

The Devil's Kitchen

A Spoken Opera in Five Acts

Conceived and directed by Nicodemus

devilskitchen.org

Summary

The Devil's Kitchen (Des Teufels Küche) is the working title of a new spoken opera (music theatre in the widest sense) that we intend to develop and stage as a rehearsed reading set to music by June 2024.

Our aim is to create an imagined world in word and sound that enables us to engage both artistically/aesthetically and critically/ethically with the increasing fragmentation and polarisation of society at a time of global crisis.

The work is divided into five acts. It tells the story of four individuals who, independently of one another, set out in a dark world full of hate and anger to find a long-lost 'urtext of human coexistence' and in the process cross paths time and again within a variety of different settings.

What kinds of texts/fragments they ultimately find and how this affects them, both personally and in their relationships to one another, will emerge in the process of developing and rehearsing the piece.

Protagonist

Character
Driving Force
Worldview

N° I (f)

The Technocrat
Conscientiousness
Kantian duty ethics

Protagonist

Character
Driving Force
Worldview

N° I (m)

The Entrepreneur
Self-interest
Ethical egoism

Protagonist

Character
Driving Force
Worldview

N° II (f)

The Activist
Compassion
Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will

Protagonist

Character
Driving Force
Worldview

N° II (m)

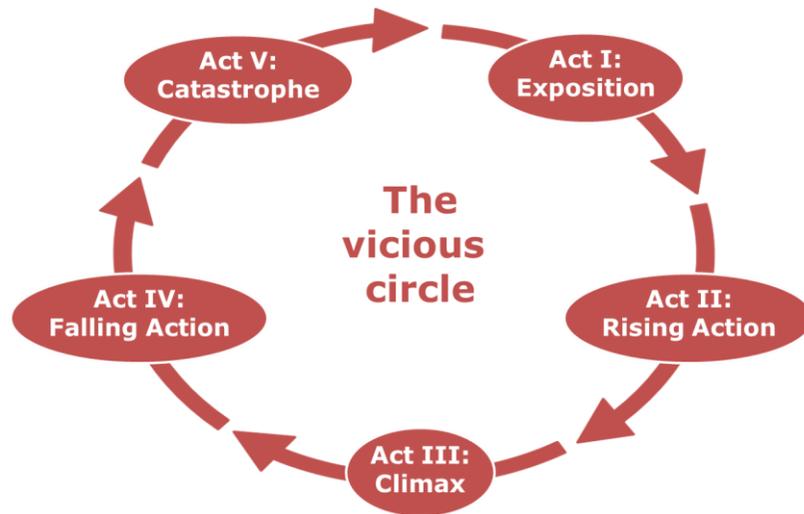
The Politician
Righteousness
Virtue ethics

The eternal Antagonist (m)

Character Mephisto (the devil, the fallen angel)
Driving Force „I am the spirit that negates!“
Worldview "...Thus everything that that your terms, sin, destruction, evil represent - That is my proper element."
Source: Goethe, Faust, Part One, 1808

Structure

The Devil's Kitchen consists of five acts and has a circular narrative structure (it has no beginning and no end).



Act I introduces our protagonists – the technocrat (Kantian duty ethics), the entrepreneur (ethical egoism), the activist (Schopenhauer's metaphysics of will) and the politician (virtue ethics) – and shows how they slowly emerge from a state of total mental/spiritual breakdown as their characters gradually take shape.

Act II establishes the context of the work: a brutal world, filled with anger and hate, a world where Mephisto, our antagonist, freed of all constraints, can do whatever he likes.

Our four heroes are increasingly horrified by this spectacle. They try to understand, want to help. Time and again they hear of a mysterious, long-lost 'urtext' of human coexistence and eventually set out in search of this text, in the hope of finding in it the answers that will allow them to lead humanity out of darkness into the light.

Act III shows how our protagonists, each for themselves, embark on their search for this urtext and how, along the way, their paths cross time and again. Since they approach this from very different perspectives, it becomes increasingly clear that they are looking for, and sometimes find in the form of fragments, very different kinds of texts. Act III then culminates in their ultimately futile attempt to combine their finds into a singular, unambiguous text.

Act IV follows our heroes as they, at first confidently, return to the place where they woke up (re/gained consciousness) in order to present their finds, their urtext, to humanity. But as before, Mephisto is also present and sows discord and confusion, so that both our heroes and their audience soon begin arguing about whose interpretation of these texts is ultimately the correct one.

Act V completes the vicious circle. The dispute escalates ever further until our protagonists, in utter desperation, finally fall back into a state of mental/spiritual disorder.

Storylines

The Devil's Kitchen is based on the self-representation, or rather self-actualisation (the character profiles) of our four protagonists, which shape their perceptions and influence their actions. Their main goal is to do justice to (to enact sympathetically) the image that they have of themselves and that is reflected in their self-actualisations.

That these are mostly constructs, fantasies and wishful thinking that have little to do with the lived experience of our heroes, becomes clear during the course of the performance. In *The Devil's Kitchen* there is ultimately only one truly authentic, through and through honest figure and that is Mephisto, the devil himself.

One of the work's central themes therefore is the field of tension between what our protagonists want to or pretend to be (conscientious, responsible, etc.) and what they really are, what life, their deeds and misdeeds, has made of them. A further, closely connected theme is our protagonists' experience of failure, their inability to live up to their own expectations and, resulting from that, their despair and eventual breakdown.

Our heroes mostly live in the discursive bubbles of the social media. Their facebook, twitter and instagram pages define them and dynamically reflect their identities, what they

'believe' in, what they stand for. Through their respective timelines they engage with each other and communicate with their communities (our audience).

In order to reflect, in the construction of the work, the virtual reality our protagonists live in, we adopt the timeline structure, the semantics of social media, for the structuration of the work.

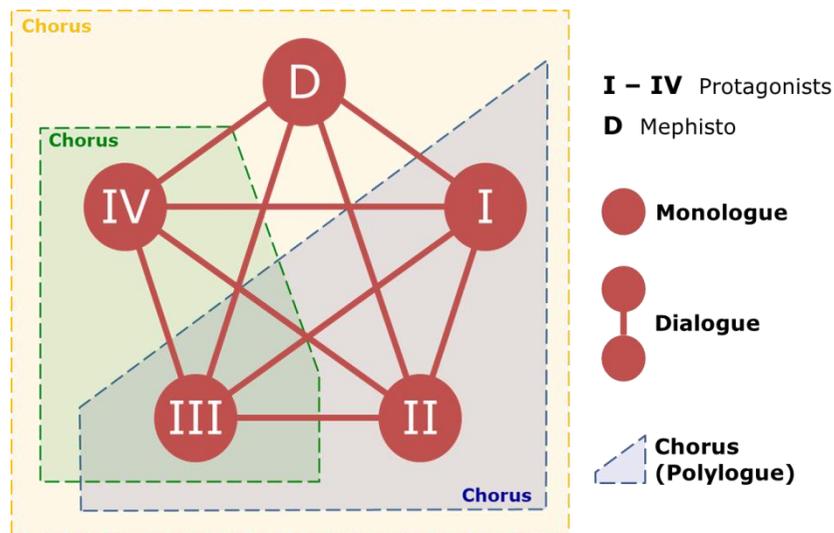
This allows us to meaningfully combine a multitude of texts and formats of the most varied kind. What the road does for the road movie, the timeline does for our 'net-work': it is the connecting, the supporting element that takes on the function of the storyline (or plot). The timeline, in that sense, *is* the story.

It also allows us to use social media creatively as a 'canvas' and to open up new hybrid spaces for the development and presentation of our net-work. For example, it enables us to directly involve the audience in the development of storylines via the respective timelines of our heroes and even to integrate contributions (posts) in dialogue scenes.

Only in one point do the social media pages of our heroes differ fundamentally from the profiles and timelines of everyone else: They are part of a larger whole, part of a new intermedia work, a spoken opera, a net-work in five acts. In short, they are the devil's chefs.

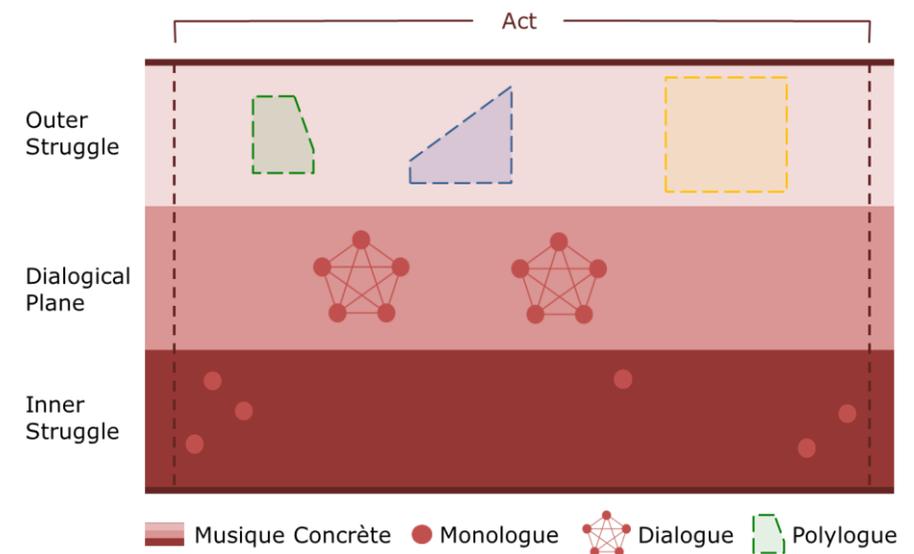
Composition

The Devil's Kitchen is a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art) in which sound and text come together as equals. Fragmentation and polarization (our core themes) shape both the form and the content of the work.



In *The Devil's Kitchen*, music becomes language and language becomes music. Conceived as a spoken opera, the work is located at the intersection of techno and musique concrète. Hence in *The Devil's Kitchen* we work mainly with ‚found‘

(pre-existing) sound, noise and text objects, which we link, combine and/or merge in the form of monologues, dialogues and polylogues on three levels: the world of thought (inner struggle); the dialogical plane; and the outside world, the world of the many (outer struggle).



The movement here goes sometimes from the inside out, sometimes from the outside in, from the individual to the many and from the many to the individual. Thus thoughts turn into positions and – where polarisation occurs – fronts emerge.

Script Development

The Devil's Kitchen consists of a multitude of interconnected tableaux, in other words, a rich collage of different kinds of texts and text fragments: social and traditional media and scientific texts, literary and poetic texts, conversations and reflections, whispers, rumours and provocations - of monologues, dialogues and polylogues.

Many of these texts/fragments already exist. We just have to collect, possibly edit and organize them.

Our sources for this endeavour are the social and traditional media, books, magazines and pamphlets. Then of course there are also the 'texts' in the minds of our target groups, our audience. In order to gain access to these texts, we have to take to the streets, talk to and interview people, both on and offline. And finally there are our own creative texts and thoughts, the texts/thoughts of our author, as well as the texts generated collaboratively during rehearsals by our actors.

The extent to which we concentrate on German-language texts (and German translations), and what other languages we may decide to include, will depend on the composition and capabilities of our ensemble. Our starting point is to aim for a multilingual production.

Whether a text in the end finds its way into our production depends not least on four factors: it must correspond to the zeitgeist and be fully compatible with at least one of our core themes. At the same time, it has to fit meaningfully into the narrative and be assignable to one of our actors. Since not all of the texts we collect will meet all four criteria, there will certainly be some texts that, in spite of their high quality and thematic relevance, we will not be able to include in the production.

We are therefore planning to publish a magazine of high aesthetic and literary value alongside this production. This allows us to share with our audience all the texts and text fragments that are important to us. In order to be able to fully exploit the potential of such a publication, we are developing the magazine as a standalone element (an artifact in its own right), rather than just reproducing the content and structure of the production.

As an integral part of the overall concept, the magazine has three equally important functions: (a) it introduces Mephisto and our protagonists to our audience, (b) it documents and comments on the collaborative development of the spoken opera, a complex, multi-dimensional process spanning many months and (c) it acts as a bibliophile literature archive and index for the project as a whole.



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