EPIC TANZTHEATER: BAUSCH, BRECHT, AND BALLET OPERA

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

August 2014

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ABSTRACT

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German choreographer Pina Bausch (1940-2009) spent most of her career as the director of the Tanztheater Wuppertal dance company in Germany. She is known for her 1975 production of Le sacre du printemps, and later for her “World Cities” series of works (1986-2009) created during residencies in ten major world cities. In the 1970s Bausch transitioned from producing “ballet opera” (Ballettoper)—that is, works that closely followed the narrative “framework” of the operas they were based on—to Tanztheater (“dance theatre”) which shied away from such explicit storytelling. Like most new theatre in West Germany in the 1970s, Bausch’s Tanztheater had roots in Bertold Brecht’s conception of epic theatre. Bausch became increasingly Brechtian in her use of music and movement as her style developed, as shown in her collage pieces that do not use entire works of music. Bausch’s increasing reliance on collage and fragmentation can be best illustrated through her inclusion of opera music.

In this thesis I argue that the influence of Brecht’s epic theatre on Bausch’s Tanztheater is essential to understanding the development of her aesthetic and, more specifically, her use of music. I discuss her two Gluck ballet operas, Iphigenie auf Tauris (1973) and Orpheus und Eurydike (1975), her Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht evening in 1974 featuring Die sieben Todsünden and Fürchtet euch nicht, her non-linear take on Béla Bartók’s Bluebeard’s Castle, titled Blaubart – Beim Anhören einer Tonbandaufnahme von Béla Bartóks Oper “Herzog Blaubarts Burg” (1977), and Café Müller (1978), which is based on a collage of arias from Henry Purcell’s The Fairy Queen as well as Dido and Aeneas.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to heartily thank my committee members Dr. Eftychia Papanikolaou and Susannah Cleveland for all of their time and effort spent supporting me and this thesis.
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When asked whether her approach to her dance has changed over the years, Pina Bausch replied:

In the pieces like Sacre, or the Gluck operas, or Bluebeard, there is a framework that already exists. So you know what you are looking for. It is very different in the other work. There are no main characters—there is just a group on a stage. We are the heroes now—the dancers and the public.¹

What Bausch is explaining in this quote is her path from producing “ballet opera” (Ballettoper) in the 1970s—that is, works that closely followed the narrative “framework” of the operas they were based on—to Tanztheater (“dance theatre”) which shied away from such explicit storytelling. Tanztheater is a term that was first used by choreographer Rudolf von Laban in the 1920s to describe his choric dance productions. The term was later used more consistently by Kurt Jooss, who wanted to differentiate his dramatic ballet piece The Green Table (1967) from more traditional story ballets.² Choreographers like Bausch and Gerhard Bohner brought the term to new prominence in the 1970s, with a handful of dance companies choosing to use it in their title, including Bausch’s “Tanztheater Wuppertal.” Bausch is credited with refining Tanztheater into a distinct genre and bringing it international prominence.

German choreographer Pina Bausch (1940-2009) spent most of her career as the director of the Tanztheater Wuppertal dance company in Wuppertal, Germany. She studied ballet and modern dance with influential choreographer Kurt Jooss at the Folkwang School in Essen, went to Juilliard in New York City, and danced in the Metropolitan Ballet Theater under Antony Tudor. She is known for her 1975 feminist-inspired production of Le sacre du printemps, Café

² Royd Climenhaga, Pina Bausch (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.
Müller (1978), and her “World Cities” series of works (1986-2009) created during residencies in ten major world cities.

Bausch’s dance style can be traced back to the Ausdruckstanz (“expressive dance”) movement in Germany that began in the 1920s. Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, and Kurt Jooss were the major figures in the experimental modern dance scene up until the 1960s. Wigman created abstract solo art pieces she called “absolute dance,” as well as grandiose attempts at recreating Greek choric theatre.3 Wigman’s choric dances were simple, rhythmic routines meant for large groups of amateur dancers. Jooss worked on adapting modern dance techniques for use alongside traditional ballet, retaining linear storytelling and narrative. He insisted that “a work of Art in order to have meaning needs a concrete subject.”4 The influence of Jooss on Bausch cannot be underestimated; Bausch entered Jooss’s Folkwang School in 1955 at the age of fourteen, and danced under his direction until he retired in 1968.

Bausch’s Tanztheater has been described as a blending of American and European dance aesthetics.5 The American influence came in 1958 when Bausch received a grant to study at Julliard with Antony Tudor, the director of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. While in New York City she became acquainted with the modernist works of Martha Graham, José Limón, and the avant-garde Living Theatre group. Impressed with her technique, Antony Tudor hired her as a dancer for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, where she danced the 1961/62 season; it was there that

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3 “Absolute dance” was abstract and concerned with the “absolute” nature of humanity. Often her solo dances were performed in complete silence. Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, “Dance Theatre from Rudolph Laban to Pina Bausch,” in The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater, ed. Royd Climenhaga (New York: Routledge, 2013), 13-14.


she developed her fondness for opera that would inspire her future ballet operas. In 1962 Bausch returned to Jooss’s Folkwang Ballet in Essen as the lead dancer until Jooss’s retirement in 1968.

The twentieth century saw a schism between the European and American approaches to dance. Narrative content became increasingly taboo in American modern dance, which was dominated by Merce Cunningham and his followers. Martha Graham moved American dance towards an aesthetic of formalism that emphasized movement for movement’s sake, which Cunningham carried to its purest form. He insisted that movement was free of content or meaning other than the movement itself. Bausch’s Tanztheater bridged the gap between the two traditions by embracing content while diluting narrative. She found the path between the two through Brecht’s epic theatre.

Like most new theatre in West Germany in the 1970s, Bausch’s Tanztheater had roots in Bertold Brecht’s conception of epic theatre. Bausch became increasingly Brechtian in her use of music and movement as her style developed, as shown in her collage pieces that do not use entire works of music. Bausch’s increasing reliance on collage and fragmentation can be illustrated through her use of opera music, as well as other classical genres.

Her initial productions of Christoph Willibald Gluck’s Iphigenie auf Tauris and Orpheus und Eurydike at the Wuppertal Opera in 1973 and 1975, respectively, followed the plots of the operas in a linear fashion, using almost the entirety of Gluck’s score from beginning to end. In 1976 she staged a production of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill’s Die sieben Todsünden (The Seven Deadly Sins) in Wuppertal, after which her productions took a distinctly Brechtian turn towards nonlinear storytelling, by breaking the fourth wall and using musical collages. Her 1977 Blaubart – Beim Anhören einer Tonbandaufnahme von Béla Bartóks Oper “Herzog Blaubarts Burg” (Bluebeard – Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartók’s “Duke Bluebeard’s Castle”)
highlighted the artificiality of the music by placing a tape player on stage that played a recording of the opera. The work is also manipulated by the dancers on stage who rewind it, replay sections, and move the tape player around on a cart. Her breakout work, *Café Müller* (1978), features a collage of arias from Henry Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen* as well as *Dido and Aeneas*. The music is played over visible loudspeakers in a café setting, highlighting again the source of the music and, hence, its artificiality. *Café Müller* does not follow a clear narrative but rather features a collage of scenes with dancers attempting to make connections with each other. In *Arien* (1979) the music is even further removed from the action. Classical music is paired with absurd activities being performed by the dancers, one example being a woman having a conversation with a fake hippopotamus while Beethoven’s *Pathétique* is played over the loudspeakers.

The influence of Brecht’s epic theatre on Bausch’s *Tanztheater* is essential to understanding the development of her aesthetic and, more specifically, her use of music. Her production of Brecht’s *The Seven Deadly Sins* was a major turning point in her style. Brecht’s rejection of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the breaking down of the fourth wall, and the use of alienation techniques become increasingly apparent in Bausch’s work. While Bausch’s choreographic influences have been thoroughly explored, particularly her connection with *Ausdruckstanz*, the influence of Brecht on her productions has been glossed over by dance critics. Furthermore, Bausch’s nonlinear, fragmentary use of opera libretti and music has yet to receive critical attention by scholars.

Prominent Bausch scholar Royd Climenhaga labels 1977-1985 as “the defining period for *Tanztheater*.”\(^6\) Bausch’s 1977 production of *Baubart* is considered the major turning point from

Ballettoper to Tanztheater. As the focus of my research is on how her use of music transforms from her early works to her mature style, I am limiting the scope of this thesis to her works produced during the 1970s. This decade encompasses all of her works based on operas, as well as three pieces (Fürchtet euch nicht, Café Müller, and Arien) that demonstrate the collage technique that she used for the rest of her career.
CHAPTER TWO: THE GLUCK BALLET OPERAS

Bausch’s exposure to opera came during her time in New York when Anthony Tudor hired her as a dancer for the Metropolitan Opera Ballet for the 1961/62 season, which included performances of *Aida, Turandot, Salome, Macbeth*, and the entire Ring Cycle. When asked in an interview by Glenn Loney whether her time with the Metropolitan Opera influenced her interest in opera music, she replied:

> It was very long ago, but for me it was nice because Anthony Tudor was running the ballet. For me, the contact with the singers was good. Not just personally either. When I was growing up, in the town where I lived, I’d seen only two operas. And I didn’t like them. They were so ugly. So I had no real idea about music, about opera. Oh, what I heard was ok—but what I saw! What was wonderful for me at the Met: when you are in your dressing room, you always have a speaker on so you can hear what is going on on the stage. I got so I could recognize different voices, and enjoyed it. It was an experience to be able to tell the difference in voice qualities. And I’d think: “Oh, that’s him!” So I got interested in opera. I had to do *Aida*—of all things—in the old Met house.¹

It was because of an opera that Bausch obtained her position as the director of the Wuppertal Ballet. While still working for the Folkwang School and Ballet in Essen, she was asked in 1972 to choreograph the dances for a production of *Tannhäuser* by the Wuppertal Opera.² They were producing the Paris version of Wagner’s opera from 1861 that included a ballet, in order to conform to the French operatic tradition. The ballet took the form of an orgiastic bacchanal in the Venusberg scene of Act I, in which Bausch highlighted the sensuality of by having the dancers perform in form-fitting, skin-colored body suits. Bausch choreographed it in the style of the Germanic expressive dance she learned at the Folkwang School in Essen,

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¹ Glenn Loney, “‘I Pick My Dancers As People:’ Pina Bausch Discusses Her Work with the Wuppertal Dance Theatre,” in *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook*, ed. Royd Climenhaga, 92.

² Footage of her *Tannhäuser* choreography is elusive, with only short clips available on YouTube from a revival of the choreography at the Biennale Tanzausbildung in Dresden in 2014. Since it was not revived for the performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s *Next Wave Festival*, the Jerome Robbins Dance Archive does not have a recording.
which was grounded in classical ballet training. Despite breaking many of the “rules” of ballet, such as dancing *en pointe*, German expressive dance still placed great value in fluidity and grace. Her choreography for *Tannhäuser* was a great success, leading to an offer for the directorship of the ballet in Wuppertal. Her Venusberg bacchanal precipitated the dance idiom she would use for her full-fledged Gluck ballet operas: *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1974) and *Orpheus und Eurydike* (1975).

The early twentieth century saw a revival of interest in Greek mythology, with several choreographers tackling venerable myths with varying degrees of success. Starting with the Ballets Russes in Paris, Vaslav Nijinsky—a brilliant dancer and choreographer whose momentous works, including *Le sacre du printemps* (1913), cast a long shadow over the rest of the twentieth century—found inspiration in Greco-Roman statues for his choreography in *L’après-midi d’un faune* (1912) and *Jeux* (1913). George Balanchine—often called the “father of American ballet” and the co-founder of the New York City Ballet—choreographed the story of Orpheus twice, once in 1936 using Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and a second time as part of his “Greek trilogy” collaboration with Igor Stravinsky, which consisted of *Apollo* (1928), *Orpheus* (1948), and *Agon* (1957). Jack Anderson suggests that these Greek stories were popular because they celebrate the “civilizing powers of art,” an undoubtedly appealing idea in a century torn apart by two World Wars.³

The term “dance opera” has been used with increasing frequency to describe dance works that use the music of an opera, as well as (but not always) the story. Some choreographers have taken an entire opera score and set choreography to it, while others have only used fragments.

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During the course of her career, Bausch would explore both of these routes. Dance historian and critic Jack Anderson suggests that choreographers are attracted to operas because of their “passionate” plots and beautiful, tuneful music.\(^4\) The context of the opera, especially if it is a familiar one to the audience, provides a recognizable narrative framework for the choreography. At this point in twentieth century modern dance, European dance still embraced narrative and storytelling, in contrast to American dance’s fixation on pure movement for movement’s sake, primarily exemplified by the works of Merce Cunningham.

The dance opera as a genre can be traced back to as early as the late eighteenth century, when the popular French opera *Le déserteur* (1769), composed by Pierre-Alexandre Monsigny, inspired ballet masters such as Jean Dauberval and Pierre Gardel to choreograph productions of it in 1785 and 1786 respectively.\(^5\) The number of dance opera productions notably increased in the twentieth century, with George Balanchine choreographing excerpts from Bellini’s opera *La sonnambula* in 1946. American choreographer Ruth Page created one-act adaptations of several operas for the Chicago Opera Ballet in the 1940s and 50s, such as *La traviata* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Some productions change the opera’s name and music, while keeping the story, such as John Cranko’s 1965 production of *Onegin*, based on Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*. While the ballet uses Tchaikovsky’s music, none of the score is actually from the opera itself; rather, the music is a patchwork of several lesser-known Tchaikovsky pieces.

In 1974 Bausch premiered *Iphigenie auf Tauris* at the Wuppertal Opera House, based on the 1781 Vienna version of Christoph Willibald Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride*.\(^6\) The Vienna

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Currently Bausch’s production of *Iphigenie auf Tauris* is not commercially available on DVD nor is it online in its entirety. Since it was not revived for the Brooklyn Academy of
version was no doubt chosen for its German-language libretto, which Gluck was intimately involved in creating. Bausch’s choreography presents all four acts of the opera, giving only one intermission between acts two and three.

Performances of Bausch’s *Iphigenie* outside of Germany have kept the German, although they have been criticized by critics for not including the surtitle translations traditional in opera performances. Yet in their original context at Wuppertal, they would have been understood by the original German-speaking audience. It seems likely that she went out of her way for both *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Orpheus und Eurydike* operas to be presented in the local language, as they normally appear in French when performed as part of the standard opera repertory. Recent revivals of the works have perhaps not used surtitles in their performances as a way of preserving the authenticity of the performance, staying true to the original.

Following in the tradition of Balanchine’s ballet opera *Orfeo*, Bausch places the chorus in the orchestra pit and the singers in auditorium boxes on the sides for her *Iphigenie*. The stage design by Rolf Borzik—Bausch’s constant collaborator and romantic partner until his untimely death from cancer in 1979—is minimalistic; all attention is focused on the dancers. Certain props and theatrical effects are used, such as a bathtub, table, altar, and chairs.

*Iphigenie* is mostly faithful to the themes and narrative of Gluck’s opera, and the entirety of the score is played by a live orchestra. There are a couple of moments noted by reviewers,

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Music’s *Next Wave Festival*, the Jerome Robbins Dance Archive does not have a recording available. Thankfully due to recent productions in Barcelona (2010), London (2010), and Hong Kong (2014), a number of reviews, as well as several high-quality promotional video clips, are available online. My descriptions in this chapter of *Iphigenie* are from reading a great many of these reviews and viewing all of the clips I was able to locate online.

however, that are surprising and break from the libretto. In a review of the 2010 London performance, Judith Mackrell notes:

One of the most dramatic moments comes when Bausch actually pauses both the music and the dance. It’s the scene where Iphigenia has been ordered to kill Orestes, not yet knowing he is her brother, and it’s handled by Bausch with surreal, haunting power. Orestes lies on an altar strewn with white flowers, his head tipped back into a white bath, his neck bared for the knife, as more flowers are strewn over him by a mourning priestess, held high in the air by the other dancers. It’s an image freighted with love, purity and sacrifice. And it’s fascinating that it prefigures exactly the style of dance theatre that would make Bausch famous in the decades to follow.8

Bausch’s willingness to stop the opera for dramatic effect hints at her more radical production of Bluebeard’s Castle a few years later, in which she frequently starts and stops the music, or the dancers continue to dance without music. A review of the 2010 London performance in Bellyflop Magazine noted the use of the lighting rigs and how they betrayed the illusion of the theatre:

Also great was the play of the lighting rigs moving up and down in a scene, this completely changed the perspective; the tale is an ancient one by Euripides about death and gods and pain and then we are openly reminded of the suspension of disbelief and the constructedness of the performance. This somehow emphasized the endurance of such drama.9

Like the start and stopping of the music, this usage of the lighting rig to highlight the artificiality of the theatre betrays her already present Brechtian leanings that will be explored more in the next chapter.

Several reviewers note the dances between Orestes and Pylades as highlights of the production. Bausch’s choreography brings their friendship alive with great poignancy and tenderness. Their two duets, especially “O mein Orest” from Act III, are examples of graceful,

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almost *pas de deux*-like duets between two men that would never occur in traditional ballet.\(^\text{10}\)

The *pas de deux* is directly referenced when Orestes stands behind Pylades and puts his hands on him to support Pylades as he pivots up and outward, though in a much more angular way than a ballerina would. Roslyn Sulcas praises Bausch’s choreography:

> The duets for the two men, in Act II and Act III, are surely among the most beautiful dance that Bausch ever created. At the start of Act II, the men, wearing only white briefs and bathed in golden light, lie with legs entwined and bodies draped backwards, on a table. Then they begin to dance, falling away from, and returning to support, one another as Gluck’s music soars in its account of their struggle with fate. There is a truth to the depiction of their relationship, their physical beauty as an expression of a purity and nobility of spirit, that is intensely moving.\(^\text{11}\)

In a foreshadowing of Bausch’s tendency in her mature style to often juxtapose cheerful music with tragic scenarios to achieve an ironic effect, she ends *Iphigenie* with a subversive twist. Roslyn Sulcas, reviewing the 2010 London revival, summarizes the ironic ending in her review, noting it as evidence of Bausch’s confidence:

> But it is fascinating that even at this early stage of her career, Bausch’s hand was an utterly sure one. The piece ends quietly as the dancers file off slowly, their backs to the audience, while the singers offer the final jubilant chorus. The action is in direct contrast to the lush, glowing song and it is an utterly sure *coup de théâtre*. The music may offer us a conventional ending, but Bausch shows us another truth.\(^\text{12}\)

Reviews for *Iphigenie auf Tauris’* revival in 2010 in Barcelona and London were mostly positive. In her review of the London performance, Ismene Brown lamented Bausch’s overall bleakness: “while I can’t find a flaw in the attention to detail and high style in her presentation of Gluck’s opera, she takes a tightly miserabilist line against music that is vastly richer than that. It

\(^{10}\) A full video clip of “O mein Orest” is available on the official YouTube channel of the Barcelona Opera, filmed at their production of the ballet in 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57WsJ3cTPMc. Accessed on May 1, 2014.


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
is a kind of butoh, distilled only to mourning, gorgeous but insistently empty.”

Jeffrey Taylor’s positive review also highlights the gloom, but overall called it “superb,” writing that “despite the unremitting adolescent doom and gloom, considered essential in 1970 contemporary dance, Bausch redeems herself by using the shape of Gluck’s moody music to inspire her movement.”

Sulcas concludes her overall positive review by adding that Bausch “achieves these heights more consistently” in her second Gluck ballet opera, Orpheus und Eurydike.15

The story of Orpheus has long captivated composers and choreographers, with a great number of operas and dance productions based on it. Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice (1762) is a natural choice for a ballet opera as dance is already integral to the opera itself. George Martin reasons that:

In Gluck’s Orfeo [ballet] is coequal with song and a leading element: the opera’s action advances through the ballet. Thus the scene in which the Furies block Orfeo’s descent into Hades becomes a dialogue of song and gesture. And in the Elysian Fields the dancers not only create the dreamlike atmosphere but they and they alone unite Euridice and Orfeo who, because of his pledge to not look at his wife’s face until they regain the earth’s surface, cannot search for her. Without good ballet the opera staggers along badly out of balance.16

Gluck’s opera premiered in Vienna in 1762 with an Italian-language libretto by Ranieri de’ Calzabigi. The opera was refashioned and revised for its Parisian premiere in 1774 as Orphée et Euridice, with a French libretto by Pierre-Louis Moline. Gluck adapted the opera for French audiences and catered to their tastes by rewriting the castrato role of Orfeo for an haute-contre, adding an aria for Euridice, as well as several ballet divertissements. Bausch’s production uses a

modified version of the French version, with an 1898 German translation of the libretto by Max Kalbeck.

Balanchine’s innovative production of Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1936 could be considered one of the first true ballet operas of the twentieth century. The dancers were given the entire stage and the opera singers were placed into the orchestra pit, out of the audience’s sight. Pavel Tchelitchev’s staging and set design were quite avant-garde independent of the dance, with Hades reimagined as a concentration camp and Heaven as a planetarium full of star constellations. The production was a disaster with both critics and the public because of the experimental setting and reports of it being difficult to hear the singers; after only two performances it was cancelled and never revived. Balanchine revisited the story with much greater success in 1947 when he created *Orpheus* in collaboration with Igor Stravinsky.

For *Orpheus und Eurydike*, Pina Bausch left the opera mostly intact, resulting in an unusually lengthy ballet production with a total duration of an hour and forty minutes; the full opera is only eight to ten minutes longer. Bausch renamed the only three characters of the opera: Orpheus is “Love,” Eros is “Youth,” and Eurydike is “Death.” The original three acts of the opera are further divided into four scenes, with each scene given a new descriptive title: “Mourning,” “Violence,” “Peace,” and “Death.”

Unlike in *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, Bausch placed the singers on stage alongside the dancers for *Orpheus*. Bausch cast each character into dual roles of singer and dancer, with each

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17 *Orpheus und Eurydike* is available commercially in its entirety. The 2009 revival by the Opéra National de Paris has been released on DVD and Blu-ray. Pina Bausch, *Orpheus und Eurydike*, directed by Gerard Mortier (Paris: Bel Air Media, 2009), DVD.
appearing and interacting on stage. When reflecting on her Gluck productions in an interview with Glenn Loney, she recalled:

The first evening, I had singers in the loges. I was afraid of the singers—and the chorus of this big theatre. They don’t want to move. They say: “If I have to move like this, I can’t sing!” They don’t want to do this; they don’t want to do that. They won’t sit two meters higher. They say: “I don’t go to the mountains for my holidays, so why should I sit up there?” There are all kinds of excuses. Finally, we did it with the dancers dancing the story, but with the main singers on stage and the chorus offstage.18

Gluck’s opera was written for three characters and a chorus, a dramatically smaller cast than in earlier serious opera, as a reflection of Gluck’s operatic reform. In the same interview, Bausch revealed that she intended the dancers to convey and represent the feelings of the singers:

When I did the opera, Orpheus, I thought how people in a room behave with one another. They try to hide their feelings, their real feelings. You walk here; you sit down there—but never show what you feel. Well, dancers show those feelings. And in Orpheus, I let the dancers be the feelings of the singers. That was good for the singers; they weren’t exposed. Being safe, wanting to be safe, is very human. So I didn’t do it as a Baroque opera—stylized, but not baroque.19

The juxtaposition of the dual roles is heightened by their contrasting costumes; the singers are covered head-to-toe in black while the dancers are mostly naked, wearing only minimal flesh-colored clothing. The off-stage chorus is embodied on stage by the corps de ballet.

In contrast to Iphigenie, where she did not rearrange or modify Gluck’s score except for one pause, Bausch is faithful to the original libretto for Orpheus und Eurydike. The ballet opera begins not with the overture, but directly with Scene I. Bausch eschews the final reunion of Orpheus and Eurydike, and instead ends the opera with Eurydike’s second death. Bausch makes this change in order to be “more faithful to the tragic sense of classical drama than to eighteenth

19 Ibid., 96.
century operatic convention.” After Act III, Scene I, there are twenty seconds of silence while the corps de ballet slowly files onto the stage, during which Orpheus and Eurydike are lying motionless. In order to accommodate the modified ending, the music then makes a leap backward in the score to the prelude of Act II. After the Maestoso section is complete, the music jumps yet again back to the choral music of Act I, Scene I, Moderato. There is an extended concluding instrumental coda that repeats the material exactly from Act I, Scene I, which fades gradually and ends in minor. This is a significant shift in tone from the uplifting D-major conclusion of Gluck’s original opera, which ended with the lovers’ reunion.

Bausch’s dance vocabulary in the production is limited, anticipating her aesthetic of repetition that she would later develop. Alastair Macaulay explained Bausch’s choreography in his review of a 2012 production:

The dances employ a very narrow vocabulary of mimelike motifs. The following images are recycled throughout the four scenes: the wrapping of one arm across the torso to clutch the opposite elbow; the placing of one or two hands onto the face (suggesting both grief and blindness); a stance in which, with both knees bent, the supporting leg is turned in, the other is turned out to present the inner thigh to the audience; the opening of both arms into a steeple above the head. The choreographic patterns are tied to the structures of Gluck’s score. When phrases of an aria repeat, her choreography also tends to repeat. The movements of the dancers are often—but not reliably—in tandem with the music. The dancers’ independence from the music often conveys additional layers of meaning; for example, when Eurydike dies for a second time Orpheus’s dancer persona dies too, representing the death of his spirit or inner light. However, his singer persona continues to move around on stage and sing a lament.

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20 Program notes to Orpheus und Eurydike, directed by Gerard Mortier (Paris: Bel Air Media, 2009), DVD.
Rolf Borzik’s staging has been frequently praised, noting its evocative nature and how it often runs counter to what is being described by the libretto. Act I/“Mourning” has a mostly bare stage with a dead, fallen tree stretching across a quarter of the stage. The singer of Eurydike sits on a tall chair near the back of the stage, draped in a white wedding gown. The second act/“Violence” has sheets and cloths hanging from clothes lines, with the dancers having long strings of yarn attached to them. In the third act/“Peace” Orpheus sings about the nature and beauty of the Elysian Fields, yet the stage is dark and sparse, encircled by glass panels that catch the dancers’ reflections. The final act/“Death” features the stage at its sparsest, with only the bare walls showing.

Act IV of Bausch’s Orpheus und Eurydike, “Death” (Act III in the original libretto), begins with the duet “Nun komm, Eurydike, mit mir” between Orpheus and Eurydike. The two are reunited at last, but due to Orpheus’s agreement with the gods, he may not look upon her until they have left Hades. The two dancers perform a beautiful dance in which they touch and hold each other, with Eurydike dancing around him but Orpheus always averting his eyes. It is beautifully choreographed to fit the joy of the scene, which then turns solemn when Eurydike realizes that he is not looking at her and asks if he has grown indifferent. When she asks this, Orpheus the dancer walks over the corner of the stage, hiding his eyes. Meanwhile, the singers are likewise avoiding each other’s gaze. Their dances have a highly mimetic quality to them, allowing the audience to understand in some ways what they are singing about even without supertitles. When Orpheus the singer sings about how he cannot look at her, the dancer covers his eyes with his hands. In the same way, when Eurydike sings about him not looking at her, the dancer gracefully runs her hands down her face.
While Bausch’s ballet operas, as well as her 1975 *Le sacre du printemps* choreography, were “widely admired by critics” in the 1970s, these works were only “begrudgingly accepted by the more conservative audience in Wuppertal.” However, her ballet operas have received a renaissance since 2008, with productions in Paris and London that were initiated by Bausch herself before she passed away. Critical as well as audience reception to these early works has been overwhelmingly positive. The Paris Opéra Ballet’s revival of the production in 2008 toured internationally and was filmed for public release on DVD. Dance critic Roslyn Sulcas called the 2008 production by the Paris Opéra Ballet “sublime,” writing that Bausch “has created an exquisite work of pure dance that possesses as much theatrical power as any of her better-known later works, perhaps more.” As with *Iphigenie*, some criticized Bausch for the overwhelmingly depressing nature of the work, with dance critic Alastair Macaulay claiming that for “Bausch, it seems, love and art mattered far less than incoherent suffering.” Macaulay also criticized the use of the German translation as well as the lack of surtitles, arguing that it impeded with the New York audience’s ability to fully grasp Bausch’s intentions.

The dance opera has gained in popularity since Pina Bausch’s productions in the 1970s. The effort to produce this genre in North America has been led by choreographers Mark Morris (*Dido and Aeneas*, 1989; *Acis and Galatea*, 2014), Trisha Brown (*L’Orfeo*, 1998) and Kim Brandstrup (*Death in Venice*, 1989; *Eugene Onegin*, 1993). The practice of setting dance to preexisting vocal music has expanded outward from opera to include sacred music (Uwe

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25 The DVD includes subtitles in English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian.
Scholz’s *Great Mass* and John Neumeier’s *Saint Matthew Passion*), Lieder (Trisha Brown’s *Winterreise*), and oratorios (Brandstrup’s *The Messiah*). These types of productions allow choreographers and directors to break down the barriers between the different categories of theater, opera, and ballet. Ballet operas challenge audience expectations, upend traditional embodiment of characters, and defy conventional narrative practices.

As has been indicated by the many recent reviews of Bausch’s ballet operas quoted in this chapter, her early works have achieved a renaissance in recent years. Tanztheater Wuppertal began allowing the performance of *Orpheus und Eurydike* by other groups in 2005, and upon Bausch’s death in 2009 the company embarked on a three-year tour of her early works. The popularity of ballet opera productions by more recent choreographers has sparked an interest in reviving Bausch’s ballet operas, as seen most recently with a performance of *Iphigenie auf Tauris* in March 2014 in Hong Kong. More than one reviewer expressed a little regret that Bausch departed from this style, with Mackrell summing up the sentiment when she wrote that “watching this pure dance setting of Gluck’s opera, you can allow yourself a heartbeat of regret that Bausch took the subsequent route she did. The range and intensity of her movement here are so remarkable, you have to wonder what other dances she might have gone on to create.”

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CHAPTER THREE: BRECHT AND THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

It was on June 15, 1976 that Bausch premiered an evening of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill at the Wuppertal Opera House. The performance was a double feature of Brecht and Weill’s Die sieben Todsünden (The Seven Deadly Sins, 1933), followed by an original work titled Fürchtet euch nicht (Don’t Be Afraid) that featured music predominantly from Brecht and Weill’s Die Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera, 1928). The performance was referred to as a “dance evening by Pina Bausch” in the program booklet at the Wuppertal premiere. When it was premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1985, it was called a “ballet with song in eight parts.” Bausch’s evening of Brecht and Weill marked a pivotal turning point in her oeuvre, when she left “the old forms behind,” as Jochen Schmid has acknowledged. In Bausch’s production of The Seven Deadly Sins the borders between dance and theatre are broken down as her dancers become both actors and singers.¹

The Seven Deadly Sins was originally produced by Brecht and Weill in Paris in June of 1933 under the title Les sept péchés capitaux: Spectacle sur des poèmes de Bert Brecht. It was sung in German, despite the French title. As Stephen Hinton notes, the use of the French word spectacle, which implies a “show” or “performance,” was chosen to “accommodate the work’s daringly hybrid nature.”² Weill describes the piece as a ballet chanté (sung ballet) in the autograph score, and then a few years later referred to it as a “ballet opera.” It is a difficult piece to categorize—as are most of Weill and Brecht’s collaborations—due to its amalgamation of

¹ Norbert Servos, Pina Bausch—Wuppertal Dance Theater or The Art of Training a Goldfish, trans. Patricia Stadié (Cologne: Ballet-Bühnen-Verlag Rolf Garske, 1984), 41.
elements from ballet, cabaret, opera and theatre. George Balanchine was the choreographer for
the first production in Paris, as well as for its revival by the New York City Ballet in 1958.

Before discussing *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Don’t Be Afraid* any further, I wish first to
give a preliminary framework of Brecht’s philosophy of epic theatre. Understanding the ideals
that motivated his theatrical choices is essential for understanding the development of Bausch’s
*Tanztheater*, which incorporates many of the same goals and principles of epic theatre. While her
previous works incorporate some Brechtian elements—such as the split characters in *Orpheus
und Eurydike*—her output after *The Seven Deadly Sins* witnesses a bold embrace of epic theatre
ideals.

Brecht’s conception of what he called “epic theatre” was already on its way to maturation
by the end of the 1920s, but the first time he referred to it in those words was in the notes to his
opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 1930)
when he proclaimed that “the modern theatre is the epic theatre.”³ He includes a table with two
lists of elements, contrasting dramatic and epic theatre. Brecht notes that the “table does not
show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent,” such as contrasting dramatic theatre’s “plot”
with epic theatre’s “narrative.”⁴ Brecht’s ideas on epic theatre are found in his notes for *The
Threepenny Opera* (1928), *Mahagonny* (1930), and *A Man’s a Man* (1926), and later in a more
codified form in theoretical essays such as “Kleines Organon für das Theater” (“Little Organum
for the Theatre”) from 1949.

Willet (London: Methuen & Co., 1964), 33. *Brecht on Theatre* is an exhaustive collection of his
various notes and writings on theatre in one volume.
⁴ Brecht, “Notes to the Opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*,” in *Brecht on
Theatre*, 37.
The most monumental contribution of epic theatre is the breaking down of theatre’s so-called “fourth wall.” The audience must not be passive observers, but rather active participants who are forced to make choices and judgments concerning what they see. The breaking of the fourth wall results in the acknowledgement—and highlighting—of the artificiality of the theatre’s setting and norms. Brecht called for a “new art of acting” where “the actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying. He is not Lear, Harpagon, Schweik; he shows them.”5 Brecht argues against the actor transforming into his character (a trademark of Stanislavsky’s acting method), writing that once that goal “is abandoned the actor speaks his part not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation.”6 His ultimate goal is the removal of the “European stage’s characteristic illusions [so that] the audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place.”7

The concept of “alienation” (Verfremdung) first appears in Brecht’s writings in 1936 in the notes for his play Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (The Roundheads and the Peakheads).8 It is a concept that Brecht most likely discovered in the Russian theatre tradition, but saw most clearly illustrated in Chinese theatre, which he praised in many of his writings. Alienation was a process of making the familiar seem unfamiliar. The purpose was to shock the audience out of the illusion or the story, so that they remain critical of what was taking place on the stage. He

5 Brecht, “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect,” in Brecht on Theatre, 137.
6 Ibid., 138.
encourages the actors to model a “self-alienation” that would in turn inspire the audience to be critical as well:

The performer’s self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and let a splendid remoteness to the events. Yet the spectator’s empathy was not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on.9

Brecht made it no secret that he was not fond of the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk. He wrote:

So long as the expression “Gesamtkunstwerk” (or “integrated work of art”) means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be “fused” together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere “feed” to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Words, music and setting must become more independent of one another.10

Brecht advocated for the various parts of a production to be independent from each other. He stated that epic theatre’s goal was the “radical separation of the elements.”11 By working together, but in different ways, he wanted all the elements of theatre to work towards what he called “mutual alienation.”12

Kurt Weill, echoed these ideas of Brecht on the separation of music from the action of stage. He wrote:

The role played by music is not that of drawing out the inner action, knitting together transitional phases, bring out events and causing passions to flare high; rather does it go [sic] its own way chiming in at static moments of the action. This is possible only with an epic-narrative form of action which makes the course of events on the stage perfectly clear to the audience, so that the music framed in this quiet development can retain its concertistic character and achieve its purely musical effect in undisturbed harmony. Not

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10 Brecht, “Notes to the opera Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny,” in Brecht on Theatre, 37-38.
11 Ibid., 37.
12 Brecht, “Kleines Organon für das Theater,” in Brecht on Theatre, 204.
to interpret musically the objectively presented course of the action, but to let this action run parallel to an equally objective flow of music—that is the inner sense of the new musical theatre.\textsuperscript{13}

The genre that Weill and Brecht have at the center of their criticisms is opera, particularly Wagnerian opera. Brecht frequently criticized opera for being “irrational.” He argued that the “irrationality of opera lies in the fact that rational elements are employed, solid reality is aimed at, but at the same time it is all washed out by the music.”\textsuperscript{14} He uses the example of a dying opera character to illustrate his point. He argues that when a character on stage is dying, yet somehow still able to sing, this situation “translates to the sphere of the irrational.”\textsuperscript{15}

Brecht had many strong words concerning singing in the theatre, mostly in opposition to situations in which the characters were seemingly unaware of their own singing. He was extremely weary of the role of music in maintaining the artifice of the stage. His biggest consternation was characters who sang without knowing they were singing. Without mincing words Brecht declared that “nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels—plain speech, heightened speech and singing—must always remain distinct.”\textsuperscript{16} On the same topic, he admonished that “the actor must not only sing but show a man singing.”\textsuperscript{17}

Brecht laid out many guidelines for the proper use of music in epic theatre. He strongly advocated against the use of the orchestra pit that concealed the source of music, preferring rather for the musicians and singers to always be visible on stage, rather than hidden below the

\textsuperscript{14} Brecht, “Notes to the Opera \textit{Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny},” in \textit{Brecht on Theatre}, 35.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{16} Brecht, “Die Dreigroschenoper,” in \textit{Brecht on Theatre}, 44.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 44-45.
stage in a pit. When commenting on the use of recorded sounds in theaters, he even advocated to place the record player on stage so that it could be seen.\(^\text{18}\) He recommended using the stage lights to illuminate the musicians while they played, to elucidate the source of the music. Wishing for music to be clearly demarcated from the rest of the theatrical elements, Brecht instructed that

The actors must not “drop into” song, but should clearly mark it off from the rest of the text; and this is best reinforced by a few theatrical methods such as changing the lighting or inserting a title. For its part, the music must strongly resist the smooth incorporation which is generally expected of it and turns it into an unthinking slavery. Music does not “accompany” except in the form of comment. It cannot simply “express itself” by discharging the emotions with which the incidents of the play have filled it.\(^\text{19}\)

Brecht’s influence on West German theatre was tremendous, and epic theatre became the “foundation” of the new German theatre in the 1970s.\(^\text{20}\) John Rouse argues that by the 1970s, Brecht’s “unconventionality … had itself become conventional.”\(^\text{21}\) Due to this saturation of Brechtian techniques in German theatre in the 1970s, the fact that Bausch did not specifically mention Brecht as an influence in any of her interviews is not particularly meaningful. She was famously tight-lipped during interviews and frequently answered questions with questions of her own.

Asking questions was a key element of Bausch’s creative process, which was influenced by Brecht. When asked to discuss his rehearsal process with his Berliner Ensemble, Brecht explained:

We develop pretty much from nothing, exploring the most varied possibilities. One speaks the text, moves around within the situations. Slowly one tries to find out what is

\(^\text{18}\) Brecht, “Notes to Die Rundkopefe und Die Spitzkopefe,” in Brecht on Theatre, 103.

\(^\text{19}\) Brecht, “Kleines Organon für das Theater,” in Brecht on Theatre, 203.


\(^\text{21}\) Ibid.
interesting. That is then kept, other things are let fall. Characters are then developed, and also the blocking. \(^{22}\)

Brecht and his collaborators had an intuitive rehearsal process. They began with an understanding of their goals, but not a definitive way of reaching them. This process “requires actors able to participate actively in a rehearsal process focused on establishing which movement of the hand best tells the story.”\(^{23}\)

Bausch’s rehearsal method seems directly inspired by this. Describing how her working process developed, she explained:

> The working process—how we put a piece together—has of course changed a lot. In the beginning I planned every move, very specifically. Out of fear, I wanted to make it good, and so I planned everything in advance—he is doing this, she is doing that—and then the costumes, the stage design, etc. Everything in its place. And while I was working I would suddenly see things that just happened and that interested me, and so the question came up: Do I follow my plan or do I follow what I just saw? I always followed what was new, never my plan. I always thought, this other idea, that I saw right there, might be more important, even though I had no idea where it was leading. At one point I had the courage not to make a plan at all. When I make a piece now, it is only out of the present at the time. I try to feel what I feel.\(^{24}\)

In her rehearsals Bausch frequently asked questions of her dancers, the most elementary (and most quoted) question being “What moves you?” Ruth Amarante, a former dancer with Bausch’s company, elaborated on the questioning process, stating “I think it started with Blaubart. She started asking the company members questions, leaving it open as to how the person wanted to reply. You could answer in the form of movement, by talking, or by doing whatever you had in mind.”\(^{25}\) Her questions dwelled less on “why,” but rather on “how.”

\(^{22}\) Brecht quoted in John Rouse, \textit{Brecht and the West German Theatre: The Practice and Politics of Interpretation}, 40.

\(^{23}\) John Rouse, \textit{Brecht and the West German Theatre}, 40.


Bausch’s Brecht and Weill dance evening was revived for the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s *Next Wave* festival in New York on October 18, 1985. She was first featured at BAM the year prior, in June of 1984, when she made her American debut of her *Rite of Spring* choreography, *Blaubart* (1977), and *Café Müller* (1978). In 1985 she presented *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1976), *Fürchtet euch nicht* (1976), *Kontakthof* (1978), *Auf dem Gebirge hat man ein Geschrei gehört* (1978), and *Arien* (1979). These performances were all recorded by BAM and saved in the archive at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. After receiving permission from BAM, I traveled to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division at Lincoln Center and viewed these recordings, which are neither commercially available nor online in any form. My observations of the two works discussed in this chapter are based on watching the recordings of these productions, as well as reading reviews from 1985.

Both the original and Bausch’s production of *The Seven Deadly Sins* feature a dancer, a singer, and a male quartet referred to as “the family.” The story focuses on the split character of Anna, who is represented by both the singer (“Anna I”) and the dancer (“Anna II”). This is made apparent to the audience early on, when she sings in the first song “we are really not two people, but only a single one. We are both named Anna, we have one past and one future.”

The technique of splitting a character between two people on stage in *The Seven Deadly Sins* is a recurring technique in Brecht’s works—it occurs in *A Man’s a Man*, *The Good Person of Szechuan* and *Puntita*. Bausch used this technique for each of the three characters in her production of Gluck’s *Orpheus und Eurydike*. Martin Esslin sees the theme of split personality as

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“a conflict in Brecht between reason and instinct, prudent self-preservation and romantic self-abandonment.” Brecht’s own Marxist description of the two Annas is that Anna I is the salesperson and Anna II is the product being sold. The play has been read as a criticism of American capitalism and of the “complacent hypocrisy of middle-class values.”

Bausch’s feminist spin on The Seven Deadly Sins is the focus on Anna as a woman who is exploited for profit. The commodification and exploitation of women and their bodies by men is a central theme in many of her productions, most notably in her 1975 version of The Rite of Spring. In reviewing the 1984 New York City debut for the New York Times, Anna Kisselgoff noted that the difference between Brecht and Bausch was that “Miss Bausch, for her part, makes us suffer just as Josephine Ann Endicott suffers as Anna II when she is molested by a series of gray-faced, gloomy men.” The “family” quartet of men becomes more menacing in Bausch’s production as well, often sitting on the stage in four lounge chairs silently observing Anna’s adventures. On one level this highlights the voyeuristic, objectifying male gaze, while on another level it reflects the equally voyeuristic gaze of the audience upon Anna.

After watching the recording, I can attest to how disturbing parts of Bausch’s production are. The sexual objectification of Anna II is portrayed in a literal, visceral manner with her being frequently groped and touched by the men in the production. Men grab her, pick her up to weigh her, position her like a human doll, and measure her with measuring tape. She is forcibly kissed by multiple men, and even her butt is not off limits to being groped. Watching Anna—and the

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28 Brecht later revised the title to Die sieben Todsünden der Kleinstädter (The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petty Bourgeoisie) to emphasize the Marxist message.
29 Stephen Hinton, Weill’s Musical Theater, 203.
dancer who plays her—be so thoroughly violated is deeply unsettling. All of these terrible things happen while Anna I sings Weill’s upbeat music, creating a disconcerting cognitive dissonance.

The production ends with the cast dancing a vaudevillian chorus line number, while Anna II stands in the center of the stage, visibly broken and drained from being violated and exploited. Despite urging by the other dancers for her to join in, she only stands there, shell-shocked (as I certainly felt by the end). After the dancers leave the stage, only Anna I and Anna II remain. They look each other in the eyes and Anna II cries “Ja, Anna” one final time, and then the stage lights go down.

Bausch’s production of The Seven Deadly Sins remains true to Brecht’s epic theatre aesthetic in most of the essential ways. The stage is sparse, the spotlights are visible, and the musicians are positioned in the back of the stage so that the audience can clearly see them. The spotlights on stage are frequently manipulated by the singers and dancers, such as in the beginning when Anna I directs the spotlight at Anna II while singing “Prolog.”

The second half of Bausch’s dance evening, Fürchtet euch nicht (Don’t Be Afraid), consisted of a collage of songs from Brecht and Weill’s Die Dreigroschenoper, Happy End, Das Berliner Requiem, and Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. Like numbers in a cabaret, the collage of songs does not create a cohesive plot, but rather maintains the overarching theme. While it features more dance numbers than The Seven Deadly Sins, it also expands beyond dance into musical theatre by featuring dancers who sing. Continuing the theme of the evening, Fürchtet euch nicht features exploitation, violence, and rape. Bausch also highlights the performativity of gender by prominently using several cross-dressing dancers, including males wearing heels and applying garish make-up on stage.
Fürchtet euch nicht is loosely about a young woman who attempts to find love, yet is confronted by harsh reality. The work gets its title from an excerpt from *Happy End* that is repeatedly sung by a suave young man throughout the work. “Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid, though corruption leads you astray. God will take you in his right hand. He will show you the virtuous way. Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid.” The production is divided into twenty-five scenes, with “Don’t Be Afraid” continually recurring as a division between scenes. “Surabaya Johnny” and “Sailor’s Tango” are the other piece from *Happy End* that are performed. “Ballade vom angenehmen Leben” (“Ballad of the Pleasant Life”), “Lied von der Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Strebens” (“Song of the Insufficiency of Human Struggling”) and “Eifersuchtsduett” (“Jealousy Duet”) are drawn from *Die Dreigroschenoper*. One of the most well-known songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper*, “Eifersuchtsduett” (“Jealousy Duet”), is turned into a quartet between four women lying suggestively on furs in the middle of the stage.

Fürchtet euch nicht marks the beginning of Bausch’s use of collage to create what Norbert Servos describes as a “loose dramaturgy, contextually bound by alternating, associative mood values.” The collage works to create content, yet avoid an explicit, macrocosmic narrative. In Fürchtet euch nicht, the scenes are variations on a common motif, with each repetition allowing the audience to view it from a different angle.

Unlike later productions, Bausch drew all of the songs from the same composer to create consistency both internally and with the other work the performance is paired with. The very nature of the collage is reminiscent of a revue show at a cabaret, an impression that is strengthened by the nostalgic nature of the musical choices. Bausch’s choice of using the revue

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32 Ibid., 43.
structure is an ironic one, however, rather than nostalgic. The “revue structure [is] both a
dramatic implement and the subject of the work.”33 The nostalgic nature of the program is further
removed by harsh scenes of implied rape of female and cross-dressed male dancers. Irony is also
achieved by the music’s text and tone running counter to the actions taking place on the stage.

The performance begins and ends with the dancers linked arm in arm and high-kicking in
unison, recreating an iconic scene from countless cabaret and vaudeville performances from the
1920s and ’30s. The dancers strut toward the front of the stage one by one, and strike classic
beauty poses for the audience to admire them. This is the first Bausch production where the
dancers break the fourth wall and are aware of themselves as dancers on a stage. The cabaret was
an inspiration to Brecht for its self-awareness of its own artificiality. The performers did not
pretend to be unaware of their audience and the source of the music was visible—there were no
illusions.

The audience in Wuppertal, which previously had only “begrudgingly” received
Bausch’s ballet operas, was “not ready to accept” the Bausch and Weill evening.34 The relatively
few choreographed dance numbers as well as the Brecht and Weill source material simply did
not fit audience expectations for a “dance evening.” Bausch had moved beyond the conventions
of German expressive dance as taught by Jooss at the Folkwang School.

The Brecht and Weill evening set the stage for future Bausch productions, where she
would expand upon the techniques used here. Dance critic Jochen Schmidt, arguing for the
significance of this performance on her development, wrote:

33 Ibid.
With her Brecht/Weill evening in June 1976, Pina Bausch finally leaves the old forms behind, at least for the time being. Using the techniques of revue in magnificent, uninhibited fashion, she now sets out to criticize and improve the world of men.35

Bausch has dismantled narrative, yet found a way to keep content. She would go on to opera again, but this time in a drastically different—and unmistakably Brechtian—fashion.

35 Jochen Schmidt, preface to *Pina Bausch—Wuppertal Dance Theater or The Art of Training a Goldfish,* 15.
CHAPTER FOUR: BLAUBART

After the negative reception of her Brecht and Weill evening—not only by some of the conservative critics in Wuppertal but by her dancers as well—Bausch was deeply discouraged. Many of the dancers were unhappy with the direction the company was taking away from classical and German expressionist dance as taught by Kurt Jooss. One of the dancers reportedly shouted during rehearsal at Bausch, “All of this, I hate it!” Bausch threatened to give up dance altogether; as she reported later, “After the premiere [of the Brecht/Weill evening], I had a terrible crisis. I wanted to give up, never work again. I decided to never set foot in a theater again.” However, in 1977, Jan Minarik—a longtime associate of Bausch’s who danced with her under Kurt Jooss—persuaded her to continue her work. With only ten dancers who were loyal to her, Bausch embarked on a new and daringly unique opera adaptation: Blaubart—Beim Anhören einer Tonbandaufnahme von Béla Bartóks Oper Herzog Blaubarts Burg (Bluebeard—While Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartók’s Opera “Duke Bluebeard’s Castle”).

_Blaubart_ is based on Béla Bartók’s one-act, two-character opera _Bluebeard’s Castle_ (Op. 11), which premiered in Budapest in 1918. The libretto by Béla Balázs is based on a seventeenth-century fairytale by Charles Perrault. The opera is about Duke Bluebeard bringing home his new bride Judith. Inside his castle are seven doors, which Judith insists on opening one by one. Behind each door is something fantastic and horrifying, such as a torture chamber and a lake of tears. The seventh and final door opens to reveal all of Bluebeard’s previous wives, who are dead. Judith realizes that she too will be murdered by Bluebeard and solemnly submits herself to her fate without fighting.

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2 Ibid.
Musicologist Carl Leafstedt argues that *Bluebeard* is a meditation on “the loneliness of the human spirit.” The opera is often referred to as “symbolist,” with the most apparent symbol being the castle itself, which represents Bluebeard’s soul. An introduction written by Balázs that was never published with the play made these connections explicit:

> My ballad is the “ballad of inner life.” Bluebeard’s castle is not a realistic stone castle. The castle is his soul. It is lonely, dark and secretive: the castle of locked doors…Into this castle, into his own soul, Bluebeard admits his beloved. And the castle (the stage) shudders, weeps, and bleeds. When the woman walks in it, she walks in a living being.

Bluebeard is a tortured character who in some respects is meant to be pitied as well as feared. The Duke’s “relentless wife-murdering [is] … less the capricious habit of a cruel man than the unfortunate consequence of repeated disappointments encountered in a fruitless quest for love.”

Bausch’s *Blaubart* is a two-hour piece in one act, running fifty minutes longer than Bartók’s original opera, despite the removal of the opera’s prologue. Whereas Bartók’s opera has only two characters, Bausch’s *Blaubart* features two principal characters as well as a host of extra male-female couples. Unlike *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Orpheus und Eurydike*, Bausch’s *Blaubart* is not simply Bartók’s opera turned into a ballet. As is indicated by the curiously long title (*Bluebeard—While Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartók’s Opera “Duke Bluebeard’s Castle”*), there is a degree of separation between Bausch’s *Bluebeard* and Bartók’s *Bluebeard’s Castle*. Bausch’s work has no orchestra and no opera singers; rather, there is simply a recording of the opera that is played. Furthermore, the tape player is physically present on the stage and the Bluebeard character starts, stops, and repeats sections of the recording throughout.

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4 Ibid., 35-36.  
6 Carl Leafstedt, *Inside Bluebeard’s Castle*, 162.
the performance. *Blaubart* does not tell the story of *Bluebeard*, at least not in a linear or coherent fashion. Rather, the two protagonists—who represent Bluebeard and Judith, at least conceptually—and a dozen supporting dancers enact scenes that are responses to what is being played on the recording. Much of what takes place on the stage demands interpretation by the audience. It is up to them to determine if the Bluebeard and Judith they see on the stage are the same as the characters from the fable and opera, and whether or not these actions are taking place in the present or are a disjointed series of memories playing out in the protagonist’s mind.

Unlike the previous Gluck operas, Bausch referred to her *Bluebeard* simply as “Ein Stück von Pina Bausch” (“A piece by Pina Bausch”), rather than a “ballet opera” or “dance evening.” For the remainder of her career, she labeled most of her works as “pieces” (*Stücke*). Not referring to *Bluebeard* as a “ballet opera” is indicative of the breakdown of the choreomusical relationship, as well as of the absence of a continuous narrative. The opera’s plot is still present, but it is referenced and alluded to rather than strictly followed. Often it is used “as a foil for [Bausch’s] concept,” argues Servos.  

Richard Sikes notes that Bausch avoids the “traps of narrative dance by simply not telling stories,” and that pieces such as *Bluebeard* are best described as “progressions of atmospheres.”

*Blaubart* marks an important cornerstone in Bausch’s *oeuvre*, and it is frequently referred to as such in the scholarly literature. Royd Climenhaga claims that *Blaubart* “marks Bausch’s entrance into a mature style and develops the form that helps to define *Tanztheater*.” Robert Servos also notes the piece’s important position in the development of Bausch’s *Tanztheater*, marking its significance for “the continuity it provides for the sustained development of dance

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9 Royd Climenhaga, *Pina Bausch*, 16.
theater as a form of theatrical representation.”¹⁰ Meg Mumford remarks that “Bausch’s Blaubart marked the beginning of the choreographer’s trademark challenge to the boundaries between dance and theatre through collaborative improvisation and verbal expression.”¹¹

*Blaubart* works as a theatrical antithesis to Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Brecht thought of *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a sort of “witchcraft” that must be “fought against.”¹² Unlike Wagner, Brecht argued for the independence of words, music, and setting in order to break down the illusion of theater and maintain the integrity of the individual art forms. *Blaubart* combines dance, spoken texts, and opera, yet Bausch uses Brechtian techniques to isolate the elements. The music is quite literally separated from the rest of the elements by using prerecorded music that can be manipulated and paused. The source of the music is clearly visible to the audience and the house lights in the auditorium are raised before the end—thus, both aspects break the central illusion of theater.

The stage, designed by Bausch’s collaborator and romantic partner Rolf Borzik, is covered in brown, decaying leaves; besides introducing an olfactory dimension to the theatre experience, the leaves also add an auditory component to the dancers’ movements. The leaves rustle evocatively whenever the dancers crawl around on the floor, or run from one side of the stage to the other. They are also symbolic of romantic and cultural decay, argues dance critic Jack Anderson. In a 1984 review for the *New York Times* he wrote:

Rolf Borzik’s setting consists of a crumbling house with a floor strewn with dead leaves. Although, surely, no such house exists on any block anywhere, the way its imagery combines domesticity with decay makes it a meaningful setting for choreographic action concerned with the crumbling of romantic relationships and, by implication, of a whole

¹² Brecht, “Notes to the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*,” in *Brecht on Theatre*, 37-38.
set of cultural patterns that control the ways in which men and women relate to one another.13

In the notes to the Copenhagen production of *Die Rundköpfe und Die Spitzköpfe* (*Round Heads and Pointed Heads*, 1936), Brecht wrote on how the source of the music should always be visible to the audience. In this particular play, he instructed that a recording of organ music to be played by a gramophone, which was to be carried across the stage by a nun. In the conclusion of his notes, he gave suggestions for sound effects that were to be played by a gramophone as well, such as the sounds of bells and crowd noises. For these sound effects he proposed, “it is best to place the record player, like the orchestra, so that it can be seen by the audience.”14

Bausch followed in Brecht’s footsteps for her staging of *Blaubart*. Rather than using live opera singers as in *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Orpheus und Eurydike*, she instead opted for using prerecorded music. For the 1984 New York premiere, Bausch used the 1979 Deutsche Grammophon recording featuring Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Julia Varady, with the libretto sung in German.15 The tape player is placed on a cart, which is manipulated by Bluebeard—and only Bluebeard—during the performance.

Bartók’s score takes on great importance in Bausch’s production, with the music taking on a pivotal role in shaping the action on stage. Servos makes the comparison between the Gluck ballet operas and *Blaubart*, noting that “in contrast to the frequently supplementary function of music as a tonal embellishment in classical ballet, in *Bluebeard* the music has the status of an independent, indispensable element of content of equal rank with other scenic elements.”16

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14 Brecht, “Notes to *Die Rundköpfe und Die Spitzköpfe*,” in *Brecht on Theatre*, 103.
Servos, arguing that Bausch’s *Tanztheater* effectively eliminates discrete individual characters, writes:

No differentiation is made between leading roles and minor characters in the Wuppertal Dance Theater. When protagonists appear—as in *Rite of Spring* or *Bluebeard*—they are “anonymous.” Their fate represents that of *every* man, *every* woman. The onlooker can no longer identify with the histories of individual characters.\(^{17}\)

While I agree that this is the case in several of Bausch’s works, such as *Don’t Be Afraid* and *Café Müller*, it is not quite true for *Blaubart*. The protagonists—Bluebeard and Judith—have unavoidable “histories” that are present with them on the stage. The entire piece requires previous knowledge of these histories in order to be understood. At the same time however, Bluebeard and Judith also represent “*every* man” and “*every* woman.”

The identities of the protagonists are destabilized by the fragmented music, jolting them every time the music starts and stops between multiple performative realities coexisting on the stage. The most artificial—and unstable—reality is that of the *Bluebeard* fable being created by the recording of Bartók’s opera. The other reality is the one that exists when the music is stopped, and the protagonists’ identities are destabilized.

In Brechtian terms, the unpredictability of the recorded music acts as an alienation effect for the audience, reminding them of the artificiality of the proceedings and preventing identification with the protagonists. Brecht wanted to prevent audiences from identifying with the characters, in order to ensure the audience remained outside observers. In an article on the use of alienation effect in “Chinese acting” published in London’s *Life and Letters* in 1936, he argued that actors should play their characters “in such a way that the audience [is] hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play.”\(^{18}\) He explained in a later essay on

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 22.

acting technique in 1940 that an actor could achieve a form of “self-alienation” by speaking his part “not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation.”\textsuperscript{19}

The use of recorded music for the voices of Bluebeard and Judith take this “quotation” concept to a higher level. For in \textit{Blaubart}, the voices of Bluebeard and Judith are disembodied and not even their own. Their transformation into the characters is continually interrupted by the manipulation of the tape recording; they cannot fully \textit{be} Bluebeard and Judith, they can only show them.

The opera opens with Bluebeard sitting on a wooden chair facing a cart with a tape player on it.\textsuperscript{20} He walks over to a lifeless Judith lying on the ground, gets on top of her, and writhes around in the leaves. After a moment, he goes back to the cart and turns the tape player on, which starts Bartók’s music. Bluebeard goes back to molesting Judith in the leaves until the music reaches measure eighteen, at which point he runs over to the recording and rewinds it back to measure twelve.\textsuperscript{21} This cycle repeats three times, with him running back the recording to rewind it more frantically each time. Finally, on the fourth time of hearing mm. 12-18 he allows it to continue. This pattern of Bluebeard repeating fragments of the opera, while repeating corresponding actions on the stage is the basis for the entire work.

Unlike the Gluck operas that quite consistently match the movement with the music, Bausch’s \textit{Blaubart} features varying strength of coordination between choreography and rhythm. An example of a place in \textit{Blaubart} with a strong correlation between movement and the rhythm

\textsuperscript{19} Brecht, “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting,” in \textit{Brecht on Theater}, 138.
of the music happens early on in the piece. Judith dances while the recording plays her line in
mm. 68-82, where she sings about how she left “all my kindred, to come hither,” singing to him,
“If you reject me, and drive me out, I’ll never leave you. I’ll perish on your icy threshold.” As
she dances frantically in front of him, his arms are raised out as if he is feebly attempting to
embrace her, but cannot. In measures 76 through 90, Judith repeatedly tries to fall into his arms,
yet he is not able to catch her. She consistently falls on the third beat of each measure,
corresponding with a sforzando that occurs on most of the measures in this passage. Each time
she quickly gets to her feet on the first beat of the measure, only to fall down again on count
two. The action of stage works in opposition to Bartok’s instructions on the score—in measure
82 it indicates that “Bluebeard embraces her,” yet the Bluebeard on stage is unable to do what
the Bluebeard in the recording can.22

In a few instances the supporting dancers on stage make sounds, breaking the traditional
convention and expectation that dancers be silent. In measure 432, Judith sings “Dank sei dir,
Dank sei dir!” (“Thanks be to you!”) after Bluebeard agrees to give her the keys to the castle
doors. Bluebeard pauses the recording immediately at the end of this measure. The women
dancers surround Bluebeard repeatedly echo back “Danke, danke!” in childlike, sing-song
voices. Their utterances are not in unison, and their many voices combine to create a
heterophonic texture. They continue singing as they put their hands all over him, stroking his
head and face, while Judith silently stands in the back of the stage. One by one they creep down
to the ground while still singing. After a couple of minutes Bluebeard stands up and walks back a
few steps away from the tape recording. Judith rushes over and attempts to embrace him, but he

22 Béla Bartók, Herzog Blaubarts Burg; Oper in einem Akt von Béla Balázs, edited by
Karl Heinz Fussl and Helmut Wagner, translated by Christopher Hassall (Vienna: Universal
does not reciprocate. After a moment, he returns to the recording and starts it again from where it left off.

When Judith sings on the recording German first (“I shall brighten your sad castle”) the support dancers run around in a frenzy, flinging themselves against the walls of the stage. They do not stop their frantic scurrying until Bluebeard ominously sings “naught can glitter in my castle.”23 The characters of Bausch’s *Blaubart* are trapped. They are trapped on a surface level by the castle, but in a deeper sense by the histories of their characters, the opera’s libretto, and ultimately by the stage itself. Poignantly, Bluebeard is as trapped as his victims. While he is the one who is able to control the music, he too is under its sway. Jack Anderson wrote:

> An even more powerful sense of being trapped is created by the relationship between movement and music. “Bluebeard’s” full title is “Bluebeard Listening to a Tape Recording of Bela Bartok’s Opera, ‘Bluebeard’s Castle,’” and throughout the work the action starts and stops as Bluebeard keeps turning on and switching off a tape recorder, sometimes playing the same passage several times before moving ahead to a new one. By so doing, Bluebeard manipulates both the music and the people around him. But he, too, is manipulated by the music, which may symbolize such things as the power of social conventions and the way conventions may be reinforced by the mass media. Although Bluebeard can stop the recorder, something inevitably forces him to turn it back on. He is compelled to do what he does: he is programmed, a product of social conditioning.24

At the end of the piece, Bausch reminds the audience of their own “social conditioning” when the lights go up in the theater before the piece has ended. She breaks the audience out of their protected observer status, and reminds them they “inhabit the same world as her characters and therefore are just as conditioned as anyone on stage.”25 When the lights finally dim to signal

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25 Ibid.
the end of the production, the characters are still listlessly in motion on stage, doomed to keep repeating their actions in the next performance.

*Blaubart* received mostly favorable reviews at its New York premiere in 1984. John Rockwell called it “riveting” and “revelatory,” noting how Bausch serves “as a fascinating indication of how contemporary artists may profitably make use of the operatic past.” Jack Anderson praised Bausch’s ability to make the audience think: “Like it or not, agree with it or not, ‘Bluebeard’ has to be taken seriously. Its imagery is too powerful to ignore and, though in no way naturalistic, it forces us to ponder human reality.” Anna Kisselgoff’s review highlighted the violence of the work, but defended Bausch, arguing that “the most extreme instances [of violence] can be the most brilliantly insightful.”

While the writers of the *New York Times* were mostly positive in their reception, respected dance critic Arlene Croce published a damning—and now infamous—review in *The New Yorker*, in which she called Bausch both “sadistic” and a “theatre terrorist.” Croce labeled Bausch’s *Tanztheater* a “theatre of dejection” that portrays a “pornography of pain.” She called Bausch an “entrepreneuse who fills theatres with projections of herself and her self-pity.” Her disdain for Bausch’s works knows no bounds, from arguing that *Sacre* is “the only tolerable Bausch piece,” to referring to Wuppertal’s dancers as “little fat girls.” She concludes that *Blaubart* is “the most concentrated of Bausch’s feminist tirades,” which she was only able to force herself to watch for an hour before admittedly leaving halfway through.

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Bausch’s *Blaubart* has gained in prominence in the critical discourse on Bausch’s overall choreographic output and is continually pointed to as the stepping stone to her mature style that would emerge in her next piece, *Café Müller*. *Blaubart* was the last piece by Bausch to use an opera’s music and libretto as the basis of its production. She continued to use opera music, but in her collage format she established with *Don’t Be Afraid*. 
CHAPTER FIVE: CAFÉ MÜLLER

In the spring of 1978 Bausch collaborated with Gerhard Bohner, Gigi-Gheorghe Caciuléanu, and Hans Pop to create a four-part dance evening collectively titled Café Müller. The works were premiered by Tanztheater Wuppertal on May 20, 1978, with Bausch’s contribution running fifty minutes with no break. The four different sections share a common theme and set up, yet do not combine together to form a narrative. Explaining the basis upon which the work was constructed, Servos wrote:

The four separate, unrelated works were united under an intentionally trivial heading, itself an ingredient of the overall concept. The choreographers had previously agreed upon a common external framework, based upon several mutual points of reference which could be combined freely to form the structural content of the individual contributions: a café, darkness, four people, someone waiting, someone falling over and picked up, a red-haired girl entering, everything becoming quiet.¹

Due to Bausch’s success and prominence gained since the premiere of the work, revivals of Café Müller staged by Tanztheater Wuppertal have only included her portion of it.

Servos remarks that Café Müller acts in many ways as a retrospective of Bausch’s works up until this point; it is the final look behind the shoulder before pressing forward. It includes short sections of dance reminiscent of her Gluck ballet operas, while more heavily featuring her theatre-based, repetitive actions from Blaubart. The music is not manipulated by the characters, nor is the source of it even visible to the audience. Finally, she uses collage to piece together her music from different sources, as she does in her Kurt/Weill evening.

Café Müller is described by Royd Climenhaga as a “chamber piece for two couples and the lone figure of Bausch herself as a kind of blind dreamer trying to hold on to the fleeting images that are played out before her.”² Bausch herself actually danced the piece for its

¹ Servos, Pina Bausch Wuppertal Dance Theater, 107.
² Climenhaga, Pina Bausch, 21.
premiere, which at that point in her career she had not done since the 1973/74 season in Yvonne. The piece also included longtime Bausch associates Dominique Mercy and Jan Minarik as dancers. In total there are six people on the stage: two couples, Bausch, and a man who runs around clearing away obstacles for the dancers, yet does not otherwise interact with them.

Like all the previous works, the sparse café setting was designed by Rolf Borzik. Setting the work in a café is deceptively trivial, as it has great personal meaning for Bausch, whose parents owned a café in Solingen, Germany. Growing up she often played underneath the tables and watched as “the patrons played out their social connections, and occasionally, their muted passions in front of her.”3 Much like theatres, cafes are places people go to watch people. The set is full of empty chairs and bare tables, which Servos argues are “symbols and surrogates for absent persons.”4

Despite her use of opera music in the piece, Café Müller has more in common with Furchtet euch nicht than it does with the Gluck ballet operas or Blaubart. Rather than drawing the music from one source and presenting it in a more or less linear fashion, Bausch uses collage again. As in Furchtet euch nicht, she draws upon the same composer for all of the music, yet from different works. Café Müller features four arias from two different operas by seventeenth-century English composer Henry Purcell but does not base its narrative on either of those operas. Rather, the arias were chosen for their mournful nature as well as their lyrics’ themes of separation and loneliness. The characters that appear on the stage are not even loosely based on characters from either opera; they are completely free of the operas’ libretti. Servos explains that post-Blaubart, Bausch has “already gone beyond any previous concept of the ‘interpretation’ of

3 Ibid., 4
4 Servos, Pina Bausch, Wuppertal Dance Theater, 107.
librettos. She did not ‘choreograph material,’ but took instead individual elements from the plot as a point of departure for her own wealth of associations.”

Three of the arias are from The Fairy Queen (1692) and one is from Dido and Aeneas (ca.1689). The Fairy Queen is a “semi opera”—a spoken play with musical scenes—based on Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Dido and Aeneas is Purcell’s most famous work, and the aria “When I am laid in earth” (more commonly referred to as “Dido’s Lament”) constitutes his most performed piece currently. The following pieces are played in Café Müller, listed in order of appearance:

1. “O let me weep” from The Fairy Queen (3:55 to 11:45)
3. “Next, winter comes slowly” from The Fairy Queen (28:25 to 31:20)
4. “See, even night” from The Fairy Queen (twice) (31:55 to 37:05 and 41:40 to 46:50)

There is no music played between these pieces; the only sounds are those created by the dancers. Bausch uses a 1971 Decca recording of the two operas, conducted by Benjamin Britten. The soprano in “O let me weep,” “Thy hand, Belinda,” “When I am laid in earth,” and “See, even night” is Jennifer Vyvyan. The bass in “Next, winter comes slowly” is John Shirley-Quirk.

Unlike in the previous pieces based on operas, there is a conspicuous absence of irony created by actions on the stage running counter to the music. All of the chosen pieces are in

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5 Ibid., 19.
6 The 1971 Decca recording is still available on CD. Henry Purcell, The Fairy Queen/Dido and Aeneas, English Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Britten, Decca 468-5612, compact disc.
minor keys and have mournful texts, which is consistent with the theme of the piece and the overall bleak disposition of the dancers. That is not to say, however, that the dancers are acting out the text in a mimetic fashion. It would not even be completely accurate to say that they are expressing the emotion of the music. Rather, they are expressing their own emotions, which the music textually and harmonically aligns with.

*Café Müller* begins with Bausch and a younger woman on stage (danced by Malou Airaudo in the 1985 video recording made for German television) with their eyes closed. They wander around the stage/cafe, which is cluttered with empty chairs in their way. A male dancer frantically runs around clearing the obstacles in Airaudo’s path. During the first aria “The plaint,” Bausch and Airaudo mostly dance using their upper bodies and arms, in fluid, graceful, yet mournful movements. The words of Purcell’s aria echo the sadness, with the soprano singing “Oh let me weep” and “sigh my soul away.” Often Bausch and Airaudo’s movements are in sync, or very nearly in sync but slightly delayed. If this is all happening in Bausch’s head, perhaps the younger dancer represents Bausch at a younger age in a different time.

The aria ends with Airaudo finding embrace in the arms of a man (danced by Dominique Mercy) at 11:10. The music stops and another male dancer (Jan Minarik) repositions the two malleable dancers so that Mercy is holding Airaudo as if he were carrying her at chest height. Airaudo falls to the ground and quickly embraces Mercy again. This forms the basis for a series of repetitions, as was seen previously in *Blaubart*, where Minarik repeatedly places Airaudo back into Mercy’s arms, and she falls each time. The pattern gets quicker as it goes, with Minarik growing increasingly more agitated.

The aria from *Dido and Aeneas*, “When I am laid in earth,” is truly the highlight of *Café Müller*. This is in no small part due to Bausch’s graceful, evocative dancing taking place in the
center of the stage. Meanwhile, Mercy flails on the dance, outstretching his arms hoping for human contact that never arrives. Despite hectic actions going on around her, Bausch remains detached from her surroundings, as if lost in a dream. Several critics also noted this as the highpoint of the evening, with dance critic Ann Nugent declaring in a review of a 1992 Edinburgh performance that “there is a moment of supreme beauty when [Bausch’s] angular body seems to melt into Purcell’s poignant musical phrase ‘When I am Laid in Earth,’ effectively underlining the ghostliness that makes her not quite of this world. Such a fusion for the eye and ear produces a frisson of aesthetic pleasure, yet seems to be entirely in keeping with the subconscious action of a sleepwalker.”

Throughout the piece, Bausch’s “sleepwalker” character remains noticeably apart from everything going on around her. New York Times dance critic Anna Kisselgoff writes that “there is something allegorical about Miss Bausch's own role. […] Miss Bausch wanders in a nightgown, with eyes closed. Yet everything about this groping sleepwalker suggests that she is absorbing into her pores every single detail of the emotionally stunted behavior around her - just as she has absorbed the life around her to create her work.” Bausch’s sleepwalker is detached in the same way the voice of the singer in the music is detached from any identifiable source. I believe her decision to use recorded music without highlighting the source was not a step back from Brechtian techniques, but rather a conscious decision to separate the music from the stage. The theme of Café Müller is the struggle to make human connections. The music is as disconnected as the dancers on the stage are.

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Café Müller strikes a newfound equality (rather than unity) between the music and dance. There is a connection between the two, but it goes both ways. The music does not define the dance, and the dancers do not disrupt the music. The connection is not in the narrative content, but rather in the emotional content.

Judith Mackrell sees Bausch’s sleepwalker as Bausch playing Bausch. She argues that Bausch is herself as an adult, remembering a scene from childhood:

Café Müller is a far more intimate work - based on Bausch's childhood memories of her parents' establishment. Her grown-up self re-enters the café as a sleepwalker, eyes shut tight, arms outstretched as if remembering the scene by touch. Five other people are present—but their behaviour appears both pointless and obsessional. The action is seen as by a naïve child, but also as by an adult who understands the tragedies and disappointments the café once harboured.

Arlene Croce was unsurprisingly not a fan of Café Müller, calling it “flashy shtick” and criticizing Bausch’s aesthetic of repetition. Croce wrote that “at every repetition, less is revealed, and the action that looked gratuitous to begin with dissolves into meaningless frenzy.” She lamented that Bausch’s production “enshrines the amateur's faith in psychopathy as drama.” Other reviewers continued the theme of referring to the work in terms of insanity, including Donna Perlmutter, who wrote that “obsessive, mindless self-flagellation [took] over in this psychiatric back ward.”

Anna Kisselgoff praised Bausch for the work, writing that “the excitement emanates from the highly controlled energy, the brilliant use of space, the cinematic overlap and flow of

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12 Ibid.
imagery.”\textsuperscript{14} Reviews were overall positive at both its premiere and at its New York debut in 1984, and \textit{Café Müller} has become one of Bausch’s most iconic works. It has been frequently revived, rarely going more than a couple of years without a performance. In 2013 alone there were performances in Taipei, Kaohsiung, Moscow, Gothenburg, Paris, Naples, Bordeaux, and Antwerp. It was also filmed for the 2009 film \textit{Pina}, which was a retrospective of her career.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Pina}, directed by Wim Wenders (New York: Criterion Collection, 2011), DVD.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Reflecting back to the beginning of Bausch’s use of opera music and libretti, we can see a definite progression towards destabilization of the characters and music. In *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, the characters were split in half into a singer and a dancer. However, the dancers took center stage and through mimetic dancing portrayed the characters as if it were their own voices singing. For all intents and purposes, the dancers primarily assumed the roles of the characters.

In the next ballet opera *Orpheus und Eurydike*, the characters were split again between the singers and dancers, but this time each was present on the stage and split the identity in a more egalitarian spirit. The characters of Orpheus and Eurydike were still very much alive and intact, just divided between multiple performing bodies. In *Blaubart*, however, Bluebeard and Judith became destabilized; they occupied a middle space between being the characters in the libretto and on the recording, performing as the character *and* as someone else (possibly everyone else). The story of Bluebeard was more one being remembered than one being told. *Café Müller* took the final step in this development away from traditional narrative and storytelling, with the dancers on the stage not at all portraying the characters in the operas the music was drawn from.

Where does this move away from conventional storytelling ultimately take us? For Brecht and Bausch, it leads to reality and truth. Servos argues that “from piece to piece the Wuppertal Dance Theater gradually blazed a trail towards a goal to which *Ausdruckstanz* had probably always aspired but had failed to achieve: releasing dance from the constraints of literature, relieving it of its fairytale illusions and leading it towards reality.”¹ Brecht frequently talked about removing “fairytales” and “fables” in order to embrace reality. Bausch’s

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choreography often seems to act as a mirror for society, reflecting back at the audience the very things they likely came to the theater to avoid, such as violence and loneliness.

Servos, seemingly channeling Brecht, declared in the opening of his book on Bausch: The point of departure is authentic, subjective experience, which is also demanded of the audience. Passive reception is impossible. Theater of experience mobilizes the affects and the emotions because it deals with undivided energies. It does not pretend. It is. Because the viewer is affected by the authenticity of these emotions, which confuse both sense and the senses but are simultaneously enjoyable, he must also make a decision, must define his own position. He is no longer the consumer of inconsequential pleasures, nor is he witness to an interpretation of reality. He is included in a total experience that allows the experience of reality in a state of sensual excitement. The dissemination of knowledge is secondary to the experience. Dance theater, however, does not seduce us with illusions; it puts us in touch with reality.2

Replace “dance theater” with “epic theater” and one would think this was Brecht talking. Yet Servos is not alone in viewing Bausch in this light. Anna Kisselgoff, who frequently gave Bausch glowing reviews, wrote:

The dominant theme [in Bausch’s oeuvre] is the impasse in relations between men and women, and by extension, the dislocation of the human spirit. It seems to me there is no question as to where Miss Bausch stands. She condemns rather than condones. Bluebeard's mistreatment of his wife is a metaphor here for how men can abuse women and how such relationships are degrading to all. In “Cafe Muller,” the main couple's loveless embraces, the fearfulness of a frowsy woman puttering about, the clumsiness of a man who charges through the furniture and then stands dazed (symbolizing his inability to express feelings conventionally) - all these add up to a picture of how things are, not how they should be in an ideal world. Obviously, this is a limited view. But there is nothing here that does not ring true. Life and literature will document any situation depicted in Miss Bausch’s theater pieces.3

Again is this idea that Bausch’s dance theatre removes illusions and points toward the (often painful) truth of reality. Brecht wrote in Kleines Organon in 1948 that “choreography, too, is again given tasks of a realistic kind. It is a mistaken belief of recent times that it has nothing to

2 Ibid.
do with the illustration of ‘people as they really are.’ If art reflects life it does so with special mirrors.” Bausch used dance to be that mirror.

Bausch, with her training in both German expressionist dance as well as experience in New York under Anthony Tudor, found a middle way between two distinctly different dance traditions. Bausch’s Tanztheater was a hybrid dance form that allowed her to depart from narrative without losing content and meaning. In Bausch’s mirror one can see the harshness of reality, yet also life’s great wonder and beauty.

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4 Brecht, “Kleines Organon für das Theater,” in Brecht on Theatre, 204.


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