

## KARL KRAUS ON STAGE: BETWEEN TEXT AND THEATRICALITY<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

Discussions of the Austrian cultural critic Karl Kraus (1874-1936) tend to focus on his skills as a writer. Apart from a very limited amount of studies (Lensing 2007; Youker 2011; Stocker 2013), surprisingly little attention has been paid to his performance as a public speaker. Nevertheless, Karl Kraus owes much of his enduring fame to the fact that he toured intensely in the period between 1910 and 1936, the year of his death. This article aims to reflect on both the rhetoric and the (implied) theatricality of Kraus' spoken-word performances. It is the ambition of this article to frame Kraus' performance, which eschews easy categorisation, within the wider framework of how authors at the time resorted to spoken performances to shape an image of themselves and how they used specific media to achieve this goal. First, I will discuss some of the eyewitness accounts of Kraus' performances in order to show why it is so difficult to arrive at a neutral account of Kraus' lecture evenings. In a second step, I will tackle the rhetorical profile, the vocal fervour and the theatrical minimalism of Kraus' scenography, which allows us to detect both progressive and conservative elements in his performances. In a third step, I will describe how Kraus' "Theater der Dichtung" and its resistance against conventional theatre can be modelled as an early precursor of techniques cherished by the main representatives of anti-illusionism and potentially also *Regietheater*. Finally, I will compare Kraus with Thomas Mann so as to highlight that the particular usage that authors made of particular media (and even typography) contributed to their overall rhetorical (and ultimately political) persona.

Before we deal with the material aspects of "Kraus on stage", it is useful to situate his readings in relation to his main work, his journal *Die Fackel*. Kraus founded his journal *Die Fackel* in 1899; he started to fill its pages as its single author in 1911 and did so until his death in 1936. Kraus was very wary of being recuperated for political purposes. In order to avoid affiliations with politicized newspapers or printing institutions, he self-published his journal under an independent imprint. Kraus did his first public reading in 1910 in Berlin, at the invitation of Herwarth Walden. Although initially convinced that his writing style was too dense to be read out aloud (Timms 1999, 254), Kraus continued to read in public, mainly to provide publicity for his journal, *Die Fackel*. In Vienna, the *Fackel* was largely ignored by the institutionalized press due to Kraus' scathing critique of what he saw as its trend towards boulevard- and tabloid-style journalism. Karl Kraus held exactly 700 public readings, among which 400 in Vienna and 100 in Berlin. His "Theater der Dichtung" (Theatre of Poetry) established a middle ground between cabaret, author readings, lectures and recitals. Like Brecht, Kraus was fond of integrating songs into his spoken-word performance. Kraus increasingly read texts by authors whom he considered valuable: Shakespeare, marginal(ized) authors like Nestroy, Offenbach, two 19<sup>th</sup> century authors of minor forms that had nearly been forgotten, but also emerging avant-garde authors that Kraus himself promoted (Georg Trakl, Frank Wedekind, Else Lasker-Schüler).

Kraus' public readings attracted a cult following in its own time. Audience response is rumoured to have been frantic. "[T]he often ecstatic and hysterical reactions [...] were mostly to the reciter's style rather than to the content of the readings." (Zohn 1997, 88) Both those that appraise his seemingly unassailable self-righteousness and his pitiless castigation of bad taste as well as his detractors equally tend to metaphorize his appearance: various contemporary authors apostrophized Kraus, as a high priest (Trakl), inhabiting a legal space in which Kraus acts both as judge and as plaintiff (Brecht), as a pre-modern cannibal (Walter

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Benjamin) or as sacred Dalai-Lama (Lasker-Schüler). Most of the appraisals take into accounts Kraus' role as a public speaker: Elias Canetti even went as far as to claim that a whole generation of authors had "Die Fackel im Ohr" (Canetti 1993). Walter Benjamin's discussion of Kraus deserves to be referenced somewhat more extensively, since he was the first to highlight the performative element of his satirical writings (which he saw as akin to ancient, barbaric rites of incorporation). Benjamin was thus among the first to note the coexistence of avant-garde progressive influences and reactionary elements in Kraus' performances. In a striking move, Benjamin also links Kraus' pose and diction to that of the "Marktschreier, der den Blick in sein und unser aller Schreckenskabinett mit einmal frei[gibt]" (Benjamin 1972, 517). He thus highlights Kraus' affinity with cabaret and the bustling anarchy of *Volkstheater*. Kraus' usage of songs and popular forms such as the Viennese *Volkstheater* (Raimund and Nestroy) also lead to Kraus' remarkable friendship with Bert Brecht (on Kraus' support of Brecht in the plagiarism-affair over Villon, see Timms 2005, 386f).

But not all observers were as sympathetic towards Kraus' public readings. As of the 1920's, the satirist almost exclusively devoted his programme to readings of Shakespeare, Nestroy and Offenbach, often to the dismay of his audience. His reputation also suffered when he was widely considered to have failed to use his performance to speak out against Hitler. This double turn to timelessness is one of the main reasons why Kraus' public readings have not yet attracted much attention in research so far. In his post-war revision of his attitude towards Kraus, Canetti takes issue with the illicit *Schadenfreude* elicited by Kraus' aggressive satire. The audience's hysterical laughter is now credited with a „mörderische Substanz“ (Canetti 1975, 236). He sees Kraus' audience as a „Hetzmasse aus Intellektuellen“ (Canetti 1975, 41) and, in hindsight, also as a prefiguration of the mass persecutions by the Nazi's. Other authors were also suspicious of Kraus' audience and of the emotions he stirred up, while remaining supportive of Kraus himself: Hermann Broch is wary of the frenetic enthusiasm of the „verständnisinnig gewordene Masse“ (Broch 1975, 32). Robert Musil, himself an author increasingly without any audience during his lifetime, commented derogatively on Kraus' cult following which he saw as akin to „geistige Diktatorenverehrung“ (Musil 1976, 895 ).

It is hard to arrive at a neutral assessment of the impact of Kraus' lecture evenings. Most of the eyewitness accounts have ulterior purposes in writing down their accounts, as most people had accounts to settle with Kraus, who notoriously cultivated a cantankerous and uncompromising persona. In the following section, I will detail the mediativity and materiality of his performances and highlight how important the acoustic dimension was to Kraus' public readings.

## II. Mediatizations on/of the stage

Apart from the occasional musical accompaniment, Kraus' style of performance was low in theatricality. As one eyewitness recounts, Kraus' reading performance took place in very spartan circumstances and was also limited in dramatic gestures:

On the bare stage, a chair behind a little table, upon which there is nothing but the book or heap of papers from which the reading is to be given. There is no need of dramatic gesture, nor can there be any, beyond an occasional movement of the right hand, which must turn the leaves of the book held in the left; but the reader may rely entirely upon the resources of his voice and its inflections. (Bloch 1937, 21)

This account is confirmed by other observers and by a sparse number of pictures that indeed show Kraus sitting down behind a table reading. Kraus did not allow photographs to be taken during his performances (Lunzer 2006, 168). Four pictures have survived (they are included

in Lunzer 2006). They confirm the terseness of the stage. Judging on the basis of their medial make-up, one feels little inclination to compare these lecture performances with the *serrata* of the Italian futurists or with interventionist performance techniques. At the surface level, Kraus' performances remained individual and conventional in outlook. However, at a deeper level, Kraus' performances have their place in a broader context of developments in art and theatre.

It is important to mention that Kraus had trained as an actor, but had given up on conventional playacting after a failed debut as Franz Moor in a suburban staging of Schiller's *Die Räuber* in 1893 (Grimstad 1982, 7). The very theatrical minimalism of Kraus' lecture performances is thus to be seen as a critical stance against all trends of the day (both Naturalism, Reinhardt's Neo-Baroque, and later on, early Expressionism), although Kraus' work shows traces of all these trends. Notwithstanding his opposition to the technical modernisation of the stage, Kraus himself was quick to embrace the new media of his age for his understanding of a genuine "Theater der Dichtung". Kraus was an early adopter of radio technology. Broadcasting began in 1924, and Kraus took to the airwaves as early as 1930. Early radio broadcasts were frequently pre-recorded, and some of these have survived. In an article, Pestalozzi reports on the unease caused by listening to these recordings of Kraus. (Pestalozzi 1991) More in particular, Pestalozzi is surprised by the fact that Kraus delivers his critique of language with the pathos that he frequently sets out to criticize; other hearers will undoubtedly claim that the recordings make him sound like the German emperor Wilhelm II or even Hitler. Kraus speeches contain hysterical climaxes so that he seems to be shrieking. In the following, I will argue that there are three important contexts that influence Kraus' rhetorical habitus and the way we perceive it.

First of all, Kraus' way of delivering his lectures reveals his proximity to *Bühnenaussprache*. *Bühnendeutsch* was the implicit norm for any type of public speech in the imperial era. Nöther argues that the emerging middle class modelled its diction and rhetorical style on the lofty declamation of theatre throughout the imperial era. The *Bühnendeutsch* rhetorical style was extremely loud and characterized by aggressive emphasis of specific words. In order to voice his general contempt for the theatrical achievements of his own day, Kraus would generally laud the 'classical' Burgtheater and its iconic actors like Charlotte Wolter and Adolf Sonnenthal (Carr 2001; Youker 2011, 92), which Kraus nostalgically defended. Various accounts show that the classical *Burgtheater* brandished a typically high-flying diction which shunned individuation of speakers (cf. Meyer-Kalkus 2001, 251-262; Vogel 2002, 333; Nöther 2008). Kraus' selective and strategic memories of the 'original' Burgtheater rhetorical tradition can be illustrated by his attitude towards the actor Josef Kainz, who gained fame through his *Burgtheater* engagement. At the *Burgtheater*, he also played the role of Zwirn in Nestroy's *Lumpazivagabundus*. Kraus polemicized against Kainz (Lacheny 2008, 22), probably also because one of Kraus' most outspoken enemies, the cultural critic Hermann Bahr, had heaped praise on Kainz' modernisation of acting. Kainz mixed various oratory styles, thus adding a psychological touch to the hitherto mainly declamatory style. Karl Kraus was one of the first to signal the oddness of mixing the everyday with the sublime "Schiller tone", full of pathetic vibrations, that Kainz and many of his colleagues used:

Es ist einfach bewundernswürdig, wie die Auguren des Berliner und Wiener Theaterparkets in den Defecten des Herrn Kainz allmählich seine Modernität [...] entdeckt haben. Eine klangreiche, immer vibrierende Stimme hat sie in Tiefen und mystische Schlünde der Kainz'schen Psyche blicken lassen, von deren Vorhandensein der dürftige Herr selbst wohl nie geträumt hat. Ich wüsste nicht, wo das Moderne in der Darstellung eines Hamlet liegt, der willkürlich belanglose Stellen mit schulmäßiger Deutlichkeit scandiert, während er ein Dutzend der aufschlussreichsten Sätze auf einmal in den Mund nimmt, um sie mit ziemlicher Nonchalance ins Orchester zu spucken.“ (Die Fackel Nr. 10, 07.1899, 18; this and all consecutive in-line references are to (Kraus 2007))

It would be mistaken, however, to assume that Kraus criticized Kainz' oratory style because of what we now perceive as its pathos. Kraus opposed Kainz' *varied* oratory style precisely because its bent towards musicality and psychological motivation moved away from the even grander style of older *Burgtheater* actors and actresses like Charlotte Wolter. (Timms 1999, 255) In addition, Kraus was also rallying against Kainz' attempt to stage Nestroy's *Volkstheater* in the lofty and bourgeois sphere of the *Burgtheater*. Nestroy was (like Offenbach) one of the lesser-known authors that Kraus managed to 'revive' through his public readings of their writings.

Only in retrospect, however, the pathos-driven declamatory style of the imperial era came to be associated with the authoritarian and violent nature of some of its most prominent speakers. Prussian officers, for instance, distinguished themselves by adding a haughty "nasal twang" to their pronunciation. (Zimmermann 1987) One of the most striking features of *Bühnenaussprache* is its rolling, alveolar 'r'. Theodor Siebs' influential standardized pronunciation dictionary *Bühnenaussprache* prescribed alveolar pronunciation. Actors probably trained to let the 'r' roll as part of the general effort to enunciate as best as they could. Siebs' dictionary only recognized guttural 'r' as of 1957. It has grown to be the default case in most standard German varieties, although alveolar 'r' continues to be used in standard Austrian pronunciation. Due to these salient markers, Hitler's public voice became associated with this tradition, but this is only a superficial identification.<sup>2</sup> Meyer-Kalkus confirms that there was a culture of sublime declamatory pathos influenced by Schiller's Romantic Idealism that extended well into the twentieth Century. However, he denies that there was a homogeneous culture of pathos prior to the Second World War. (Meyer-Kalkus 2010) Similarly, he argues that pathos did not simply vanish after the war, citing the infamous actor Klaus Kinski and well-known professional speakers like Will Quadflieg and Gert Westphal as examples. It would seem that Kraus squares the circle by introducing dialect speakers and elements of documentary poetics into an elevated discourse of high-flying rhetoric. Kraus himself, however, did not shy away from pathos either. Nevertheless, one would be doing injustice to Kraus by putting too much emphasis on his usage of the "genus grande". He was not only capable of the damning, Biblical diction of the Old Testament; in fact, he used many different stylistic registers from the grand to the mundane. (Kühn 2003, 377) It is to some extent pernicious that our ears condemn us to associate Kraus' lectures solely with this tradition and its political abuse afterwards. The audience that Kraus' lectures attracted was mainly from Jewish descent, and it was part of a bustling Jewish intellectual and cultural scene that was completely eradicated during the Second World War. The effect of exalted speech is to some extent wasted on us since it has come to be associated with abuse of language by fascism.

Secondly, to some extent, technical limitations have an effect on the listening experience and may even induce an uncanny effect in those listening to recordings of Kraus' voice. These recordings mainly stem from so-called shellac discs ("Schellak-Platten"). This compound was used between 1896 and 1948. Shellac was very brittle, however, and it was replaced by vinyl discs as well as by magnetic recording techniques. (cf. Sterne 288; Mervant-Roux 2013) As with the phonograph, sound was recorded by speaking directly into the apparatus and without any electric amplification. It was nearly impossible to record soft sounds. As a consequence, speakers had to (or felt the need to shout) into the recording apparatus. (Müller 143) Given the mechanical nature of the procedure, the range was very limited (600 to 2000 Hertz), so that different speakers may sound quite alike. Hence, the

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<sup>2</sup> There is a plethora of scholarship on the question whether Hitler was a good public speaker. See for instance Kopperschmidt 2003, which shows that Hitler received training and practiced his (very ostentatious and theatrical) gestures.

acoustic archive does not give us an accurate account of natural speech. Cultural studies have captured the effect of estrangement in more theoretical terms.

We can listen to recorded traces of past history, but we cannot presume to know exactly what it was like to hear at a particular time or place in the past. In the age of technological reproduction, we can do no more than presume the existence of an auditory past. (Sterne 2003, 19)

It is interesting to note that Kraus himself comments on the recording techniques of his day and their limitations. His documentary play *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* features a scene in which (silent) filmic footage of the war is 'enhanced' by an officer who has to shout the 'Bumsti', a disrespectful expression of glee, at every explosion. (Lethen 2005, 33) This highlights the fact that audio recording was equally unable to capture loud sounds. Kraus thus shows him very much aware of how technology distorts our view of reality (or serves up its own reality). While some of this critique has become difficult to understand from the point of view of a society in which technology has become so ambient and all-pervasive, it also cautions us to perceive the Kraus recordings as an accurate rendition of the live performance.

Thirdly, through his use of biting satire and by speaking in an aggressive way, Kraus to some extent also echoes artistic beliefs and avant-garde practices of his day. In the pre-war period, there was a cult of strong affects, which were assumed to be effective against the dullness of bourgeois imperial culture. (Wagner 1982, 164) Formerly negative emotions like hate and aggression were transvalued and championed as wholesome and necessary antidotes. Meyer-Sickendiek points to another lineage, namely that of Jewish wit, which often borders on sarcasm and gallows humour. (Meyer-Sickendiek 2009) Karl Kraus' spoken word performance is indeed to be seen as a precursor to the aggressive gallows humour of George Tabori, Edgar Hilsenrath and Elfriede Jelinek. The very choice of Nestroy as a topic is another argumentative move in this regard: By pitching Nestroy against the canon of bourgeois Burgtheater, Kraus speaks to the defence of comic literature and of an alternative canon of authors (Jean Paul, Offenbach, ...) This also brings to the fore what the gambit of Kraus' negotiation with the stage was: In championing comical or light-hearted authors like Nestroy and Offenbach, Kraus aimed to rehabilitate the experience of laughter as an aesthetic and emancipatory one. The negative reactions of contemporary authors cited above shows that these intellectuals were indeed wary of laughter, but as a collective experience, comical laughter is not only destructive (Peiter 2007, 97–142). Laughter is a dimension that obviously flourishes in the live and collective context of the reading performance, even despite Kraus' ruthless image and his authoritarian stipulation of what hearers were allowed to signal. One can venture to see Kraus' performance a kind of cabaret, characterized by gallows humour. As we will discuss in the next section, humour and satire also recuperate on the level of catharsis what was given up in terms of classical drama or illusionism.

### III. *Theatrical minimalism*

Kurt Weill, the avant-garde composer who cooperated intensely with Bert Brecht, also accompanied Kraus. (Hinton 2012) In a letter he claimed that Kraus' art and style of declamation "belonged to a previous generation from which I have little to gain, creatively speaking" (Hinton 2012, 226). In the following, I will argue that this generational gap is indeed the case, but that it can be reinterpreted from the point of view of ulterior generations. Kraus' resistance against theatricality (here understood as visual spectacle, and epitomized by Reinhardt and Piscator) can be easily misunderstood as a conservative critique that pitches text and language against the collective, multimodal and multimedial experience that modern performances have come to embrace since the twentieth century. Yet, by showing the media

involved in Kraus' performance and by highlighting his willingness to embrace the new media of his age (especially radio and even film), a different image of Kraus perspires: When taking into account the inherent gestural quality of his writing, Kraus' lecture performances were very much multimedial and multimodal performances indeed, and Kraus embraced media even at the risk of the obvious limitations that these media imposed precisely on the vocal range and quality of speakers.

In his book *Stage Fright. Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama*, Puchner makes an interesting claim about the relation between the anti-theatrical monodrama of turn-of-the-century modernisms and late 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatrical innovations, which he groups under the common umbrella of diegetic theatre. Puchner starts from the observation that the technologically mediated stage experience reduces or even problematizes the live presence of the live human actor on stage, which, however, "has already been rendered obsolete by modernist anti-theatricalism" (Puchner 2002, 175). Puchner then traces the history of Brechtian anti-theatricality all the way back to Plato. In this view, "diegetic theater", mediated by strongly profiled narrator functions, is the equivalent of technologically mediated theatre experiments like those of the Wooster Group:

the mediatized stage is the continuation of diegetic theater by other, technological means. [...] We might even go so far as to say that the mediatized stage is in fact the continuation of diegetic theater by other, technological means, that our contemporary stage has fully absorbed textual resistance and diegesis into its own technological repertoire. (Puchner 2002, 175)

Puchner is not concerned with Kraus, but with authors like Mallarmé, Gertrud Stein and Joyce: The modernist closet drama (Puchner 2002, 174) mixes stage directions and direct speech, refuses to assign speech to specific *dramatis personae* (or problematizes the notion of personification per se), and frequently features lengthy narrative stage directions. Modernist authors did so to challenge common expectations of theatricality (presence, immediate, pure presence). Postdramatic staging techniques even more strongly problematize character dialogues in order to stress a-signified bodily presence and multimodal effects.

Puchner is right to note that these diegetic techniques have lost their anti-theatrical potential over time; he mentions Robert Wilson as a case in point. It is not my aim to establish a causal link between Karl Kraus and these theatrical innovations. But there is certainly a kind of isomorphic relation between his anti-theatrical solo performances and the aforementioned innovations. Already the table of contents of Kraus' anti-war play *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* reads like a veritable narrative and the *dramatis personae* features characters that problematize the very notion of characters as individual perspective bearers. Furthermore, Kraus blurs the border between primary and secondary text to the extent that stage directions and speaker attributions develop into real narrative texts. All this allows us to develop the tentative notion of Karl Kraus not just as an actor, mimicking multiple roles on the scene of his "geschriebene Schauspielkunst" (F 336-337: 41), but also as a director invested with specific privileges towards his object material. Both the Schober and the Bekessy affairs, in which Kraus managed to drive out of office (or even out of town) well-known personalities, show that his interventionism could have real consequences in reality.

By casting Kraus as a director, we focus on his role as nearly omnipotent stage manager whose vocal and bodily presence dominates not only the stage, but also the audience and, as is claimed, the events and persons of the external world that are the object of his satire. He did so in order to oppose what he saw as excesses of illusionist theatre. Kraus was a life-long opponent of the director Max Reinhardt, whose importance for the re-theatricalization of drama cannot be underestimated. (Kraus 2013, 193–194) However, Kraus was convinced that all visual spectacle was at the detriment of the acoustic dimension of the text. Timms convincingly argues that Reinhardt's aesthetic was closely related to the rise of (silent) film,

whereas radio was indeed Kraus' preferred medium (Timms 2005, 377). Interestingly, Kraus motivates his live "Theater der Dichtung" by way of an opposition to the phonograph and its illusion of authenticity.

Die Widerspenstige mit einer bis in die kleinsten Rollen bewahrten Treue so nachzugestalten, dass ein geschlossenes Auge und ein offenes Ohr der Zeugen jener lebendigen Herrlichkeit nicht mehr den Apparat vermißte, der heute für das offene Auge und das geschlossene Ohr seine toten Wunder verrichtet. Ein so rekonstruiertes älteres Burgtheater, wäre vielleicht wichtiger als ein Phonograph, der die Stimmen der heutigen Schauspieler für die Nachwelt aufbewahrt. (F 426-430, 47f)

Kraus' opposition against the visual is quite remarkable in an age that was enthralled with the rapid development of the film industry. Kraus' tendency to play down the visuality and *physis* of his "Literary Theatre" is thus in line with many other modernist writers' attitude towards drama. Kraus may have sensed an additional need to play down corporeality. Rumours about the alleged deformity and Jewish physiognomy of his body circulated in anti-Semitic smear campaigns and caricatures. Also his language and gestures were targeted. Agitated or exaggerated gesticulation were seen as aspects of *Mauscheln*, an anti-Semitic designation (derived from the name Moische) which was meant to connote dishonesty, corruption. While this derogatory designation mainly documents the incomprehensibility of Jiddisch from the point of view of other languages, it also foregrounds the habit of speaking loudly and with heavy gesticulation. While Kraus went so far as to mount the accusation of *Mauscheln* against his fellow Jewish writer Franz Werfel, Kafka famously said: "Der Witz ist hauptsächlich das Mauscheln, so Mauscheln wie Kraus kann niemand." (Kafka, Letter to M. Brod, June 1921, in: (Kafka 1989, 359) While this is not the place to elaborate on questions of Jewish identity and assimilation, it is worthwhile to touch upon the notion of agitation and exaggeration, because it also surfaced in our discussion of pathos and the hyperbolic acting style. In a typical reaction, Kraus countered the allegation that he would have a hunchback by modifying a common idiomatic expression: "sie können mir den Buckel runterrutschen" means "I want them to get lost" (literally: to slide down someone's hump). (Die Fackel, Nr. 374/375, 1913; see also: Martens 2009) He thus showed that such non-verbal, visual attacks could be countered most efficiently by means of verbal bravado and wordplay. Kraus also evoked similar rumours of bodily deformities that had been pitched against Kierkegaard, which mounts an international literary companion. Hence, Kraus showed that bodily deformities and hate speech can be re-signified in language

A second notion of the body operates at a different level, namely by way of the (simulated) corporeality of the interaction with the audience. This harks back to an influential (Baroque) notion of life as theatre. Kraus was famous for scolding his own audience. This might seem lethal by standards of conversational rhetoric, but it is part of Kraus' fascination (and a source of inspiration for authors as diverse as Elfriede Jelinek, Thomas Bernhard and Jonathan Franzen). "Schimpft alle in der Garderobe / ihr wart mir wehrlos im Saal." (Die Fackel 472-473, 1917, 23) The language of opprobrium is at the same the site of an insistent self-reflexivity and a continued game of deictic reference which makes the audience an essential part of the text and its performance. It would go too far to claim that Kraus 'sculpting' of the 'body social' approaches that of the "soziale Plastik" of Joseph Beuys, Christoph Schlingensiefel and other actionists. It is fruitful to take into account that the spectacle of public satire (belittled by his modernist contemporaries) is to a large extent theatrical in its reliance on figuration, fictionalisation and ultimately catharsis. Robert Musil had indeed noticed this cathartic effect, though derogatively. „Kraus ist die Erlöserfigur; dadurch daß Kraus da ist u. schimpft, ist alles wieder gut. Das objektivierte schlechte Gewissen. Natürlich ist diese Wirkung nicht günstig.“ (Musil 1976, 634) In other words: satire affords the same motion of suspense and resolution; and polemics personify problems

and scandals to the extent that actual characters are no longer needed. Therefore, both can do without conventional theatrical means because they are to a large extent theatrical and carnivalistic as such.

In order to conclude the analogy with anti-illusionism, one can also consider Kraus as a director who adapts texts extensively without sticking to the *Wortlaut* of the original text. Kraus' adaptations of Shakespeare were met with much derision because Kraus openly admitted that he was not able to read the original in English. Whereas Kraus' interfering with the original text was for the longest time seen as heavy-handed and not done, abbreviations of long plays like *Hamlet* as well as scenic readings of classical plays have become quite common. Indeed, scenic readings (rather than stagings) and lecture performances have recently been (re)discovered. (Peters 2011) Kraus justifies his abbreviations with a sneer towards Wagner and the Bayreuth cult of authentic stagings:

Wie also der Hörer fünf bis sieben Stunden Shakespeare ertragen soll, ohne just die wunderbarsten Stellen zu verschlafen. Die einzige Wirklichkeit, in der sich so heroische Ausdauer bewährt, ist der vom Snobismus kommandierte Wahn, der die armen Teufel, zumeist Engländer, noch immer nach Bayreuth treibt und die Bußübung des Parsifal-Genuss mitmachen läßt. (F 426-430, 47f)

In fact, such opposition to this piety towards the repertoire and extreme liberty towards the text have become hallmarks of postdramatic *Regietheater*. Thus, his turn to Shakespeare is not simply a conservative reflex or a lapse into a style "of a previous generation" (Hinton). From the aforementioned constructivist point of view on sound memory studies and translation, rephrasings or appropriating translations of Shakespeare are now believed to be inescapable on grounds of intercultural negotiation.

#### IV. *The writer's speech and democracy*

It is tempting to treat the public addresses of authors as a democratic act or even as a revolutionary *prise de parole*, by virtue of their taking an individual 'stand'. However, we should be careful to do so and consider the historical and political context of public speeches. There are obvious differences in the types of speeches that both authors were giving; Kraus did not adhere to the classical stance of Mann as elocutor of his own ideas. Yet, a brief excursion to Thomas Mann's public persona will further help us to tease out the political context they share, as well as the specifics of Kraus' persona, especially his wavering between older and more progressive performance styles and aesthetics. Nowadays, Thomas Mann's public speeches and especially his radio addresses during exile figure as the epitome of democratic free speech. However, in fact, in 1918 Thomas Mann had spoken out against (French) rhetoric and democracy in his anti-Republican *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918). Even *Doktor Faustus* (published 1947) features a scene in which the narrator strongly condemns the revolutionary speeches which Thomas Mann himself had witnessed in Munich at the end of the First World War:

kein Abzug ist zu machen von dem Wort peinlich, wenn ich die Eindrücke kennzeichnen soll, die ich bei den Versammlungen gewisser, damals ins Leben tretender Räte geistiger Arbeiter, etc. in Münchener Hotelsälen als rein passiver und beobachtender Teilnehmer gewann. Wäre ich ein Romanerzähler, ich wollte dem Leser eine solche Sitzung, bei der etwa ein belletristischer Schriftsteller, nicht ohne Anmut, sogar auf sybaritische und grübelhafte Weise über das Thema Revolution und Menschenliebe sprach und damit eine freie, allzu freie, diffuse und confuse, von den ausgefallensten, nur bei solchen Gelegenheiten einen Augenblick ans Licht tretenden Typen, Hanswürsten, Maniaks, Gespenstern, boshaften Quertreibern und Winkelphilosophen getragene Diskussion entfesselte – Da gab es Reden für und gegen die Menschenliebe, für und gegen die Offiziere, für und gegen das Volk. Das Benehmen der in plumpen Zwischenrufen sich gefallenden Zuhörerschaft war turbulent, kindisch und



verroht, die Leitung unfähig, die Luft fürchterlich und das Ergebnis weniger als Null. (Mann 1987, 453f)

The narrator of the novel takes a very negative attitude towards the revolution, he castigates it as “die selbstgerechte Tugend-Suada des Rhetor-Bourgeois und Sohnes der Revolution, vor sechsundzwanzig Jahren” (Mann 1987, 452). Some of the formulations cite Thomas Mann’s own letters and diaries, which all testify to his anti-democratic attitude at the time. In spite of Thomas Mann’s reservations, the artists’ republic has been celebrated as an experiment in radical democracy (Bru 2009, 236).<sup>3</sup> Mann’s attitude towards the November revolution and the ensuing establishment of the Weimar Republic changed over time. Nevertheless, his distrust of public orators never faded. His novel *Der Zauberberg* features a character named Peepkorn, who is, in fact, a thinly veiled description of Gerhart Hauptmann. A former champion of Naturalism, Hauptmann was cultivating his image as a *poeta vates*. With his portrayal, Mann toys with the allegation that Hauptmann needed to cultivate the (unmistakable) charisma of his personal presence in order to compensate for his lack of innovating literary production.

In the following, I will detail a mirror situation of the above because it will ultimately



Image 1. Thomas Mann’s “Deutsche Ansprache. Ein Appell an die Vernunft” in Berlin, October 17 1930. Picture © Ullstein bild/Lebrecht Music & Arts.

allow me to determine Kraus’ ambivalent position as a public speaker. The rhetorical turbulence described in *Doktor Faustus* echoes a situation in which Thomas Mann had found himself as a public speaker in 1930. Thomas Mann gave a speech in Berlin on October 17, 1930 (Image 1), shortly after the NSDAP had achieved its first outstanding result in the elections. Thomas Mann’s first public address in favour of democracy was interrupted by the paramilitary

organisation SA, seconded by Arnolt Bronnen, a Jewish-Austrian playwright and Ernst Jünger. (cf.

Wagner 2001; Kiesel 2009, 335–339) The photo grasps the moment when the audience turns away from the speaker in order to locate the source of the disruption. It shows the famous author strikingly weaned from the attention and esteem that was showered on him throughout his career.

The confrontation between Mann and his hecklers in Berlin 1930 brings to light an important ideological divide that also affects the assessment of Kraus as a public speaker: Mann’s 1930 plea for rationality and democracy is a confession to the ideal of a rational public sphere, whereas Bronnen and his cronies are motivated by an anti-bourgeois attitude which favours a magical and irrational collective public sphere. Bronnen’s action was modelled on Marinetti’s conception of performance, which unites theatricality, rebellion and politics. At this point, it is useful to consider Kraus’ own position within this epochal debate. It is fair to question whether the emphatic metaphorisations of Kraus’ performance are as mystifying or over the top as we tend to think they are. Brecht’s image of the judge is reinforced by the optical evidence. Kraus criticizes the magic and lure inherent in language. But he does so in a rhetorical way that may not be entirely free from trying to emulate ancient,

<sup>3</sup> On Kraus’ attitude towards the Räterepublik, see Stewart (2009, pp.40–44).

pre-rational speech acts and cultural techniques of execration and purging (again aptly noted by authors like Musil and others). On the other hand, the comparison with Thomas Mann also highlights an interesting difference on a more material and probably also subliminal level. Kraus announced his readings with billboards typeset in his preferred Antiqua (and thus: Roman) font. While Roman fonts have come to dominate typography, they were nothing less than a statement by Kraus at the time. Thomas Mann's *Deutsche Hörer. 25 Radiosendungen nach Deutschland* are set in typical German *Fraktur* (Mann 1942). The early Canetti, still in favour of Kraus, expounds the effect of seeing the poster demanding Schober's resignation in Kraus' typical font and layout in public. He writes that it was "as if all the justice on earth had entered the letters of Kraus's name." (Canetti 1993, 232; see also: Jonsson 2003, 82) He was, of course, foremost enthralled with the courage and the candid oppositional nature of the *message*. However, to some extent the terse layout subliminally conveys the branding of the typical Krausian *letter font*, which was progressive due to its association with things French and Roman (and hence, at the time, as un-German). All these clues yield a fundamentally ambiguous picture: Kraus to some extent announces future developments, but this impression clashes with the fact that Kraus chose to render his finely chiselled argumentations and his often progressive attitudes (towards homosexuality and matters political) in a heightened and exclamatory tone.

## V. Conclusion

Karl Kraus' performance as a public speaker has attracted little attention so far. In this article, we focused on the material circumstances which skew our view of Kraus as a public speaker. Various cultural and theatrical traditions influenced Kraus' public persona, and some of these literally tend to sound unusual or even counterproductive to our ears. Reducing his speech patterns or gestures to merely one of these influences, however, tends to reduce the complexity of what Kraus was aiming for when giving public lectures. While Kraus' public appearances were nowhere as rowdy or revolutionary as the actions or the *serrata* of the avant-garde movements, they were to some extent an art of provocation that also had interventionist features. From a comparison with Thomas Mann, one can also deduce that Kraus' public persona wavers between that of a verbal magician and that of a debunker of the idea that any such magic should be allowed to secretly inhere in the usage of language and rhetoric. The key to understanding this paradox is that in Kraus text (as language) and theatricality do not exclude, but mutually support each other. By taking into account how Kraus interacts with historically sedimented traditions of oral delivery and their medial innovations, it has been shown how Kraus distances himself from the rational and moderated pose (epitomized in his age by Thomas Mann) in favour of a stance that bears at least some similarities to later trends towards actionism and directors' theatre (*Regietheater*).

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