

FRANZISKA KLOOS, JENNIFER WALSH. *SPIEL MIT IDENTITÄTEN* (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2017). ISBN 978-3-95593-076-9, 136pp, €19.

On 12 July 2019 the German *Akademie der Künste* (Academy of the Arts) announced that Jennifer Walshe was among its newly elected members for this year.¹ The Berlin-based, federally funded *Akademie* is the closest equivalent Germany has to Aosdána, however its membership is not restricted to German citizens, but open to all artists who are based in the country or whose work is deemed important to artistic developments in Germany. Among its current non-German members are Harrison Birtwistle, George Crumb, Sofia Gubaidulina, Peter Eötvös, György Kurtág, and Salvatore Sciarrino.

The Irish reaction to this announcement was interesting to observe. On 24 July, critic Michael Dervan published an article in *The Irish Times* that took the news as a starting point to critique the inadequate funding and general support of artists by the Irish state, without engaging at all with Walshe's achievements.² At the same time, an opinion piece by composer Dave Flynn appeared on the RTÉ website in which he introduces a distinction between 'experimental music' (of the kind that Walshe composes) and 'classical music' (described as fundamentally tonal), stating that the former style has little to do with the latter, and that 'experimental' composers should cease claiming that their works are 'classical'.³ I don't wish to engage with the terminological or historical problems of his argument here, but only want to highlight that Flynn—like Dervan—does not engage with Walshe's music or her person at all, instead taking the news as a welcome occasion to broadcast a more general grievance.⁴ In reaction to these two texts, on 29 July Toner Quinn published an article entitled 'Ireland needs to Celebrate the Work of Jennifer Walshe' in *The Journal of Music* in

¹ The press release announcing Walshe's election can be found at https://www.adk.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen.htm?we_objectID=60066&fbclid=IwAR3q_M6Grr0cr-6CILdVgQ29ksfSs6BSA5gqghhJUrWChP1nSxj6XVT7xo.

² Michael Dervan, 'Aosdána functions as a way of hiding fact that arts funding is shamefully low', *The Irish Times*, 24 July 2019 <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/aosd%C3%A1na-functions-as-way-of-hiding-fact-that-arts-funding-is-shamefully-low-1.3964755>.

³ Dave Flynn, 'Is experimental music killing classical music?', *RTÉ Brainstorm*, 24 July 2019, modified 29 July 2019 <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/0717/1063606-is-experimental-music-killing-classic-music/>.

⁴ Dr Flynn has contacted the *JSMI* to state that the timing of the publication was coincidental and the article was aimed at all composers writing 'experimental' music and not specifically at Walshe.

which he initially laments the under-appreciation of art music in Ireland in general, before engaging with Jennifer Walshe's music and her career as the first Irish writer to do so in reaction after the *Akademie's* announcement.⁵

It fits into this picture that *Jennifer Walshe. Spiel mit Identitäten*, the first book-length engagement with Walshe's work, is published in (and by a) German. The study is based on an MA dissertation that Franziska Kloos wrote at the Folkwang Conservatory in Essen (which explains its comparative brevity). It concludes with the complete transcript of an interview that Kloos undertook with Walshe in March 2016 in London, and despite its position it may be advisable to read this first, as it appears that the rest of Kloos's book has more or less grown out of it, with many pages essentially consisting of elaborations on a few lines from the interview. Of course, the amount of scholarly literature about many contemporary composers is limited, but it is interesting to discover in the bibliography that there are generally more texts on Walshe available in German than in English (at least in terms of printed sources; when it comes to online references there are more English ones available, although many of these consist of interviews and Walshe's own texts and music). Generally, Irish musicology (as well as English-speaking musicology in general) has not closely engaged with her so far, notwithstanding a few texts by Bob Gilmore.

The book is divided into three main chapters, plus an introduction and a two-part conclusion. The introduction provides an extremely brief (four pages) theoretical contextualisation, focusing on Erik H. Erikson's ego psychology and the dangers the ego identity faces in postmodern times, Stuart Hall's narrative of the self in a situation determined by discrepancy, discontinuity and decentralisation, and Judith Butler's gender theory based on social constructivism. Given that each theorist is tackled over one page or less there can be no discussion of their ideas; instead their positions are summarised in a few lines which do not allow for much detail. Kloos is after those aspects of these ideas that help her illuminate the possible context of Walshe's habit of creating alter egos and 'hiding' behind them, both as a composer and a performer.

The first main chapter is entitled 'Avantgarde unter sich' (The avant-garde amongst itself) and describes the way in which Walshe's alter egos evolved up until 2016, commencing with 'Milker Corporation', the website that unites and documents

⁵ Toner Quinn, 'Ireland needs to Celebrate the Work of Jennifer Walshe', *The Journal of Music*, 29 July 2019 <https://journalofmusic.com/focus/ireland-needs-celebrate-work-jennifer-walshe>.

all of Walshe's activities; Walshe herself appears only as one of several subject areas covered by the website, as if Milker was something like an artistic management group for her and others.⁶ The main focus of the chapter is on 'Grúpat', Walshe's first major decentralisation and fragmentation project (as Kloos describes it), and Grúpat's earlier incarnation as 'Avant-Gardaí'. Grúpat is a collective of fictitious artists that initially consisted of nine members and later grew to eleven (Kloos writes as if Walshe is a twelfth member, but Walshe never listed herself as a member and acts as an artist who commissioned works from Grúpat members that she now performs). Grúpat was first presented to the world during an exhibition of their multi-media works at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin in 2009, accompanied by recordings of their works on two CDs (all performed by Walshe)⁷ and an extensive catalogue containing biographies of all members and aesthetic reflections regarding their styles.⁸ Walshe had spent three years developing these personae, carefully devising their separate, distinctive musical and aesthetic styles. Kloos reads all this as a split of the artistic ego according to Erikson, a decentralisation and fragmentation à la Hall, and—given that the Grúpat members represent different genders, are queer and straight, with one of them (The Dowager Marchylove) being a drag artist—as exemplifying an overall gender fluidity related to Butler's ideas, particularly if one assumes that these characters all represent different aspects of their creator's artistic personality. The chapter concludes with a brief section on 'Aisteach', Walshe's next major project, which involves the invention of an entire Irish avant-garde tradition that did not in fact exist.⁹ Yet again, Walshe created a broad range of characters and movements (much broader than the styles and aesthetics represented by the Grúpat members), wrote music on their behalf, performed and recorded it and shared the project with the world at a launch in the Little Museum of Dublin in January 2015 (this time, however, it was clear from the beginning that everything was fictitious). As this was relatively new in 2016 when Kloos wrote her dissertation, it plays only a small part in the book.

⁶ There is, in fact, a 'Management & Booking' section on the website (www.milker.org), but once it is clicked, two more clicks are required to reach *Southern Bird Artist Management*, Jennifer Walshe's actual management company.

⁷ Grúpat and Jennifer Walshe, *The Wasistas of Thereswhere*, CD, no label, Ireland 2009; Grúpat and Jennifer Walshe, *Songtags*, CD, no label, Ireland 2009.

⁸ The audience at the launch of the exhibition was told that the Grúpat members had planned to attend the event, but that their plane had been delayed in Paris.

⁹ See <http://www.aisteach.org/> for details.

The next chapter is dedicated to ‘Die Neue Disziplin’ (The New Discipline), referring to Walshe’s aesthetic manifesto of this title, written in January 2016 (just in time for Kloos’s dissertation) and in the meantime also published in German and Polish alongside the original English version.¹⁰ Kloos engages with this text so closely that it may have been helpful to include it in the Appendix alongside the interview. Walshe describes her new discipline not as a style but rather a ‘way of working’ or a ‘practice’, with the word ‘discipline’ not referring to the categorisation of subject areas (as in ‘academic discipline’) but rather to working in a disciplined, rigorous and physically demanding (if not exhausting) way—although I am convinced that she welcomes the ambiguity that lies in this title. Working in this disciplined way includes composers ‘being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical; pieces which often invoke the extra-musical, which activate the non-cochlear’. The concept also expects composers to be involved in the performance of their works themselves—something for which Walshe is famous; in fact, it is often difficult to imagine that others could do justice to her pieces and match her sophisticated, multi-faceted extended vocal techniques as well as the physicality and theatricality of her performances. Walshe describes this music as a kind of ‘music theatre’, yet also argues that maybe today ‘all music is music theatre. Perhaps we are finally willing to accept that the bodies playing the music are part of the music, that they’re present, they’re valid and they inform our listening whether subconsciously or consciously’.¹¹ Kloos links the manifesto to Walshe’s musical work (particularly the Grúpat project) through reflections on the dissolution of authorship in a collective, the degree of independence that fictitious alter egos can acquire, and the composer as director and ‘auteur’ with responsibility for all aspects of the development and performance of a piece of ‘music theatre’ (the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* is not used here, presumably due to its specific Wagnerian connotations, but it almost inevitably springs to mind, particularly given that Walshe stressed that ‘[a]ny physical action should be undertaken with the same care and focus given to sounds’).¹² Kloos also points out that Walshe intends some pieces to be performed by just one person (often herself), while the specific notation she has developed as well as the required physicality make it almost inevitable that different performers will produce different readings of the same piece. Finally, Kloos

¹⁰ The text of ‘The New Discipline’ can be found at <http://milker.org/the-new-discipline>.

¹¹ <http://milker.org/the-new-discipline>.

¹² Walshe, score of *zusammen i*, quoted in Kloos, *Jennifer Walshe*, 43.

highlights the conscious 'post-internet' attitude of at least some pieces (which reflect on the impact the virtualisation of our lives is having on us), the required openness on the part of the listeners, as well as the experimental nature of many of the works.

The final major chapter is dedicated to 'Analyse' (Analysis) and covers almost half the pages of the book (excluding the Appendix). It engages with six of Walshe's pieces. Two of them are assessed on the basis of scores and audio recordings, two on the basis of video recordings, and two after live performances. The first piece, the 'electronic opera' *i: same person / ii: not the same person*, is analysed on the basis of a recording alone. Kloos spends quite a bit of time describing what she hears, mixing this with associations the sounds evoke in her. There is the odd cross-reference to other pieces, but overall little in terms of a bigger-picture context. Her associations are inevitably personal and will not necessarily be shared by other listeners; for example, I don't associate a certain vocal effect with the voice of a pirate as she does. This multiplicity of associations is probably typical for this kind of music and therefore not a negative critique, however, it would be more interesting if this was discussed more directly at some stage. Overall this section remains a bit too descriptive.

The next piece, *As mo cheann* (Out of my head), is analysed on the basis of a recording and the score, yet Kloos again describes her listening experience first before comparing it to the score (although the section on the 'Höranalyse' was clearly written after the author had engaged with the score). There is much more structural and acoustic assessment here, such as an engagement with microtones or musings about which instruments create certain sounds using which extended techniques. The most interesting part of the score analysis is certainly the openness with which Kloos describes discrepancies between her initial aural impression and what the score actually indicates: for example, the extended playing techniques made her identify instruments that in the end didn't feature in the piece, while she had also expected more than just two performers to be involved. These are issues that are likely to affect many listeners particularly in the case of extended techniques, and it is probably helpful for analysts who tend to focus on the score to be reminded of the difference between what is notated and what is often perceived.

The 'Barbie opera' *XXX_LIVE_NUDE_GIRLS!!!*, a modern adaptation of Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, is analysed via a video recording and the score, and for the first time the section includes music examples. Again, Kloos broadens her approach compared to the previous analysis by positioning this piece of music theatre in a wider context, comparing, for example, the presentation and musical treatment of a rape

scene at the end with another one in *Wozzeck*. The next piece, *Language Ruins Everything*, is also discussed in relation to a video recording and the score, with some music examples. Overall there is perhaps a bit too much description and not enough reflection in this section (certainly less than with regard to the previous two works). Kloos engages with the next two pieces, *THE TOTAL MOUNTAIN*, and *1984 IT'S O.K.*, on the basis of performances she attended in Stuttgart. In relation to *THE TOTAL MOUNTAIN*, she outlines on just three pages the audience's reaction, its interaction with the performers, and her own impressions of the different performative and filmic layers. *1984 IT'S O.K.* is given more space as Kloos focuses on the theatricality of the performance in which, for example, the percussionist has to rearrange their gear during the performance.

In her conclusion, Kloos highlights once more the fluidity and ambiguity of Walshe's compositional and performative persona and the identity split reflected in her alter egos. For the author, the questioning and reinterpretation of the notion of authorship is one of Walshe's most important contributions to the current scene. Yet the questioning of this and other issues does not lead to clear answers provided by Walshe; her music requires openness on the part of the audience, which has to respond and position themselves in relation to the aesthetic challenges and extra-musical questions raised by the music.

Franziska Kloos has written what is so far the most extended study of Jennifer Walshe's music and her aesthetics; she touches on many interesting questions in relation to identity, authorship, reception, theatricality, and performativity. It is a pity that the author didn't engage more closely with the Aisteach project, which is much broader in scope compared to Grúpat and of particular interest in the context of Irish musical history and its lacunas, but it presumably appeared just about too late for Kloos's research and is also probably less interesting from a German point of view. The main problem with the book may lie in its comparative brevity; many interesting avenues are indicated or hinted at, but rarely explored fully. Several times I wished that the author had taken more time to explore certain ideas and their contexts and consequences, rather than briefly sketching their general outline. This is, of course, due to the general German tradition of publishing dissertations as they are (apart from some minor editorial work). Yet in this case it is particularly regrettable that the thesis was not expanded further. However, it still offers a good introduction to Walshe's work and her aesthetics. The way in which the six analytical sections operate via different combinations of listening to or watching recordings, live experiences, and score studies is quite interesting, but there could have been more comparative

reflection about the results of these different approaches. The book certainly invites further research into Jennifer Walshe in general, but also topics such as compositional and performative identity, Irish musical identity, and the use of extended techniques. Perhaps it can serve as an invitation for Irish musicology to follow Toner Quinn's call and celebrate Walshe by engaging more closely with the music and the aesthetics of an Irish composer who is much more active and successful internationally than at home.

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