, Film,* p.205.

each successive section, here he continually recomposes his film space. The result is typically anti-cathartic, breaking the viewer's identification with the camera eye, drawing attention to the camera technique and the process of film making as a whole.

This continually varying film space is articulated by the camera movements. The tracking of the meandering camera is precisely controlled, as are the many close-ups, medium and long shots, pans, tilts, and dolly shots. Schnebel's principle of 'visible music' is extended to encompass not only the gestures of the conductor but also the glances of the mechanical eye that sees him. While in *Match* the requirements of filmed music hold the recalcitrant camera in check, *Solo*, not bound by precisely predetermined timings, grants it considerable independence. The autonomy of the quasi-melodic camera work is, however, deceptive: what crosses the field of vision is rarely a matter of chance. Kagel calculates particularly thoroughly the images produced by filming the anti-objects of decor, the mirrors, prisms, sheets of glass. Just as in all of Kagel's works the compositional process operates only in the ceaseless dialectic of technique and material, so here the camera movements articulate the space but are at the same time determined by it.

In the oppressive labyrinth that the camera lasciviously reveals, Alfred Feussner plays five roles. Any resemblance to persons living or dead may or may not be purely coincidental. One might spot the young Richard Strauss, Nikisch, Toscanini . . .? At any rate, the five figures are so frequently intercut within a more or less narrative continuity that they appear more as aspects of a multiply schizophrenic prototype than as autonomous roles. Schnebel's musical composition of gesture is continued in *Solo*, but the gamut of actions is vastly expanded to include the pluck of a moustache at one extreme and highly undignified mid-air oscillations at the other. And, like the camera movements, the actor's tortuous routes through the set are carefully mapped out, revealing an analogous but rarely parallel quasi-musical organisation.

Solo may thus be seen in terms of the independent musicalisation of various filmic dimensions, though these are themselves in perpetual transition between the states of heterophony, unstable polyphony, and total fusion (the last, for example, where the discontinuity of the actor's mirror images becomes indistinguishable from the actual process of film editing).

If the word 'film' were substituted for 'theatre', what Kagel said in 1966 apropos of the premiere of *Pas de Cinq* (1965) would apply equally to *Solo*:

> As a composer I feel I have an increasing duty to non-aural materials. In this I see no substitute for actual composition, but on the contrary assert that the definitions . . . of the word 'composition' as 'setting together' or 'mixing' may be as consciously accepted as the more usual 'tone setting'. But apart from terminological speculations, the application of musical thought to purely theatrical thought presents itself as a foregone conclusion. Words, lights, and movement are articulated in the same way as tones, timbres, and tempi: the meaning or meaninglessness of all scenic processes cannot be effectively represented without musicality, since the means of formulation of the true 'homme de théâtre' are more readily inspired by genuinely musical compositional methods than by any other.[29]

This musicalisation of film which *Solo* carries out has a drastic impact on the conventional relationships of filmic elements. The ornamental function of decor is transformed by the camera work into a dramatic one (a particularly pointed shift considering that Art Nouveau is *decorative* art par excellence). The composition of

[29] Ibid., p.163.

gestures, however, is effectively a process of reification, which is perhaps why the conductor in *Solo* often seems to be no more than a kinetic object. *Solo* brings these mutations into focus and releases a network of metaphors as labyrinthine as the set in which the film is shot. Sexual connotations of music making predominate. The camera pans down from the conductor's pigeon-toed stance to the androgynous couple of Peter Behrens's picture *The Kiss*. A violin serves as a fig-leaf for one of the statues. A horizontal double-bass, over whose waist the conductor furtively peeps, mimics the lifeless eroticism of the nude female figurines. The cigarette smoke with its snaking line, so typical of Art Nouveau, might trigger a subconscious connection with the whip as instrument of domination and torture. The connection between musical and sexual domination is made explicit in the conductor's attempted rape of a painted nude. And the sounds that the actor produces are themselves ambiguous, can be heard both as the product of strenuous conducting effort or as the expression of unfulfilled lust.

I think it is no coincidence that Kagel's conductor finds himself surrounded by the decor of Art Nouveau, since the emergence of that artistic movement coincided in the last decade of the 19th century with the advancement of the bandmaster, whose primary function was simply to beat time and maintain precise ensemble, to the position of autocratic maestro who took charge of all details of interpretation and dictated them to the orchestra.

The musical necessity for such a shift might be traced back to Berlioz who, in expanding and extensively subdividing the groups of the Classical orchestra, drew the musical consequences of the industrial rationalisation of the division of labour. But this increasing differentiation of compositional means brings an always latent conflict of ensemble music out into the open. Since the orchestral musician can hear only imprecisely or not at all everything else that is happening around him, his performance directly contradicts the compositional principle of 'unity in diversity', a fundamental tenet of bourgeois music whose clearest expression is sonata form. The compositional integration of detail and whole can no longer be spontaneously realised but must be achieved through the mediation of the conductor. And so fresh contradictions arise. The conductor's integrating function could of course be completely realised in rehearsal and in performance he would revert to the simple beating of time. But thrust into the limelight yet alienated from the physical process of actual sound-production he must demonstrate with every gesture his total and 'spontaneous' control, without which the performance would (supposedly) fall apart. Facing the orchestra, his gestures are aimed at the audience. Masquerading as complete commitment to the musical work, his utterly superfluous gestures are antagonistic to the real process of musical performance, which is nothing less than, as Heinz-Klaus Metzger put it, 'the total translation of a score analysis, which has been taken to its utmost limit, into correlates of instrumental technique'.[30]

Both *Nostalgie* and *Solo* set out to demolish this false myth of the conductor.[31] Schnebel splits open the assumed identity of gesture and sound by removing the object of the conductor's gestures altogether, then reconstitutes the relationship by composing gestures as if they were musical material. From this premise Kagel elaborates an allegorical maze, pinpointing alienation and frustration as products of domination and repression, with the connection between musical and political

[30] Heinz-Klaus Metzger, 'Zur Beethoven-Interpretation', *Beethoven 1970* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1970), p.9.

[31] For a discussion of the conductor-orchestra relationship see Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp.104-117.

domination never far from the surface. As Adorno laconically remarked, 'The histrionics at the podium are easy to credit with the dictatorial capacity for frothing at the mouth at will.'[32]

Apropos of *1898* (1973) Kagel once said that it has the atmosphere of the imminence of catastrophe.[33] *1898* could even be heard as the music that the conductor of *Solo* has lost, so to speak. Some years after *Solo* was filmed, Kagel dedicated his piece *Zwei-Mann-Orchester* (1971-73) 'to the memory of an institution that is in the process of extinction — the orchestra'.[34] The First World

War may have put an end to Art Nouveau, but today, supported by the mechanisms of affirmative culture, the cult of the conductor continues to flourish (Karajan!). After the cataclysm of *Solo* the conductor refuses to accept his own obsolescence — the closing sequence of the film is a copy of the opening one. On a clear, empty floor, one hears footsteps approaching. It is left to the soundtrack to negate the comfortable reprise. The conductor is walking on broken glass.

Thank you.

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[32] Ibid., p.106.

[33] 'Mauricio Kagel, Interview with Adrian Jack', p.44.

[34] Mauricio Kagel, *Zwei-Mann-Orchester* (London: Universal Edition, 1975), UE 15f848.