

Unquiet Living

Elfriede Jelinek / Bernd Roger Bienert / Roman Haubenstock-Ramati

"After all, what the public doesn't know, doesn't want to know, is that in order to PERCEIVE a work of art, half the work on this must be performed by the perceiver himself'.

Ferruccio Busoni

It is evident that in a house bound up in traditional repertoire like the Vienna State Opera, confrontations are hardly ever possible – such between the public and the sounds are rare, and such between the public and the stage are as good as non-existent. Over the past decades, even where innovatory musical theatre came off most of all on a global scale – in the world of ballet, the Viennese have had nothing to regale on in the way of visionary art. However, there is one exception. In 1984, the Viennese choreographer Bernd R. Bienert, then barely 20 years old, staged the first assault on the scenic junk shop – the State Opera. In conjunction with the young composer Thomas Pernes, he shattered customary visual and audio practices so resolutely with his dance piece "Alpenglihn", that the directors uncompromisingly banished this work to the afternoon program.

News of this "enfant terrible" in this traditional and conservative institution spread fast. There was no option but to invite this young star to perform a second piece, which then surrounded by performances from Rudolf Nurejev was received like a punch in the gut by certain dance enthusiasts. Bienert the "revolutionary" refused to come up to expectations in every sense in his strange creation with the even stranger title "Rads Datz". As far as ballet enthusiasts were concerned he failed in dance, presenting classical figures like a leadweighted provocative slow motion metamorphosis, and with the Gottfried von Einem composition which was forced upon him (of course as a dedication it bore the name of the then director of the State Opera), he failed to knuckle under, and performed turbulent counter harmonies, counterpointing them with cabaretistic intermezzi. The stage which he had created in gold, deep blue, black and red dreamed off however into far off illusionary regions. The presentiments which had marked Bienerts work until then and which were to increasingly mark everything to come were already evident. All that in the centre of an anarchical conspiracy scenario for which all those who didn't want to perceive anything visionary have not forgiven the young artist to this very day.

This naturally marked out his course, and provided the fundamental emotional and artistic vocabulary. Subsequently, Bienert created stage worlds with fantastic spatial dimensions. The choreography commences with the stage architecture he designed himself and progresses with the suggestive sign language of lighting to culminate in the completely new canon set up for human movement, a combination bearing the marks of puritanical dance elements and completely physical cramped gestures. By means of such a "choreography-space-design" (Bienert) nightmarish, depressing, apparently hopeless vivid dreams can be realized just as resolutely – inescapable for lookers-on – as perhaps the harmonious "negative image" of a Mozart piano concerto: To date, the only Bienert work which could be termed "ballet" without batting an eyelid was "trazoM" which was established in Holland for Introdans and which was a masterpiece in "musical" movement directing. This artist proves his immense musicality by doing away with complying with the ostensibly preceptible rhythmic and melodic structures of the music: Mozart's composition is not being "imitated" by unsuitable means (- it conveys the structures perfectly well itself). What is being effected here is an optical superstructure, a counterpoint which makes perceptible the immanent formal conformities, the inner motion so-to-speak, which is not directly conveyed by sounds. The musical work is being scenically "interpreted" in the true sense of the word. The public is called upon to use the same process of analysis for Bienerts work, to continue dreaming, to complement the allusory, the anticipatory, the desirable – even what was denied, that was expected but did not become manifest, but nevertheless still: was THERE – to PERCEIVE in Busonis words. The international world of stage has produced no other artist in recent years who was capable of demanding just that with more impetus.

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**ELFRIEDE JELINEK
UNQUIET LIVING**

Off, into the house, to save the horrible! The child in the carrying strap. Nothing but a bit of goodwill as food. Barely noticed, it has made itself comfortable. Thus they disappear into the house. The child runs out. A trickle remains on the sidewalk. The buildings gather. It is day. They go into the container they were given. Their housing is no wandering. Their housing is just being contained in each other. The child transforms too rapidly. It does not run yet. Soon it will grow teeth. It is not harmless to ride around in each other. Walls cannot adapt to that. They are made to consist. The child is disturbing. That does matter. Their living is no wandering! This stay will do the child no good. It does not get its milk snack right now. The parents wander through their stay. They take themselves into the building. They have gone into the net. But no! Do not get the landscape near by housing! This nearness does not stand the width of the landscape. This nearness cannot go on one single yard! Up to right here! The woman takes her body in that is also a child. When the body goes, the woman goes, too. She takes along the child. It keeps them distant from each other. Still! A barrier the child is, against that housing that founds closeness. The child is a slip from outside, and that it remains.

Until the end. Its body formerly the mother's wings. Now closely folded up, but they don't start any more. There is no way out for the child. It got to stay inside! Without the child the woman had moved on former times. This wandering is over. But without wandering no housing! They fall together. Distant from each other the child keeps them. This living means to be thrown towards each other without release. The child is crying out. Please close the door! They have arrived in the container. Fill themselves in. Feel themselves into the joy they are themselves. Taking the child along. In this moment an obstacle, the child is. They cannot escape it. Are they living away from the child, into each other? The only place the child leaves. The child is always somewhere else and something else. It is not the mother. What is it? It

is the mother's movement frozen in itself. Its stay within the mother is terminated. Delimited from them, the child is. A stem into emptiness, never made by the mother. Still! Night! They toss the child away from them. And themselves into the main wandering path that leads them into each other. The woman's clothes embroider the floor. Dumped garbage, these clothes: Traces of Man. Signs. Framing the ways. Make them become ways. This presence is no living, for it will not go on afterwards. No stay is conceded to them. Untidy the kitchen, where delights have been torn from the shelves.

Terminus everywhere. It is never to become a wandering, for nothing does change. The child is crying out. Still! Still! In the kitchen the woman's apartment. Excess is sticking to it. From ancient times! Her living the movement of excess. Now it's getting tight. Giving and taking. And also this taking, already standstill. Terminus in each other. The child is crying out. Still! The child is crying. Does not know where it came from. Cannot go back. It makes ordinance from them. Disorder. Disturbs in the neighborhood. Here the body it came from. There the body to end it. Already to be seen in the mist of lust. Like freshly unwound from the swaddling bands. This stay definitely too short. The child has not been anything of its own. The child is so restless today. Its place is soon going to be free. The child cannot say there was someone there. It has come by itself and gone: Motion! But nothing more in between. Housing is the child and has been it. It cries out. Something they throw into the devices of their bodies that comes back on them unrecognized. They have taken over each other already on the threshold. Still! Housing just the lever with which they open each other. The child is going to be quiet after all. To the floor with it, while they lose themselves straight on. Wandering paths marked for lust. The child a single tenant house in the world. The child is lived in by beatings. Thundering down on its head like the sun. Blasting like rain on its body. Tracer ammunition the woman's clothes.

On the waters of the rug, which makes waves. They wrap the child into it. The toddler does not cry now. Dust in its throat, the father has something urgent to relive on the mother. As the star does with Heaven and the rock with the Earth. And Yesterday! What does it make us? It makes us all go on. Such a change is but natural. The woman has moved out long ago. In many countries she is part of everyday life in the streets. Now the man lives where the woman had been. He is accustomed to the woman. They are not two any more. Surprise each other in their buildings. Pay each other visits. All paths full with them parked. No space to turn around. And they do not sweep it with brooms. They are their reflections on the skins that are their homes. Today is over. The child does not go anywhere any more. Sewn into the rug. As nature, it is locked out. A little bit bent the child is. Then they drop it into its diaper device. Into the rug. They are its friends no more. Their business is open now. They pour themselves in and out. They are countries within each other. No paths any more where men kiss women. For the child the world is a building. It is raining beatings. First of all, the roof is pulled away from the child. Purposely, darkness follows. There the child does its business there and is closed immediately. Here! It says. They become themselves, because they live within each other. They find each other for further handling. The child has been nursed. Be quiet. Shut up! This is not going to be business. They present each other as a gift.

They do not give anything away. The child is no gift. It does not know about itself. Its swaddling bands keep it more or less together. This kit is incomplete. They lie down beside. The newly arrived immediately lose any tenderness. Kicking against their doors. Your entry, please! In this butcher's they count in each other's hands. They do not count. Asking the child: How does it find its existence? Answer: The existence has been found in the rug. And the way the kitchen looks! Almost immediately they see food that has lost its place. Spittle falls on their lair beneath them. Their pairs of wings are warbling. Great and in vain. Their lust does not take them high. Something heavy falls by chance. And atop the child. They send their bodies into the adjoining room in order to find themselves. But neither there they are. Lust is not entertaining. Where is the meeting point? Where do they find themselves to go home together? Who should not like to be comfortable? Does the child not breathe? They become knitted into a knot. Wool as written by life. They follow each other with the eyes. The child does not sleep any more. It is dripping away. They go out of themselves. Their bushes are opened. They fit each other and try each other as a pair. Something is missing. They seem to have helped each other well. Peaking like in sports when suddenly one is thrust far away. Greater! Higher! More slender! Overcoming the doors of Man! Kick them in. Now being in. For the last time the child cries out. It is fighting with its excretes. Now it has lost!

It was too short. With a plop it falls from its new bodies' home. In sports, men are fighting. And they care about the neighbor! So that he may not come before them.

The woman has produced everything. Precociously she is shimmering in her dress. This is no achievement. Dirty dishes everywhere: Scales falling from her eyes. She is being lived in. She has already taken along her body. She needs it. Also the gymnastics dress. In order to get on with it. She is wrapped into several closely tightened plastic bags. Her female sex is being flattered. Already it is making acquaintances. The child is not crying. It has no flat of its own any more. The woman has taken it up: Like dirt from the floor. She is wiping with herself and her product. Dried she gets up again. Ready for being emptied again. This rag is ready to absorb again. They are quaffing each other. They do not have to behave in front of anybody. No child any more. Business is business. They are their own walls, made to shop in each other. They owe nothing to each other. Drink fresh and warm from the udder. There are better ones than man and woman. And yet: Always just them! Wallowing in each other as if they were to be given away for nothing. They won't get away so cheap! Even clothing fits better! No other one would take them. So cheap they get each other. The child has cried out. Scared from joy. Now quiet. Who wants to share? The child thrust against the wall.

Ungentle this housing is. Men make living, just their pretexts are too hard. They are only themselves. Accustomed to each other. No reason to turn around. They summon themselves. Last recruits. Defending their garden plot to the last. But no one else ever wants into them. No one else claims them. No reason to be proud of oneself. No reason belonging to them at least. Already their bodies belong to the newspapers. They must put themselves at disposition. It is morning now, in the papers they stand still. Trembling like deers. Now they belong to everybody. The child has fallen down a bit. At least some yards. Now is already morning, for you can read it in the papers. Knocking fast against the entrance door! Not well mode they are, Man and Woman. Even clothing fits better! They would like to return themselves to the cashier. But now is morning. The child a heap of its own housing. Starting to get putrid. It has knocked on the wall with its head, its cushion. No one has ever come. The child is gone now, too. So they give birth to each other. This has no end. Their windows are steamed up. They have not even a misty idea of themselves. Restlessly they are getting each other done up to the day. There their life will be written down! Standing before each other like

strangers. Read each other. Quite sympathetic, though! War! War! Parts rarely seen in open air are hired. Agreed upon as visited. They are rejected, these distorted limbs! They still have to learn to eat by themselves!

And if we let them sit at the table for hours! She'll eat up! Thanks for our valuable exchange value! Still! Could you give me even more of yourself? Eating as such includes that one wants to have more some time. They search for themselves as their traces on the ground. Lead away from each other. Bite off each other. Throw themselves away. The child just one heap of rubbish. An advertisement, included free of charge. They want everything that is on it. Being used according to the paper's instructions. No body is comfortable. But it offers comfort for the other. Gemutlichkeit! Then you have to undress it. Here they say so! Today is already tomorrow. They believe never to have lived better. And yet, a semidetached house is like the other. At least many and often! More! Who are they? The child's wall has stumbled into the interior. And they tumble behind them, the people. As if they had lost themselves. Into the interior! More! More! But, inside like outside: Numb. There is no difference. There is no shelter. Just more! It is morning. Several hours lay behind them, trampled. The house is dissolving. Does not yield anything any more. They are no valid currency! The more beautiful the meadow is, where they pasture from each other. To say something overtly and aloud. More! More impression, please! The paper to me! It is morning. They are standing here and have disappeared from their impressions. They have not been here. It hasn't been at all.

ROMAN HAUBENSTOCK-RAMATI
'TURBULENT LIVING'

For Elfriede Jelinek the word 'living' means 'life'. Our whole life actually centres around home. So, 'turbulent living'. 'Unbearable life'.

Jelinek's text cannot directly be realized with music. Therefore, no naturalism. As a result, I only had one possibility and that was to poetize the whole thing. What happens, this terrible deed, the battering of a child – something of a nightmare. And it is just this dimension that opens a door for the musical approach.

First of all, the voice and then some poetized layers of sound. Jelinek's voice: with no expression, like reading a medical report.

A diagnosis: quite cold, not too fast, not too slow. Certain pauses between the sentences.

Then the attempt to change the voice using electronics, computer and synthesizer. Splitting up normal speech into several layers: like from afar: very quiet, then multiplied.

Certain sentences superimposed, then changes in sound. On the one hand, tuned up like hard, male speech. On the other hand, tuned down like the voice of a child.

The result is a whole vocal scale of sounds, and I more or less punctuate them: with tempo-relations, cuts, rhythms, to a retrograde run-off of speech.

We have the original sound of the voice with different changes and accelerations – this in itself produces the music. Everything becomes music: even the word. Multivocals arise: not only sentences, but even words are out and superimposed.

The different voice levels are then surrounded by a host of noises and harmonious sounds, which range between secco, quite secco and very very far echo.

The search for the "right" music finally results in the attempt to set speech against harmonious sound worlds. Two long computer-controlled sound layers. All of this over a continuous 50 minutes. Aspects of the dream: the transformation of the voice into male/child-like is generally only imaginable like inner voices in a dream, but what develops is an art-over-art relation to a frightful thing shrouded in a form which should finally make this process – which verges on the brink of the unbearable – a bearable part of life.

Basically, art is there to make life bearable.

And: there is a kind of longing in this musical entirety.

A longing for peace. Even for a child.