

The dull sound of cattle herds galloping across plains

... somehow we were stuck again in this dead end... she quietly called us all together to share her despair with us... fighting back tears.

Indeed none of us could imagine how this hopelessly confusing collection of fragments, short scenes, images, movement ideas, dances that were only just coming together, a few group dances even, small gestures, unfinished improvised dialogues, texts, musical ideas... how all this might be organised into arcs of tension and form resembling a “piece” that could be, no, would *have to be*, performed in just a few short days... because of course the date of the premiere was fixed and had long been announced as a yet untitled “New Piece” in the season brochure, even though we were never really sure that it would actually become a piece. Once again, we were much closer to giving up than to confidently keeping going. Even the positive experiences of the past did not make us to believe in future success... even worse: the world’s expectations had grown. The announcements in the press were frightening, although we tried to ignore them. There was no piece yet, nothing coherent, just a few small connections, nothing to announce.

We knew nothing about her goals, had no idea what she was looking for and trying to do, or what she might have already known, some inkling of where the journey was going. Of course her questions did suggest things, but they were very far away... perhaps desires, dreams, worries, thoughts, memories, something she heard or picked up the other day, fantasies that she could not or would not elaborate on but that she had hidden in questions to us, hoping to find unexpected or unimaginable things in our answers, maybe also her fear of having to answer them on her own. Yes, “Christmas”, and “death” were always present, but indirectly: talking about a Christmas recipe from our childhood, killing a mosquito, or playing dead. Tears flow because we are chopping onions... no, not out of sadness, there can be no pathos and no sentimentality. That would be too easy, too one-dimensional...

It was the same with finding music, which would somehow, at some point, need to merge with the narrative. No, not in the sense of “fitting in”, but of being eye-opening... never let it simply comment on or tell the same story that is being told on stage, because the emotions come even without the music. Doubling does not make the emotions stronger, in cancels them out in many ways... no, you have to open a different door to reach a special, perhaps even contradictory, level of feeling. One that can barely be explained in music and that cannot be planned or constructed in advance... all you can do is sum up the courage to open doors and then slam them shut really quickly if they are the wrong ones. Her eyebrows would go up or down slightly like a thumb signalling yes or no... if she sat back impatiently, changing her usual posture of leaning forwards full of curiosity, we would know that this was not what she had hoped for... lighting a cigarette, blowing the smoke upwards in silent but obvious frustration, was the worst judgement... no, there was nothing more to fear, there were never any harsh words... but still, it made you ashamed to have even suggested such a thing... simply out of respect for a newly discovered

connection, something so fragile that nobody wanted to destroy it yet... just glad that there was now a hint of structure, and aware that it was not yet strong enough to support too many mistakes. A cobweb is difficult to repair.

There were now small sequences of moments, dances or scenes, each of them labelled with a single keyword. It was almost like a secret language that all of us could understand or were learning, for we had now been trying for many weeks to connect one with the other, rehearse transitions, discard apparent solutions, try the exact opposite, let things run in parallel without one diminishing – or even drowning out – the other... and by now everything had been reduced to short code words, so that one keyword could refer to a previously rehearsed scene or even a whole sequence of scenes.

She carefully pencilled, almost painted, the keywords along the top of several A4 sheets of paper, which she then pinned together on the left hand side using paperclips. You could only see the uppermost section that had been written on, then beneath it the top of the next sheet and so on... this is how she made connections, at first in her own mind, in long thinking sessions during the afternoon (between rehearsals) and at night (after rehearsals). Thanks to the paperclips, the A4 sheets could be easily separated, reconfigured and laid out on the table in new thought patterns. In the meantime five large wooden tables had been set up in the widest row of the auditorium, the so-called director's row (row 7 in "our" Schauspielhaus, with lots of legroom). They had been built five years previously for the piece "Nelken", with dancers being "rabbits" on them, dancing on hands and knees. It was also one of the same tables that the four stunt men had brutally fallen on to, slowly pushing it diagonally across the stage metre by metre, from left to right, while a frightened dancer sat there on a chair, the men's eyes fixed on her, threatened by the loud falling. Now the tables offered enough space for the smaller and larger stacks of papers, pinned together to illustrate different possible connections. Our "music table" was always set up in the same row, but with a respectful distance to the "director's table"... she needed space to think, and we with our headphones needed it too. She said she had put something together this afternoon, then tore it all apart again... she did not know, we should have a look at it to see if it would still work with the music, or what we thought, probably it would not work at all musically. Yes, there was music, quite a lot of music even. Because of Andreas (Eisenschneider), computers had entered our musical world. Andreas was and is a passionate collector of music, extremely important in the Tanztheater's musical history, which has gained so many new stylistic colours through him. Our joint searching, collecting, systematising, editing could now be properly filed and organised. Searching again and again, trying to recall things from the morning rehearsal in time for the evening rehearsal, connecting them with images, movements, dances, remembering experiments... just be courageous and suggest something? Ask first? Or surprise her?

Yes, of course it had grown into a large archive over the years, with analogue sources being digitised and everything coming together on several hard drives. Past materials and new findings could suddenly be accessed much more quickly. Something that had been discarded or filed long ago now presented itself, years later, as the ideal solution for a certain atmosphere that we had been trying to achieve. Surprised and newly amazed by forgotten things.

No, she did not really like the fact that all musical discoveries and suggestions were only ever available to see or find on the monitor. To be listened to via headphones, which we would pass on to her. She missed the individual cassette tapes with their recorded titles, which could be rifled through with a clattering noise. The reverse side of the cases were labelled with keywords written on removable tape: “Armenia”, “slow”, “fast Jazz”, “Beethoven”, “Arabic”, “Judgement Day”, “Schubert song”, “Harpichord”, “female voice”, “Renaissance”, “Jewish dances”, “trombone”, “small melody (piano)”, “Sicily”, “Death and the Maiden”, “Leningrad”, “organ/timpani”, “timpani without organ”.. . and so on. Hundreds of tapes in many special suitcases. Then came the time of CDs... the suitcases were now filled with burned (!) CDs, each with just one track on them... rewinding was no longer necessary, accessing musical ideas for a scene in rehearsal was now much faster. Simply set the player to zero to prepare it for a fast track change and all the other quick transitions and cross-fades. No more guessing where a specific note starts by gently turning the wheel with a pencil or your little finger to adjust the delicate cassette tape just a tiny bit. For longer sequences or full dances, the required tapes would be lined up from left to right. The cassette cases, or later the open CD cases, had to be carefully checked against hastily scribbled notes and keywords. But now we could view four or five (or more) playlists on the computer monitor in front of us, shifting titles around, adding new ones, deleting those that were no longer needed, collecting alternative suggestions in a separate list. Smaller editing jobs, such as cutting down musical intros or making certain sections longer, could be done in the same interface, while other, more complicated, operations could be performed in a separate editing programme. Things like changing timbres or combining two entirely separate recordings: the voice of a Blues singer improvising freely suddenly corresponded with the lines of a pounding drums solo, without either of them knowing anything about it – miraculously and seemingly naturally they were playing at the same pitch... yes, of course drums have a pitch, deep basses, the nervous buzz of the cymbals etc.

It was our playground in the afternoons between rehearsals. In the evening we might already have a solution or at least a suggestion for one of the dancers’ unfinished solos. Just try it, maybe it will come together, but probably, very often, it will not. One playlist (no. 5 or 6) was always there as a repository for all kinds of sounds. Sounds and “field recordings” (snapshots created with very little technical equipment, just a microphone and small recording device) brought back from our many travels. For example of the old Erhu player, whom we had encountered sitting

on a piece of cardboard in an underpass on the way to the ferry to Hong Kong. The plaintive, sobbing sounds of this small Chinese violin with just one string go straight to your heart. Its body is no larger than a fist, strung with a piece of snakeskin the size of a beer mat.

The soft snarl of a jaw's harp, recorded somewhere in Chile at an instrument-collecting musician's place... later Ditta will dance to it on stage. A simple wooden bow strung with wire, to be plucked while held to one's lips so that the mouth becomes a resonating cavity. It resembles the Mongolian jaw's harps... not a small metal frame holding a vibrating metal reed, like the one heard in "Palermo Palermo"... some instruments appear all over the world but sound different in every place. Breathing in and out creates a distinctive sound. When our Sicilian one gives up the ghost it will be difficult to replace its exact timbre, all our efforts to find a back-up instrument have so far been in vain.

The No. 28 tram in Lisbon with its annoying screeching and shrill bells, rattling right past our rehearsal room. Warnings for the pedestrians who anxiously press their backs against the walls of the narrow streets. The dull sound of cattle herds galloping across plains. Andreas always says, "sounds have to tell a story"... with this in mind, we made our recordings. He is standing on the river bank, his arm held high (there is a photo), a tiny microphone in his hand... 70 metres above us is the imposing suspension bridge across the Tejo, buzzing with traffic like a huge, threatening swarm of bees... is this a story?... or just our awed impression of the place?

A small "walkman" from the 1980s, complete with built-in microphone, lies on my stomach as I am taking a nap in a hammock in northern Italy: around me the cicadas are making a racket. Now it is the soundscape for "Palermo Palermo", our coproduction with this city. The old man in his sparse bedsit in the centre of Palermo, his thin voice only barely remembering the old songs...

The list is long, but only a few recordings find their way on to the stage. Perhaps because they do not tell enough of a story...

The earlier "dead end", so close to the premiere – in fact it had just been an issue relating to 20 minutes somewhere in the second act – that had brought everything to a standstill: it was primarily about some of the music choices that had become boring over time, had perhaps fitted each scene and each dance but not anymore, had become worn-out in rehearsal. Pina once said that after many many pieces of music, she still needed to look forward to the next one. This is what we had to look for. But here there was no great musical arc, no new perspective on the images we had seen so often: the girl in the bright red cocktail dress, hiding her arms behind her back, a man with muscular arms posing behind her so that it looks like his arms are hers... flirting... balancing on a small ball, looking for a specific wardrobe door with jangling keys... hitting a paper bag full of sweets with a stick while being blindfolded, until it bursts and the sweets rain onto the white stage floor... being swung in a circle, flying backwards with your skirt flowing behind you, the brightly lit

white walls moving around the room as if by invisible hands, the light changing to make everything seem menacing... the woman screams, an intruder jumps from one moving wardrobe to the next, almost missing it, the panicked woman with the keys is still screaming... the walls drive on... suddenly the dancers (the women in black, the men in tuxedos) use broom heads to ruffle their hair, aggressively bashing away at their partings... a hairdresser tells absurd stories, hysterical laughter etc., etc. All of this had been accompanied by a variety of musical choices over the weeks, but the episodes had not coalesced into a coherent whole. The sheets of paper had been clipped together in an order that made sense to Pina, each following the other in a sequence of emotional logic that seemed compelling... she did not want to change it... but the music was working against it, the atmosphere was not what she had hoped for, much of it was fragmented, the colours were all wrong... too soft... It was all so easy, so deadly boring.... maybe she should get rid of the whole lot. It was clear to us that it all needed to go. We needed to say goodbye to our ideas... try something completely different... none of it was right... she so wanted to be able to see with fresh eyes again... no matter if we think we are making a mistake... we just need courage.

Yes, and that is what we did... we looked at just one excerpt: Amon Tobin, the Brazilian musician with his exuberant imagination, endless ideas, driving rhythms, sudden invasions of new musical material and styles, unexpected bouts of emotion, even sentimentality, destroyed by drum solos, more, more, intensifying into deafening noise, more, more, more... and now the screaming woman with her bunch of keys, the intruder struggling to cling on to two wardrobes, the swinging dress, the sweets falling out of the paper bag, the risky balance on the small ball, the moving wardrobes, the sudden lighting changes, the rattling keys amplified by a microphone, which of course also picks up the woman's voice... suddenly, a lashing strike of lightning from the sound archive (again, deafening) marks the end of the nightmare, which began so innocently with a little flirt... there will be many more strikes, such as the broom heads that attack the dancers' hair like weapons... Nina Simone sings "I put a spell on you"... I had initially mistranslated it as "I curse you", which is where my idea for the lightning strikes came from... perhaps too naive... yes, and what follows is another story.

The next day, Pina asked for the same scenes again... our question: what music shall we play?... well, it wasn't bad yesterday, was it? Maybe we will find something else later... hm...

(very quietly and just between us: it all stayed as it was...)