

Indeterminacy à la Kagel in *Exotica*

by Mylène Gioffredo*

Une thèse d'*Exotica*, c'est que l'Orient, c'est une invention de l'Occident. [...] L'Orient existe parce que l'Europe invente toujours les formes qui définissent l'orientalisme.¹

Munich, 23 June 1972. The visitors of the *Weltkulturen und Moderne Kunst* exhibition witnessed the world premiere of Mauricio Kagel's *Exotica für außereuropäische Instrumente*: under the baton of the composer, six “white” performers² clumsily played non-European instruments while singing, sometimes poorly imitating, ethnomusicological recordings. Since then, *Exotica* has mostly been discussed as a unilateral criticism of Exoticism in the Western tradition, the few evidences of strict compositional practices being irony and mockery of contemporary European art music. Such a vision of *Exotica* relies on an *a priori* assumption, though: indetermination understood as freedom for the performers, suggesting that Kagel had no specific vision of the outcome. *Exotica* is composed in five sections, but none is fully written out. However, two of *Exotica*'s performers – Vinko Globokar, one of the world premiere performers, and Fabrice Marandola³ – emphasized that despite its sparseness, the score had all the necessary information to control the sonic results, any performer's liberty risking to destroy the work's intentions.⁴ My investigation based on the compositional material

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1 “One thesis of *Exotica* is that the Orient is an invention of the West. [...] The Orient exists because Europe always invents the forms that define Orientalism”; Mauricio Kagel and Dominique Jameux, “Musique et cruauté,” in *Tam-Tam: Monologues et dialogues sur la musique*, ed. Felix Schmidt and Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1983), pp. 29–40, esp. pp. 37–38.

2 Michel Portal, Vinko Globokar, Christoph Caskel, Wilhelm Bruck, Theodor Ross, Siegfried Palm.

3 Marandola participated in two performances: the first produced by Sixtrum, Université de Montréal, Salle Claude-Champagne, 19 September 2008; the second co-produced by Sixtrum and SMCQ, Théâtre Rouge du Conservatoire de Montréal, Festival Montreal Nouvelle Musique, 2 March 2013.

4 Personal discussions with both performers.

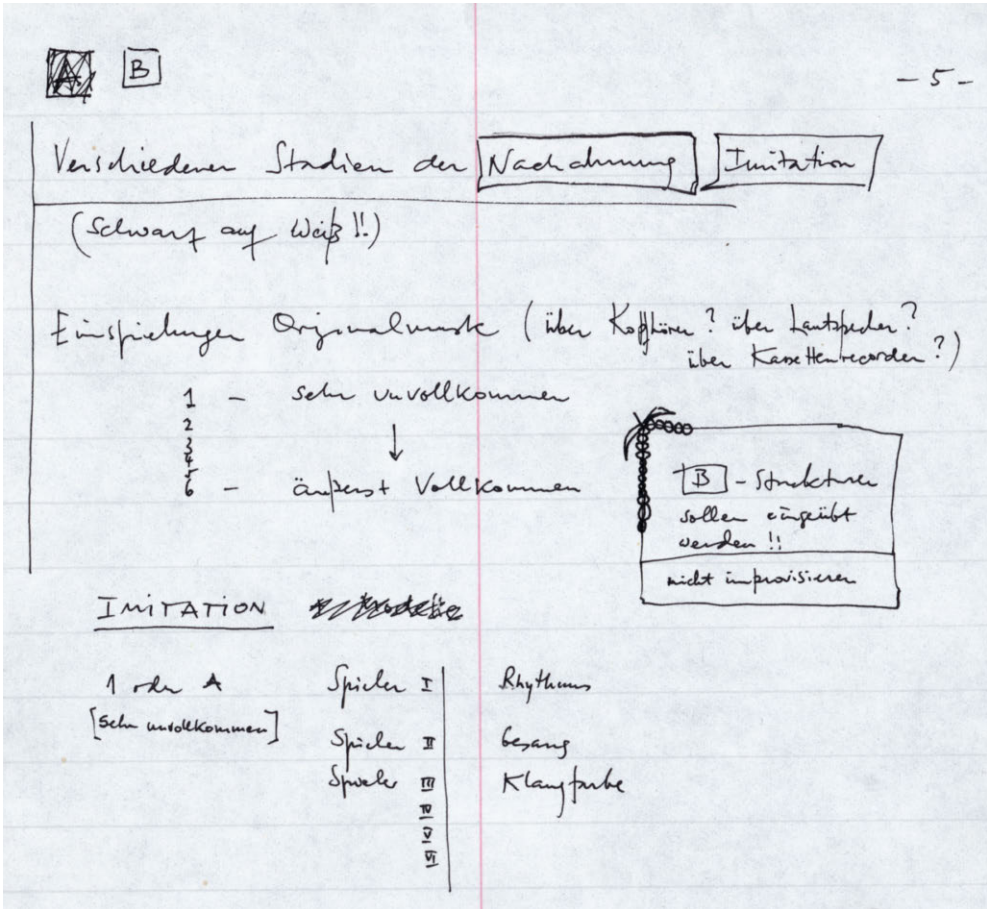


Plate 1: Mauricio Kagel, *Exotica*, detail of sketch with initial notes on controlled indetermination (Mauricio Kagel Collection, PSS).

of *Exotica* in the Mauricio Kagel Collection, most specifically on the evolution of the work's B section – which is perceived and presented as the most significant and indeterminate section of *Exotica* – corroborates this affirmation.

The initial stage of the creative process is presented in a thin notebook that contains the seed of the B section. On the first page, the impulsive nature of Kagel's writing is rendered by language switches (Spanish and German) and fragmented thoughts. On the two initial pages, Kagel first drafted the desire to have performers sing, to practice self-quotation, and to borrow some characteristic rhythmic sequences. Then, his notes turn to the introduction of ethnomusicological recordings to which performers would react: "Secciones de imitation Etnomusical / Sektionen ethnomusikologische Nachahmung (por ejemplo China, Bali, Congo) / Ein-

spielungen Ethnographische Musik? mit Original musik / die Musiker reagieren darauf.”⁵ This idea is furthered on the next page: “Während der Aufnahme: und auch beim Konzert / werden Beispiele anthropologischer Musik eingespielt, / die Musiker ahmen diese Musik, die sie eigentlich nicht / kennen, nach.”⁶

Plate 1 shows the emergence of “Indeterminacy à la Kagel” drafted on the notebook’s fifth page. The composer could have left the performers to follow their own intuition and improvise according to their own rules or possibilities, given their lack of instrumental mastery. However, notice Kagel’s clear decision about section B: “B-Strukturen sollen eingeübt werden!! Nicht improvisieren.”⁷ Kagel then proceeded to analyze all the ways he could meticulously control the imitative phenomena. First, he dissected the gesture in six degrees of accuracy, ranging from “sehr unvollkommen” (very imperfect) to “äußerst vollkommen” (extremely perfect). Then, his analysis turned to the various parameters of an imitative process: “Rhythmus / Gesang / Klangfarbe” (rhythm / singing / timbre). At the bottom of the page, Kagel drafted the condition of a reversal of the imitative process in which performers would first have to imagine a specific sonic situation, then adjust their performance according to the recording.

The upper part of *Plate 2*, which corresponds to the notebook’s seventh page, presents section B’s final compositional material selected by Kagel. On the one hand, the composer added “Lautstärke” (loudness) to the three parameters mentioned in the previous sketch – here, “Melodie” (melody) replacing “Gesang” (singing). Concerning the rhythmic parameters, the composer remains undecided in their association with the global temporal allure (“Tempo” crossed out) – an independent category in the final score. On the other hand, he simplified the continuum of accuracy to four degrees: “sehr gut / gut / mäßig / sehr schlecht” (very good / good / moderate / very poor). The rest of the sketch shows the composer’s attempt to find a practical notation to convey his compositional choices to the performer. Not shown here, the final decision concerning the annotation is given on a subsequent draft. F stands for “Farbe” (color), M for “Melos,” R for “Rhythmus,” L for “Lautstärke” (loudness). The continuum of accuracy is expressed by an advanced arrow system: ↑! stands for very good, ↑ for good, ↓ for moderate, ↓! for very poor.

Rigorous control over the imitation procedures does not stop here: on a seven-page sketch, Kagel has systematically written out all existing combinatorial possibilities. The first combinatorial procedure involves one param-

5 “Sections of ethno-musical imitation / for example China, Bali, Congo / playback of ethnographic music? with original music / the musicians react to it”; slashes (/) correspond to line breaks in the sketch.

6 “During the recording: and also in concert / examples of anthropological music are played, / the musicians imitate this music, which they actually do not / know.”

7 “B-structures should be practiced!! Do not improvise.”

Let us take the double parametrical combinations 97–112. One notices their focus on the combinatorial potential between M and L: the four degrees of accuracy for L are aligned with those for M. The final double parametrical combinations (113–128) involving R and other parameters are shortened to only one declination (R with L), as combinatorial possibilities connecting R with other parameters have already been listed previously. From 129, Kagel starts the “Triaden” and the combinatorial rotation now involves three levels: the first two parameters remain fixed while the third one unfolds its four degrees; then, while the first parameter remains unchanged, the second parameter shifts by one degree and the third one unfolds a new round of the four degrees; and so forth. Once the two final parameters have completed a full rotation, the first parameter rotates by one degree, and the whole process concerning parameters 2 and 3 starts again.

Plate 4 shows the final stage: the distribution of combinatorial items throughout the six sequences of section B (numbers indicated in the upper rows) among the six performers (I–VI, left column). For each performer, Kagel gives each combination number as well as their parametrical modification, choices that were already evident in *Plate 3* (in which the Roman numerals underneath some of the combination numbers represent the performers to which this combination has been attributed). Not all combinatorial possibilities are used, the reasoning behind those choices could be linked to the desire to craft highly contrasted sound-based sections.

One might ponder the reasons behind Kagel’s adoption of indeterminacy characterized by a control of freedom. A first hypothesis can be found in Kagel’s own statement in the score material when discussing the verbal content of the piece: “Selbstverständlich ist hier vordergründige Komik auszuschließen.”⁸ Humorous features, if introduced in the piece, should only concern the performers. At no moment should it be perceived as a mockery of the Other’s culture. Looking back to Section B’s strict compositional process, one might infer that it was an efficient way for Kagel to ensure that performers would never be tempted to create meanings or emotions that he would not perceive as belonging to the piece.

Far from being unique to *Exotica*, though, such control over seemingly free material is not uncommon in Kagel’s compositional approach. The exhaustive exploration of combinatorial possibilities serving as a compositional reservoir has been noted by others.⁹ This continuity in Kagel’s compositional procedures is an invitation to reconsider the traditional analytical narrative attributed to *Exotica* within a musical perspective. From a “formalist” or purely musical point of view, through the exploration of all

8 Mauricio Kagel, *Exotica für außereuropäische Instrumente*, 1971/72 (UE15195; London: Universal Edition, 1974), p. 6; english translation on p. 86: “Blatant comedy should naturally be excluded.”

9 Matthias Rebstock, *Komposition zwischen Musik und Theater: Das instrumentale Theater von Mauricio Kagel zwischen 1959 und 1965* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2007), p. 37.

3

Kombinationen

94 → 134

✓ 94 Ⓢ M ↓! R ↑	✓ 105 Ⓢ M ↓ L ↑!	✓ 116 Ⓢ R ↑! L ↓! Ⓢ	✓ 127 Ⓢ R ↓! L ↓
✓ 95 Ⓢ M ↓! R ↓	✓ 106 Ⓢ M ↓ L ↑!	✓ 117 Ⓢ R ↑ L ↑!	✓ 128 Ⓢ R ↓! L ↓!
96 ✓ M ↓! Ⓢ R ↓!	✓ 107 Ⓢ M ↓ L ↓	✓ 118 Ⓢ R ↑ L ↑!	<u>Triaden</u>
✓ 97 Ⓢ M ↑! L ↑	108 M ↓ L ↓!	✓ 119 Ⓢ R ↑ L ↓	✓ 129 Ⓢ F ↑! M ↑! R ↑!
✓ 98 Ⓢ M ↑! L ↑	✓ 109 Ⓢ M ↓! L ↑!	✓ 120 Ⓢ R ↑ L ↓!	130 F ↑! M ↑! R ↑
✓ 99 Ⓢ M ↓! L ↓	✓ 110 Ⓢ M ↓! L ↑	✓ 121 Ⓢ R ↓ L ↑!	131 F ↑! M ↑! R ↓
✓ 100 Ⓢ M ↓! L ↓!	✓ 111 Ⓢ M ↓! L ↓	✓ 122 Ⓢ R ↓ L ↑	132 F ↑! M ↑! R ↓!
✓ 101 Ⓢ M ↑ L ↑!	✓ 112 Ⓢ M ↓! L ↓!	123 R ↓ L ↓	133 F ↑! M ↑! R ↑!
✓ 102 Ⓢ M ↑ L ↑	✓ 113 Ⓢ R ↑! L ↑!	✓ 124 Ⓢ R ↓ L ↓!	134 F ↑! M ↑! R ↑
✓ 103 Ⓢ M ↑ L ↓	✓ 114 Ⓢ R ↑! L ↑	✓ 125 Ⓢ R ↓! L ↑!	
✓ 104 Ⓢ M ↑ L ↓!	✓ 115 Ⓢ R ↑! L ↓	✓ 126 Ⓢ R ↓! L ↑	

Plate 3: Mauricio Kagel, *Exotica*, sketch on the combinatoriality and systemic distribution process (Mauricio Kagel Collection, PSS).

B

EXOTICA

Reihenfolge des verwendeten Kombinations

	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥
	14 24 19 84 48 80 160 40 168 11 10 272					95→85 90→83 39→41→60 91→92
F	↓!	↑!	↑!	↓!	↑	↓
M		↓	↑!	↑		↓
I	↑!	↓	↑!	↑!	↓!	↑!
R	↑!	↓	↑!	↑!	↓!	↑!
L	↓!			↓!	↓!	↑!
	121 9 72 23 32 62 94 20 6 28 201 4 102					81→82 127→104 77→70→71 128→118
F		↑	↑!	↓!	↑!	↓!
M			↓!		↓!	↑
II	↓	↑!	↑!	↓	↑	↑
R	↓	↑!	↑!	↓	↑	↓!
L	↑!	↓!				↓!
	67 5 113 48 24 67 72 84 120 275 46 156					37→48 78→65 119→126→120 107→107
F	↑!		↓!	↑	↓	↑!
M		↑!	↑!	↑!	↑!	↑!
III	↑!		↑!	↑!	↑!	↑!
R	↓	↑!	↓	↓!	↑!	↑!
L	↓	↑!		↓	↓!	↑!
	98 44 44 109 35 23 69 87 256 299 13 16					56→62 49→45 127→127→122 72→73
F		↓	↑!	↑	↑	↑
M	↑!	↓!	↓!		↑!	↑
IV	↑!	↓!	↓!	↑!	↑!	↑
R	↑!	↓!	↓	↑!	↑!	↑
L	↑	↓	↑!	↑!	↑!	↑
	87 66 89 25 24 103 57 68 269 264 219					31→20 43→38 25 114→125
F	↑!	↓	↑!	↑	↓	↑!
V	↑	↓	↑!	↑	↑!	↑!
R	↓	↑!	↑	↑!	↓!	↓
L	↑			↓	↓!	↓!
	96 29 61 1 36 115 24 86 244 304 149 7					58→59 20→4 100→110→99 106 26→27
F	↓!	↑!	↑!	↑	↓!	↑
VI	↓!	↑!	↑!	↑	↑	↑
M	↓!	↑!	↑!	↑	↑	↑
R	↓!	↑!	↓!	↑!	↑!	↑
L	↓!	↑!	↓	↑!	↑!	↑!

Plate 4: Mauricio Kagel, Exotica, sketch with section B's final multiparametrical distribution (Mauricio Kagel Collection, PSS).

combinatorial possibilities and the use of “indeterminacy *à la* Kagel,” the composer made sure that his piece, no matter how the performance ended up, would always display a wide range of differentiated musical situations, or “Moments,” to borrow a term from Stockhausen’s theories. Following this analytical path would bring us to fully understand Kagel’s own claim about *Exotica* – “Et alors, parce qu’il y a cette différence entre Orient et Occident, j’ai dit: on va faire de la musique occidentale, on va faire ‘du Kagel’”¹⁰ – and explore new meanings of an inexhaustible work.

10 “And then, because there is this difference between East and West, I said: we’re going to do Western music, we’re going to do ‘Kagel’”; Kagel and Jameux, “Musique et cruauté” (see note 1), p. 38.