

Eva Van Daele

Doctoral researcher, Ghent University (2017-)

Research focus: contemporary opera and music theatre (combining musicology, theatre and performance studies)

Education, Ghent University (2013-2017)

- Bachelor and Master of Arts in Art History, Musicology and Theatre Studies
- Master: Graduated summa cum laude with a master's thesis on Chaya Czernowin's opera *Infinite Now* (2017)

Dramaturgy assistant (as intern) for several productions at Opera Vlaanderen (2015-2017)

The absence of traditional characters in Philippe Manoury's Thinkspiel *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017)

To this day, composers try to reinvent the genres of opera and music theatre. One of the impulses for renewal is contemporary theatre. One development we notice is a discrepancy between the singer and the character in contemporary music theatre (in its broadest form). This discrepancy is an opportunity to question how we (re)present voices, ourselves and our stories on stage. We will look at the phenomenon in one specific work. Our case *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017) is a collaboration between the French composer Philippe Manoury (b. 1952) and German theatre director Nicolas Stemann (b. 1968) who created a performance based on theatre texts by Elfriede Jelinek. The main concern of this paper is this: how is the lack of characters in Jelinek's text addressed in the Thinkspiel *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017) of Nicolas Stemann and Philippe Manoury?¹ This question is inseparable from the treatment and the allocation of text to the voices and bodies on stage. It is not immediately clear how the text of Jelinek is distributed among the speakers and if the words of actors and singers have a different status. Since nor in the theatre texts, nor in the Thinkspiel we can't speak of "characters", I will use the term "roles". There is a friction between the "roles" (such as A and B) in the text, what we see on scene, and what we hear. Indeed, even between what we see and what we hear, concerning the actors and singers, we notice a discrepancy. The text presentation in the performance diverges from the sequence of Jelinek's texts and there is a play with and manipulation of the text, using simultaneity and interaction. I want to contextualise these concerns within the Thinkspiel, proposed by Manoury and Stemann as a new form and production method for opera.

To answer the question of how the lack of characters was handled, the structure of this article is threefold. First, we analyse how the postdramatic texts of Elfriede Jelinek are used in an opera context with a flexible work process. Then we demonstrate how Manoury rephrases the "roles" of Jelinek's texts. The last part places the role of the performers in the context of the "Thinkspiel" and tries to come to a closer understanding of this new art form. Before we start this threefold investigation, we indicate how we want to build on and contribute to

Fukushima in March 2011, have had some examination in line with our attention for the identity of the speakers, the difficulties of communication and the musical references in the texts. Rita Thiele compares the speakers in the text *Kein Licht* (2011) to “Zombies”, “Boten” and “lebende Leichen”.² The multitude of intertextual references and quotations are not the topic of this paper, but are examined in the work of Asako Fukuoka. The title “Das Zitat als Mittel zur Kommunikation mit den Toten?”³ (2014) shows how Fukuoka links Jelinek’s extensive quoting with talking with the dead. In a later text (2016) she even speaks of the “Zitat als Botschaft”.⁴ Sruti Bala calls *Kein Licht* “an act of mourning, an act of reparative translation”.⁵ Bala argues that this “reparative translation” in *Kein Licht* is “a means of constituting the collective human subject as a responsible subject”.⁶ This is Bala’s reading of Jelinek’s “deconstruction of subjects” versus (individual) responsibility.⁷ “Geistertöne” is the term Rebecca Schönsee uses to describe the voices in *Kein Licht*. Studying the role of music and sound in the text, Schönsee refers to music as a “Hoffnungsträger”.⁸ The concept of entropy in relation to the text and the situation is central in her study,⁹ and though it would be interesting to compare her theory with Manoury’s composition, that is beyond the scope of this paper. Later in this paper we will introduce our reading of the allusions in the text to the conversation with the dead and the question of individual responsibility, and confront this reading with the performance of *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017). Bärbel Lücke broaches the frequently asked question of “Wer spricht” in her article on *Kein Licht*.¹⁰ A question upon which Jelinek touched in the text “Textflächen”.¹¹ About the musicality in Jelinek’s texts, the sort of role she ascribes to the actors and the question “Wer spricht” has been written extensively, not only in the context of *Kein Licht*.

Writing on previous performances of the *Kein Licht* texts highlights other aspects of the texts that are relevant for our discussion. Chiaki Soma, who programmed four productions of the texts at the Festival/Tokyo, indicated how the texts were received in Japan and how their performances related to the dialectic between needing to speak about what happened in 2011 and not knowing what can or should be said.¹² Momoko Inoue also addressed the reception of the texts in Japan and points to negotiations between speech and “das Unwahrnehmbare” in Jelinek’s text.¹³ In an interview Karin Beier, director of the first performance of *Kein Licht* (Schauspiel Köln, 2011), tells that she wanted to stage the piece “fast als Konzert”.¹⁴ This interpretation fits with the extensive musical metaphors in the text. It is thus not surprising that this text, like several other Jelinek texts, provided the basis for an opera production.

The Thinkspiel of Manoury and Stemmann was not the first occasion that Jelinek's texts were used in music theatre. Thus, the study of music theatre based on Jelinek's work is not a new domain of research. We might compare Manoury's treatment of the texts and the lack of traditional characters in music theatre when using Jelinek's texts, with studies on the approach of composer Olga Neuwirth (b. 1968). Neuwirth worked extensively with Jelinek's texts since the beginning of her career. Karin Hochradl conducted a study on Neuwirth's compositions that work with texts of Jelinek (up to 2003). Hochradl's theory associates vocal expressions with specific emotions or situations, e.g. spoken text in Neuwirth's works would imply "einen Diskurs von Macht und Gewalt".¹⁵ Musicologist Stefan Drees (2013) devoted an article to Neuwirth's "Umgang mit Text und Sprache Elfriede Jelineks".¹⁶ Drees draws attention to her approach to "Sprachlosigkeit"¹⁷ in Jelinek's text for *Lost Highway* (2003), resulting in "den Diskurs des Bühnenwerks durch Sinngebungen jenseits des Klingenden anreichert und dadurch ein komplexes Mediengeflecht voller Querverweise schafft".¹⁸

In addition, I want to make a contribution to the research on the voice and the electronic music in the operas of Philippe Manoury. In his article "Vox et Machina" Brice Tissier analyses the use of the voice and how electronics are used for voice processing in his operas.¹⁹ Tissier points out that Manoury has been working with electronics applied to the voice since his composition of and research for *En Écho* in 1993.²⁰ Serge Lemouton, an collaborator at IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique in Paris), worked with Manoury to create the electronics in several compositions. Therefore, he can give insight in how they are created and what procedures are used on the voice.²¹ Both authors refer to Manoury's opera work up to *La Nuit de Gutenberg* (premiered in 2011). Like *Kein Licht*, all these works made extensive use of electronics. This is typical for most of Manoury's work. Previous music theatre and opera work of Manoury was however not as radical as the Thinkspiel; the more traditional interpretation of characters and singers in the older work is remarkable.

To conclude this introduction a few words on the methodology and the sources used in this article are needed. The texts of Elfriede Jelinek, the score of *Kein Licht. (2011/2012/2017)*ⁱ and the video recording of the performanceⁱⁱ (distributed by ARTE²²) are fundamental. We will draw on Manoury's theoretical text on the Thinkspiel, published on his website in spring 2017 under

ⁱ I want to express my sincere gratitude to the staff of publisher Durand Salabert Eschig for disclosing the score of Manoury's composition for consultation.

ⁱⁱ The references in the article to the performance are based on the video recording of the performance on 21 October 2017 in Opéra Comique, Paris. This video recording was produced by Les Films Jack Fébus. The recording mentions that it is the "version française". This French version premiered on 18 October 2017 at the same location.

the title “Sur le Thinkspiel”²³ and published in a German translation in the program book of the premiere.²⁴ Considerable effort was undertaken by the producers to communicate this project to the audience. A crowdsourcing campaign was launched in 2015, promising donors to keep them up to date during the production process.²⁵ As a result, there is an abundance of supplementary sources (blogs, recorded meetings with the artists, a documentary video series) providing insight in the artistic process.

The text and the production of *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017)

***Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017): an adaptation of Jelinek?**

The three texts of Elfriede Jelinek used in *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017) give the piece its structure in three parts and its title: *Kein Licht*²⁶, *Epilog*?²⁷ and *Der Einzige, sein Eigentum* (*Hello darkness, my old friend*). The dates in the title of the performance correspond with the years in which Jelinek wrote the three texts: respectively 2011, 2012 and 2017. The last text was written only months before the premiere of the piece, commenting on the presidency of Donald Trump and his threatening language. This last part reminds us that the risks of nuclear energy and nuclear weapons are not a thing of the past.ⁱⁱⁱ The inclusion of such a very recent text is exceptional for music theatre and opera and points therefore already to a first deviation from the normal working process in these genres. Jelinek also wrote another text related to the Fukushima disaster, *Prolog*?²⁸

The three parts in the performance give the suggestion of a chronology, but there is no unfolding narrative. Nor is there any indication that the situation improves later in the performance, on the contrary: water containers leak yellow-green fluid and float the stage. The setting of the performance is not exactly defined: where we are, when (though we have the indications of the years), who we are hearing, who the speakers are in Jelinek’s text, what is happening, none of it is clearly stated. The perspective of posthumanism—which is not taken up in this article—also seems an interesting approach to study these texts and their performance, seeing the difficulty of categorising the figures on stage and theme of mankind’s failure in dealing with technology and knowledge.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nuclear danger is not a new theme in music theatre and opera. Philip Glass refers in *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) to the link between Albert Einstein and nuclear weapons, since Einstein’s theories formed the basis for their development. *Doctor Atomic* (2005) of John Adams focuses on Robert Oppenheimer, a crucial figure in the development of nuclear weapons.

Hearing and not-hearing, this theme is in line with the many references to musicians and music. Already in the first sentence of Jelinek's text we notice this theme: "ich hör deine Stimme kaum", says A to B.²⁹ Not being able to hear what the other speakers are saying breaks with the dramatic conventions of a functioning closed realistic world. A possible interpretation is that just as the world is falling apart after the nuclear disaster, our human networks and our ability to communicate (with ourselves, with each other, with others i.e. the audience) are falling apart. In another interpretation the not-hearing might refer to not being heard or being forgotten after Fukushima. Rita Thiele (cf. supra) as well as Asako Fukuoka associate the speakers with bodes.³⁰ A further study might compare these instances in Jelinek's texts with Carolyn Abbate's theory of hearing in opera.³¹ This is maybe even more interesting concerning Manoury's music theatre piece. I wonder, does the audience hear what the speakers can't hear, or do we find ourselves stuck in the same situation?

In an interview with Pia Janke, Stemmann confirms Jelinek's idea that the director of her plays is a "Co-Autor".³² This strengthens our conviction that Jelinek's texts lend themselves well to the libretto of a Thinkspiel and justifies the profound reworking of the texts. The high speed of the text delivery comes with a certain density, although there are variations in speed. But even if the resulting libretto is long, the original text material is much longer. In the libretto is a certain adherence to the frame of the Jelinek's text. The beginning and ending of the Jelinek's *Kein Licht* are roughly retained in the first part of the performance: "ich hör deine Stimme kaum" is one of the first things we hear the actors say, "Ein Urteil bitte" closes the first part. But the separation that the structure of the performance in three parts suggests, appears not to be strict. The texts are not exclusively used in the part that wears its date. For example, quotes from *Kein Licht* are used in the second part. Excerpts are selected and recombined, not necessarily respecting the original order of the text.

Most of the text is in German. In addition, there is a distinct presence of French in the performance. We hear a French text written by Manoury on the Thinkspiel at the end of the first act, and again towards the end of the second. The announcement of each new part is in French—at least in the French version (cf. infra)—as are the introductory texts that are projected at the beginning of the first and second part. These passages partly have an instructing purpose and set the scene. In the third part we hear English, mostly in reference to Trump. On the video by Claudia Lehmann there is a text as in the earlier parts but merely phrases as "great" and "la vérité?". Out of several texts of Jelinek, one multilingual theatre performance is created. The layering of simultaneous texts does obviously not improve the understandability of what is said.

But in a presentation for the French audience Stemann reassured a worried audience member that “bien sûr on peut pas comprendre tout” and that even the German audience couldn’t understand everything.³³

The flexible production process of the Thinkspiel

The work process for this performance appears to be rather open and flexible. Singer Sarah Maria Sun testified that Manoury was willing to listen to the opinions of the singers and adapt lines.³⁴ This demonstrates that there was not a fixed, finished score before the rehearsals. In addition to the flexible working process during the rehearsal period, there appears to be a sort of openness to the piece, or even to the ‘musical work’. Manoury did not enter the rehearsals with an end product, but with a score structured in modules,³⁵ without a fixed order. Manoury does not challenge the idea of the musical work in a completely new way, but reminds of the open form compositions, in which the order of parts of the score could be changed. We already saw this in the second part of the twentieth century (e.g. Boulez, Stockhausen). The Paris version (autumn 2017) is not the same as the performance at the time of its creation in Germany (summer 2017)—though creation might not be the correct word, seeing that the work encourages recreation. Because the French version is more recent, and to answer to the openness of the makers and to depart from the monopoly of the first performance (in the spirit of the work process for this Thinkspiel), I think it makes more sense to concentrate on the last version and I therefore my examination is based on the French version.³⁶

Of course, it is not unusual for a performance (especially for a theatre or dance performance) to be adjusted and reworked in between series of presentations. But with this Thinkspiel, something more profound seems to be going on. For an opera or even any kind of performance with a continue musical score (which is not completely the case in this piece), it is more difficult to make changes after the premiere. Director Nicolas Stemann emphasizes indeed the different way of working in comparison with opera.³⁷ For Stemann the production of this Thinkspiel might be the future of the whole opera genre: “C’est pourquoi je crois que ça peut être vraiment la future de l’opéra, de faire une connection avec manière de travailler qui au moment se passe seulement dans le théâtre sans musique, théâtre parlé.”³⁸

The voices of *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017)

The lack of characters in Jelinek's texts for *Kein Licht*

In her article on Jelinek's text *Kein Licht* Bärbel Lücke (2012) asks the question “Wer spricht?”³⁹ and draws attention to the fact that this is a question frequently asked in Jelinek research. This question is a compelling one while reading the texts that are used for *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017). This exact question is posed in the text and in the performance: “Wer spricht da”.⁴⁰

The text on the website (Rowohlt Theaterverlag) of the publisher says one needs at least three actors.⁴¹ The question of how the text will be distributed over the actors remains. Or does the remark of the publisher refer to the performance of all *Kein Licht* texts and do the three actors speak the text of A, B and the “Trauernde”? The Thinkspiel departs from the simple form and cast that a first view on the Jelinek's texts would suggest. The impression of two monologues and one long dialogue is undermined. Looking purely at the theatre text, *Kein Licht* (2011) appears to be a dialogue, with two speakers i.e. A and B. Lücke actually characterises it as a “Dia(Poly)Log”.⁴² The *Epilog?* (2012) seems to be presented as a monologue, spoken not by A or B (or at least, no reference implying this is made in a stage direction), but at the beginning of the text a “Trauernde?”⁴³ is mentioned: someone who mourns. At the end of the text Jelinek mentions Sophokles' *Antigone* as a source.

The layering of voices

First it is important to get an overview of who is on stage, which bodies are present. The musicians sit at the back of the stage: they are not hidden, a soloist even stands up to play. Close to them, a choir—although only consisting of four singers—stays throughout the performance at the edge of the scene. Six performers step on the stage: all dressed in very similar costumes, without any differentiation in hierarchy. At this point there is no hint of who or what they (re)present, if anything. In the second part, a visual differentiation comes into play when the performers wear different costumes and the two actors are lifted out of the group through bright-coloured clothing. Sometimes there are other people on scene, but they are in the background, make no sound and have a rather practical function, e.g. moving pieces of scenery. A howling dog opens the piece. His trainer is dressed in black and always remains close to the animal. A last ‘speaker’ we see on stage is the puppet Atomi who appears in the second part.

Two non-human bodies mentioned above seem to have a more clearly defined role than the human performers and therefore deserve a closer look. The dog who returns at the beginning of the three parts is the most remarkable figure. The lamenting sound of the dog results in a remarkable spine-chilling presence. These sounds set the tone, at the same time compassionate and mournful. A scene with interaction between the three female singers and the dog occurs in second part of the performance. Sitting on their knees the singers howl with the dog. Initially the voices of the singers are close and not very differentiated much, which results in a sort of duet between the singers and the dog who seems to have a separate melodic line. There is a very fast alternation between song and howling on the part of the singers. In addition, one moment the voices sound more like speech, the other moment they seem closer to song. Especially this scene makes us reconsider the relationship between animal and human. The animal on stage is the only one who cannot have been complicit in the disaster. The lamenting sounds suggest that even those who are not guilty, suffer as well. The puppet Atomik does interact with actor Niels Bormann, a conversation that sounds as a discussion between father and son discussing bed time. Atomik speaks French, the actor speaks German in this scene. Their body language also suggests that they are having a conversation. Is the non-conversation with the puppet the only one that can happen in these circumstances? Another 'figure' that deserves further study is the depiction of Donald Trump in the last part of *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017).

The lack of traditional characters is not covered up by the composer. On the contrary, Manoury states that there is "pas de personnification continue du début à la fin" and speaks of "une dissociation du visuel et du sonore"⁴⁴. Under influence of Nicolas Stemmann, Manoury decided to divide a figure or character over several performers: "c'est idée de disjunction, ou plus exactement de distribution du rôle d'un seul personnage entre plusieurs".⁴⁵ Following a visit to Japan in 2011, Manoury developed the idea for this Thinkspiel and for "la composition d'un opéra d'une manière nouvelle".⁴⁶ He mentions marionette theatre as an inspiration as well.⁴⁷

For one long passage in *Kein Licht* Jelinek indicates that not just A or B speaks, the passage is assigned to "A/B". She clarifies: "So. Ab hier, die lange Passage, bis die Stimmen wieder aufgeteilt sind, sollten beide gemeinsam schreien – oder sich ihre Texte selber aufteilen. Sie können sich auch überschneiden, so daß man passagenweise nichts mehr versteht."⁴⁸ Apart from this occasion, Jelinek doesn't prescribe that multiple voices or texts should sound at the same time. Let us for a moment not consider what text is spoken, but which voices sound at the same time. Manoury shows us a multitude of strategies and combinations of voices: one voice

alone, the pair of actors, the actors alternating every few words, the singers howling with the dog. The auditory lines are often overlapping and occasionally the result sounds chaotic. Still, the combination of voices is not arbitrary, but refers to certain structures and patterns. The two actors are a reoccurring duo and the contralto is often paired with an instrumental soloist, just as the dog is paired with a muted trumpet solo. Repeatedly, the singing reminds of conventional opera forms: for example, the trio of female voices and the baritone solo.

How are Jelinek's A and B from *Kein Licht* (2011) interpreted in the first part in the performance? A first look at the performance would suggest that A and B are portrayed by actors Caroline Peters and Niels Bormann respectively. The text implies that the speaking voices A and B play or played the violin. In the performance we see an actual violinist at the edge of the stage in the first part, and then a second one. It seems that these figures A and B (who were not singular defined persons in Jelinek's text) are now split in a voice and an instrumentalist. In addition, we notice another split of these two 'figures': namely the two actors and two of the female singers. The two actors and these two singers (Sarah Maria Sun and Olivia Vermeulen) are thus also a frequent combination. These two singers appear to be the equivalents, the parallels of the two actors. At a certain moment these singers appear to be doubled by the two violinists who stand at the side of the scene. This doubling is enhanced because in another scene the singers are holding or even playing a violin themselves, sitting in front of a music stand. The third female singer, contralto Christina Daletskaja, switches between being part of the trio of female voices and singing solo laments as "Worte der (Un-)Wahrheit".⁴⁹

In the second part of the piece a scene with ventriloquism captures our attention. In another scene it appears that the actors are not able to speak and they struggle to engage in voiceless communication. Just as the scenes where A and B are not able to hear each other, these are examples of the inability to communicate.

Up to three times the phrase that announces the third part of the performance is repeated: "Kein Licht troisième partie 2017". The third time, the actress reads these words from what appears to be a script. We often see the actors read their text from a booklet. This aligns with a more general approach of transparency: the music stands on stage, the puppeteers (the singers who master Atomi) and the ventriloquist (the actress who speaks the part of Atomi), the ensemble, the vocal quartet and the conductor, no effort is made to hide these elements.

Thinkspiel: singing or speaking?

A first thing we need to say about the composition that it diverges in several ways from an opera. The most obvious is that there is not a continuous presence of music or sound; the piece is not through-composed. The piece works a lot with silence, spoken text and lack of continuity between parts. This aspect might be partly related to the genre of Thinkspiel, as the Singspiel (to which the neologism refers) is a form in which sung and spoken texts are mixed. We might use Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* as an example of the Singspiel, in which we hear the aria of the queen of the night alongside spoken German dialogue.

Manoury takes an interest in the human voice since long. Another dominant concern in his career as composer is his interest in technology. Since the 80s he is one of the dominant figures in the development of music with live electronics. And since *En Écho...* Manoury works with sound processing of the voice as mentioned by Tissier (cf. supra).

In the text "Sur le Thinkspiel" Manoury says about the relationship between speech and singing that "la voix parlée est une voix chantée chaotique"⁵⁰ and "La voix humaine se meut en permanence entre hauteurs et bruits."⁵¹ This suggests that Manoury sees speech and song as elements on a scale. The composer points to the difficulty of deciding which parts would be spoken and which parts would be sung.⁵² Comparing these two modes of voice, Manoury argues that singing is paired with more emotion but is less understandable.⁵³ Stemann goes even a step further: "c'est un peu un dialogue de la voix parlée et la voix chantée entre les vivants et les morts sur une catastrophe".⁵⁴ In combination these statements allude to the singers as the voices of the dead, the grieving. The actors, lost in absurd wordplay and not wholly conscious of the situation, then align with the passive living.

Voice processing and composition^{iv}

We hear a combination of speech and song in several languages, instrumental sounds, animal howling, purely electronic sounds and mixtures. We can point out a few general reoccurring aspects in the hybrid auditive network of the score. First, concerning the notation of the text of the actors, it is written that the timing in the score is not an exact prescription.⁵⁵ The text is not

^{iv} A music theatre work with a name as *Kein Licht* cannot avoid the association with one of the most substantial and bizarre works in the history of opera and music theatre: Stockhausen's cycle *Licht* (1977–2003). A few similarities that come to mind between the two pieces are the combination of several languages, the use of electronics and a sort of open form. A further inquiry into the similarity or legacy of Stockhausen's *Licht* does not fit within the scope of this article.

rhythmically notated, but written over the bars or written as a block of text in a box followed by a line spreading along a number of bars. Second, the vocal quartet often sing the text in the same rhythm (almost as one voice, cf. the voice processing of the solo voices), an element we also see in the wind instruments of the ensemble.

In the video recording we can see that all six performers and the members of the vocal quartet have their own small microphone attached to their face.⁵⁶ A small package carrying a microphone is attached to the torso of the dog. The ensemble is probably recorded in a comparable way. The audio signals are sent to the computer in the hall, where they can be processed (ranging from a simple balance in volume to more complex manipulation of the incoming sounds). The result, in combination with purely electronic sounds, are what we call the electronics. Some scenes are dominated by the electronics, e.g. “Wassertropfen” or “Partikeltanz”.⁵⁷

Necessary to point out concerning how the actors sound, is the voice processing of actors. The actors often don’t sound as if it is just one person or an individual speaking, though that is what we see on stage. The voices are processed (i.e. manipulated). Manoury already used electronics for the voices in his previous operas, operas that use traditional opera characters. It is thus not immediately clear what the use of electronics means for the voice, and what they imply for our question of roles, characters and identities. In addition, there are moments that the actors appear to be singing, due to the voice processing.

The Thinkspiel

The Thinkspiel as object/genre

The neologism “Thinkspiel” was created in the context of this work. Apart from other quotes from the artists in interviews, it is Manoury’s text (“Sur le Thinkspiel”) that we can use as a point of reference, in combination with the performance *Kein Licht. (2011/2012/2017)*, to theorize further upon this genre proposition. However, based on this one production it is not yet completely clear what are the particulars of the genre and what are the particulars of this production. In his theoretical text Manoury writes the following:

“Mûri en collaboration avec le metteur en scène allemand Nicolas Stemmann, ce premier Thinkspiel est une proposition commune d’un ‘objet’ musical et scénique nouveau, issu du laboratoire de nos idées, de nos expérimentations et de nos désirs respectifs,

confrontés et mis en œuvre lors d’une assez longue période de réflexions, de répétitions et d’ajustements, qui se poursuivra jusqu’à la veille de la ‘creation’.”⁵⁸

This quote testifies of the flexibility of the production process and emphasizes the experimental aspect of the project. The Thinkspiel is called an “object”, rather than a genre. The performance reveals negotiations with the genres of opera, the German opera Singspiel, contemporary theatre, the concert, and the lecture performance. The word “Spiel” or play suggests a sort of game, it suggests the lightness we also find in a Singspiel. The Thinkspiel seems however less light-hearted than the Singspiel. The other half of the neologism (“Think”) points more to intellectual engagement and experiment on the part of the artists and the audience, I would say based on the performance. The use of the different languages and the verbal density might be linked with this. “Sur le Thinkspiel” refers to this hybridity and describes the Thinkspiel as follows: “Dans mon esprit, le concept de Thinkspiel renvoie surtout au ‘jeu’ entendu comme association et action combinée de la recherche expérimentale, de la pensée conceptuelle et du ‘langage’ artistique.” The Thinkspiel is a web, a mix, a game of different elements, genre references, vocal utterances and divergent forms of communication (e.g. Manoury’s commentaries, Atomi and actor, the howling), resulting in a hybrid fabric of voices and ideas. The interventions by the composer are probably one of the most significant moments in the piece to understand what the Thinkspiel is.

The voice of the composer during the Thinkspiel

At the end of the first part of *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017), Philippe Manoury addresses the audience a first time, standing in front of the stage. Holding a piece of paper and a microphone in his hand, he addresses the audience in his mother tongue and introduces himself with his name. He is thus presented as the composer, rather than as a performer. We hear something that is unquestionably the voice and the opinion of the composer Philippe Manoury. What are the implications of this fragment in the musical work considering the question of character and who speaks?

In these two monologues Manoury elaborates on the Thinkspiel, this new project. Fragments of the text he reads can be found in his text “Sur le Thinkspiel”. The second occasion we hear Manoury, he stands in between the audience, next to the computer that steers the electronics. He draws attention to the most crucial technological aspect of the performance, the computer running the software for the live electronics, and reminds the audience that it is technology and

knowledge that led to the risks and disasters implied in the performance. Apart from the Thinkspiel, topics such as the nature of Jelinek's text, climate change and our relation to technology are addressed. Manoury's interventions are moments of visual and auditive rest in the Thinkspiel. These interludes are however not comforting, they confront the audience with statements and encourage them to reflect. In *Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017) the Thinkspiel is presented as a genre with a prominent theoretical preoccupation. The Thinkspiel puts forward images, convictions and interpretations developed in a collaborative work process. Still, the hybridity and playful elements in the performance provide a counterbalance.

Mankind's struggle with technology as shown in the Thinkspiel

Mankind's irresponsibility in dealing with technology and knowledge is ever-present in the staging of the Thinkspiel. The scene is a toxic, deadly environment, supposedly caused by nuclear waste. On the one hand our society and this performance depend on technology, on the other hand we are not able to handle it responsibly. Manoury's second intervention and parts of Jelinek's text (e.g. "Das Elektro ist alles, was Sie brauchen, damit etwas daheim auf Sie wartet, während Sie fort sind."⁵⁹) focus on this duality. This struggle reaches its climax in a moment of crisis: lights flickering, followed by a blackout on scene. Candles light the stage. Accompanied by the ensemble the contralto sings solo. This scene appears to be acoustic and free of electronic music. This collapse, this instant of "kein Licht", is however not an end or a turning point. Just as the world continued to use nuclear energy after Fukushima, the third part continues to employ the same media and technology as before the crash.

During the second part, we see fragments of video on the screens showing the actors in a car. As we see them outside of the context of the theatre scene and without their costumes, they encourage the impression that they are just persons, even though we don't hear them speak one word. They are people who use polluting energy and who have a negative influence on the environment, just as we are. It is only in these video fragments that the actors are shown as unquestionably human. At the same time, these video fragments give the impression of a behind the scenes video for the production that obviously uses electricity for light, music, amplification, and uses polluting means of transport. Later in the third part we see that they try to escape the earth in a rocket wearing space suits.

In line with a broader inclination in contemporary music theatre to disconnect singers from fictional individuals, *Kein Licht. (2011/2012/2017)* presents no traditional characters for the performers. We do get unstable silhouettes suggesting figures, a mass of polymorphous shapes. These result from the intense adaptation of Elfriede Jelinek's texts and the allocation of this text to the voices and bodies on stage which is not straightforward. We saw several compositional strategies that Manoury uses which dissociate the performer from the sounding result: the voice processing, ventriloquism and the doubling of roles by pairing performers. These prohibit a simple association of a performer with a demarcating identity. In combination with a variety of multilingual vocal utterances, acoustic and electronic sounds, these strategies give the auditive aspect a hybrid disorientating nature.

While it is still unsure if this Thinkspiel will know succession, the flexible production process that for composer Philippe Manoury and director Nicolas Stemmann is typical of the Thinkspiel, seems to fit with more general trends in music theatre and opera production and adaptation. When composer Philippe Manoury takes the floor during the performance, we are confronted with a moment for reflection. These moments enhance the impression that the Thinkspiel is no non-committal entertainment. As its name suggests, the Thinkspiel encourages and seeks for this cerebral engagement of the audience, using a mesmerizing amalgam of quotes and languages, voices and allusions.

¹ Manoury, Philippe, Stemmann, Nicolas and Jelinek, Elfriede: *Kein Licht. (2011/2012/2017)*. Duisburg: Gebläsehalle, 25.8.2018.

² Thiele, Rita: "Nicht einmal ein Wort rührt uns an." Über *Kein Licht* von Elfriede Jelinek. In: JELINEK[JAHRE]BUCH. Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrum 2012. Vienna: Praesens 2012.

³ Fukuoka, Asako: *Das Zitat als Mittel zur Kommunikation mit den Toten? Kommunikation mit den Toten mittels des Zitats? Fukushima in Texten von Elfriede Jelinek und Hiromi Kawakami*, 2014. https://fpjelinek.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/proj_ejz/PDF-Downloads/Fukuoka_Das_Zitat_als_Mittel_zur_Kommunikation.pdf (14.9.2018) (= Paper presented at Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrum Nachwuchsworkshop 2014).

⁴ Fukuoka, Asako: *Erzählen der unerlebten Katastrophen. Übersetzen als literarisches Modell bei Elfriede Jelinek und Autoren der „zweiten Generation“*, 2016.

https://fpjelinek.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/proj_ejz/PDF-Downloads/Beitrag_Asako_Fukuoka.pdf (14.9.2018) (= Paper presented at Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrum Nachwuchsworkshop 2016), 9.

⁵ Bala, Sruti: 'Translation is the making of a subject in reparation': *Elfriede Jelinek's Response to Fukushima in Kein Licht*. In: *Austrian Studies* 22 (2014), 183–198, 197.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Schönsee, Rebecca: *Strahlende Geiselhaft. Jelineks Lärmblending «Kein Licht»[Splendid Captivity. Jelinek's Noise Blinding «No Light»]*. In: *Studia austriaca* 26 (2018), 45–74, 54.

⁹ Schönsee, Rebecca: *Strahlende Geiselhaft. Jelineks Lärmblending «Kein Licht»[Splendid Captivity. Jelinek's Noise Blinding «No Light»]*.

- ¹⁰ Lücke, Bärbel: *Fukushima Oder Die Musik Der Zeit: Zu Elfriede Jelineks Bühnenstück "Kein Licht"*. In: Weimarer Beiträge. Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft, Ästhetik Und Kulturwissenschaften 3/2012, 325–350. Consulted via <http://www.baerbel-luecke.de/fukushima.pdf> (14.9.2018) (= Website Bärbel Lücke), 4.
- ¹¹ Jelinek, Elfriede: *Textflächen*. <https://www.elfriedejelinek.com/ftextf.htm> (7.9.2018) (= Website Elfriede Jelinek).
- ¹² Soma, Chiaki: *Jelinek in Post-Fukushima Japan. 4 Versions of Kein Licht. Produced by Festival/Tokyo*. In: Janke, Pia / Kovacs, Teresa (ed.): „Postdramatik“ Reflexion Und Revision. Vienna: Praesens 2015 (= DISKURSE.KONTEXTE.IMPULSE. Publikationen des Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrums 11), 490–96.
- ¹³ Inoue, Momoko: *Hautnah aus der Ferne. Die theaterpraktische Rezeption von „Kein Licht, Epilog?“ und „Prolog?“*. <https://jelinektabu.univie.ac.at/politik/protest/momoko-inoue/> (14.9.2018) (= TABU: Bruch. Überschreitungen von Künstlerinnen. Interkulturelles Wissenschaftsportal der Forschungsplattform Elfriede Jelinek).
- ¹⁴ Beier, Karin: *Dionysos und Apollon zugleich. Über die Uraufführungsinszenierung von Kein Licht. Karin Beier im Gespräch mit Christian Schenkermayr*. In: JELINEK[JAHRE]BUCH. Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrum 2012. Vienna: Praesens 2012, 73–79, 76.
- ¹⁵ Hochradl, Karin: *Olga Neuwirths Und Elfriede Jelineks Gemeinsames Musiktheaterschaffen: Ästhetik, Libretto, Analyse, Rezeption*. Bern: Peter Lang 2010, 129.
- ¹⁶ Drees, Stefan: „[...] in einer virtuellen Neuerschaffung und musikalischen Überhöhung [...]“ *Olga Neuwirths Umgang mit Text und Sprache Elfriede Jelineks*. In: JELINEK[JAHRE]BUCH. Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrum 2013, 271–91.
- ¹⁷ Drees, Stefan: „[...] in einer virtuellen Neuerschaffung und musikalischen Überhöhung [...]“ *Olga Neuwirths Umgang mit Text und Sprache Elfriede Jelineks*, 285.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Tissier, Brice: *Vox et Machina : Lorsque L'électronique Redéploie La Voix Dans Les Opéras de Philippe Manoury (En Écho, 60e Parallèle, K..., La Frontière, La Nuit de Gutenberg)*. In: Les Cahiers de La Société Québécoise de Recherche En Musique 2/2014, 55–69.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 56.
- ²¹ Lemouton, Serge: *D'Orson Welles À Gutenberg, Les Opéras de Philippe Manoury*. In: Auzolle, Cécile (ed.): *La Création Lyrique En France Depuis 1900: Contexte, Livrets, Marges*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes 2015.
- ²² „Kein Licht“ de Philippe Manoury à l'Opéra Comique | ARTE Concert. *Concert capté le 21 octobre 2017 à l'Opéra Comique, Paris*. <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/078839-000-A/kein-licht-de-philippe-manoury-a-l-opera-comique/> (29.8.2018). (= Website ARTE Concert).
- ²³ Manoury, Philippe: *Sur le Thinkspiel*, <http://www.philippemanoury.com/?p=6091> (14.9.2018), dated on 29.5.2017. (= Website Philippe Manoury).
- ²⁴ Manoury, Philippe: *Operation in Echtzeit. Einige Gedanken Über Das Thinkspiel, Eine Neue Form Des Musiktheaters*. Translated by Sarah Muriel Pieh. In: Boenisch, Vasco / von Blumberg, Benjamin / Stemann, Nicolas (ed.): *Programmheft Kein Licht*. (2011/2012/2017). Bochum: Kultur Ruhr 2017.
- ²⁵ *Kein Licht*, <https://www.commeon.com/fr/projet/kein-licht> (12.9.2018) (= Website Commeon, crowdfunding & mécénat).
- ²⁶ Jelinek, Elfriede: *KEIN LICHT*, <https://www.elfriedejelinek.com/fklicht.htm> (29.8.2018) (= Website Elfriede Jelinek).
- ²⁷ Jelinek, Elfriede: *Epilog?* <https://www.elfriedejelinek.com/ffukushima.htm> (29.8.2018) (= Website Elfriede Jelinek).
- ²⁸ Jelinek, Elfriede: *Kein Licht: Prolog?* <https://www.elfriedejelinek.com/fkeinlicht-prolog.htm> (29.9.2018) (= Website Elfriede Jelinek).
- ²⁹ Jelinek, Elfriede: *KEIN LICHT*.
- ³⁰ Fukuoka, Asako: *Erzählen der unerlebten Katastrophen. Übersetzen als literarisches Modell bei Elfriede Jelinek und Autoren der „zweiten Generation“*, 9.
- ³¹ Abbate, Carolyn: *Unsung Voices. Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- ³² Janke, Pia: *Die Gedanken Sind Die Handlung. Nicolas Stemann (Hamburg) Im Gespräch Mit Pia Janke*. In: Janke, Pia (ed.): *Elfriede Jelinek: „ICH WILL KEIN THEATER“*. Mediale Überschreitungen. Wien: Praesens Verlag 2007 (= DISKURSE.KONTEXTE.IMPULSE. Publikationen des Elfriede Jelinek-Forschungszentrums 3), 172–177, 174.
- ³³ Lienhard, Camille: *Kein Licht - Rencontre. Rencontre avec Philippe Manoury et Nicolas Stemann au Club de la Presse. Animée par Camille Lienhardt [sic]*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPCdD47MFQA> (14.9.2018), recorded on 21.9.2017 (= Video on the YouTube channel of Opéra National Du Rhin).
- ³⁴ *La Fabrique de Kein Licht : Épisode 4, Vocalité - Ressources*. <https://medias.ircam.fr/x3fbac9> (1.9.2018) (= Website audio/vidéo archives IRCAM).

-
- ³⁵ Manoury, Philippe: *Sur le Thinkspiel*.
- ³⁶ “*Kein Licht*” de Philippe Manoury à l’Opéra Comique | ARTE Concert. Concert capté le 21 octobre 2017 à l’Opéra Comique, Paris.
- ³⁷ Lienhard, Camille: *Kein Licht - Rencontre. Rencontre avec Philippe Manoury et Nicolas Stemann au Club de la Presse*.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Lücke, Bärbel: *Fukushima Oder Die Musik Der Zeit: Zu Elfriede Jelineks Bühnenstück “Kein Licht”, 4*.
- ⁴⁰ Jelinek, Elfriede: *Epilog?*
- ⁴¹ Rowohlt-Theaterverlag :: *Kein Licht*. <http://www.rowohlt-theaterverlag.de/tvalias/stueck/2946810> (29.8.2018) (= Website Rowohlt Theaterverlag).
- ⁴² Lücke, Bärbel: *Fukushima Oder Die Musik Der Zeit: Zu Elfriede Jelineks Bühnenstück “Kein Licht”, 3*.
- ⁴³ Jelinek, Elfriede: *Epilog?*
- ⁴⁴ Lienhard, Camille: *Kein Licht - Rencontre. Rencontre avec Philippe Manoury et Nicolas Stemann au Club de la Presse*.
- ⁴⁵ Manoury, Philippe: *Sur le Thinkspiel*.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Lienhard, Camille: *Kein Licht - Rencontre. Rencontre avec Philippe Manoury et Nicolas Stemann au Club de la Presse*.
- ⁴⁸ Jelinek, Elfriede: *KEIN LICHT*.
- ⁴⁹ Manoury, Philippe: *Partition Kein Licht (édition provisoire du 11 septembre 2018)*. Paris: Éditions Durand 2017. https://issuu.com/durand.salabert.eschig/docs/philippe_manoury_kein_licht (14.9.2018) (= Issuu account of publisher Durand Salabert Eschig).
- ⁵⁰ Manoury, Philippe: *Sur le Thinkspiel*.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Lienhard, Camille: *Kein Licht - Rencontre. Rencontre avec Philippe Manoury et Nicolas Stemann au Club de la Presse*.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Manoury, Philippe: *Partition Kein Licht*.
- ⁵⁶ “*Kein Licht*” de Philippe Manoury à l’Opéra Comique | ARTE Concert. Concert capté le 21 octobre 2017 à l’Opéra Comique, Paris.
- ⁵⁷ Manoury, Philippe: *Partition Kein Licht*.
- ⁵⁸ Manoury, Philippe: *Sur le Thinkspiel*.
- ⁵⁹ Jelinek, Elfriede: *KEIN LICHT*.