

## Chapter 4

### Playing Together: Modeling Authorship of a Downtown Opera

“The ideology [of the romantic myth of the artist] posits a perfect correlation between doing the core activity and being an artist. If you do it, you must be an artist. Conversely, if you are an artist, what you do must be art. This produces confusion when, from either a commonsense point of view or from the standpoint of the art’s tradition, that correlation does not occur. . . . Another confusion arises when no one can tell which one or ones of the several people involved in the production of the work have the special gift and therefore the right both to receive the credit for the work’s ultimate character and to direct the activities of others.”

— Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (1982; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 16, 18–21.

#### 4.1 An Imperfect Correlation between Art and Artist

While collaborations between composers and writers abound throughout opera’s history, collaborations between composers and directors are atypical of the genre.<sup>312</sup> Thus, when Robert Wilson and Philip Glass agreed to coauthor an opera in 1974, inviting Andrew de Groat to choreograph two scene-length dances and asking three other performers to contribute spoken text, they deliberately played with the expectations of their chosen genre. This play had important implications for *Einstein’s* reception, and thus for both Glass’s and Wilson’s careers and for our understanding of the work’s relevance to the avant-garde and institutional art worlds in which it participated. Just as Glass and Wilson conditioned *Einstein’s* reception as an opera by wedding typically operatic performance

---

<sup>312</sup> Among *Einstein’s* operatic forbears and descendants that involved creative collaborations between composers and specific directors are Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht’s *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1927–30) and *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928), and John Adams and Peter Sellars’s so-called “CNN operas” (*Nixon in China* [1987], *The Death of Klinghoffer* [1991], and *Doctor Atomic* [2005]). While twentieth century music theater in the United States and Europe increasingly relied upon relationships between directors and composers, as the Brecht/Weill collaborations exemplify, even modernist operas that sought to introduce avant-garde trends in music and/or the other arts to opera, such as Virgil Thomson’s and Gertrude Stein’s *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1927–28), or Morton Feldman’s and Samuel Beckett’s monodrama *Neither* (1977), did not rely on the director as a creative contributor, maintaining distance between opera and experimental theater.

forces and venues to downtown aesthetics, so they also combined the authorial expectations of traditional opera (composer and librettist) with those of New York's experimental downtown theater (collective, frequently under a director-*auteur* like Wilson and Richard Foreman). The result was a hybrid project whose composer and director laid equal claim to authorship of the work as a whole, the former taking responsibility for the music and "lyrics" (the numbers and solfège that comprise the opera's sung text), and the latter taking responsibility for its direction and "visual book" (the sketches of the *mise-en-scène*).

From the beginning, joint authorship presented difficulties for *Einstein's* composer and director and its audiences. In 1976 Glass worried that Wilson's more prominent European reputation would overshadow his own, and newspapers and magazines were left wondering whether they should send theater or music critics to performances. By and large, publications hedged their bets by sending theater critics, resulting in reviews that frequently skewed toward Wilson's contributions, though as the reception history tracked in chapter 2 attests, the presence of Glass's music throughout the opera figured prominently in debates about the work's operatic legitimacy. Music and theater historians likewise found themselves in the awkward position of trying to assimilate the interdisciplinary work into discipline-specific narratives, the result of which has frequently involved the glossing over of one collaborator's contributions to bring *Einstein* into line with the standard authorial conventions of opera or avant-garde theater.<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, the collaborators who contributed the work's choreography (Andrew de Groat and Lucinda Childs), spoken text (Christopher Knowles, Samuel M. Johnson, and Lucinda Childs), and prominent improvised musical material (the Philip Glass Ensemble woodwinds), while billed as contributors, have received only cursory critical and academic consideration as authors of *Einstein*. This is in large part because critics, interviewers, filmmakers, and scholars have empowered Glass and Wilson with the authority to shape the

---

<sup>313</sup> See, for example, Holmberg, *The Theatre of Robert Wilson*, 9–22; Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 128–38.

*Einstein* narrative.<sup>314</sup> This chapter, then, considers the traditional divisions of labor in opera and theater and how they may have conditioned *Einstein's* advocates to explicitly or implicitly treat either Glass or Wilson as the opera's chief artist, ignoring or only cursorily accounting for their collaborators' contributions. In response to these issues of accreditation, I outline a model of collective authorship that better represents the creative activity underlying the downtown opera's unusual assembly. This model allows for a more nuanced exploration in chapter 5 of how the opera's director, composer, choreographers, writers, and musical improvisers negotiated the creative control and symbolic capital that authorial recognition carries with it.

#### 4.1.1 Opera Authorship and Film Credits

"Imagine, as one extreme case," Howard Becker wrote in *Art Worlds*, "a situation in which one person," or in *Einstein's* case, two people, "did everything: made everything, invented everything, had all the ideas, performed or executed the work, experienced and appreciated it, all without the assistance or help of anyone else. We can hardly imagine such a thing, because all the art we know, like all the human activities we know, involve the cooperation of others."<sup>315</sup> Chapters 2 and 3 of this study examined the "assistance or help" critics provided in establishing *Einstein's* operatic ontology, as well as the avant-garde influences whose ideas informed the work's promotion and reception for uptown and downtown audiences. Within the sphere of the opera itself, Glass's and Wilson's ability to produce *Einstein* likewise relied on the cooperation of others, namely performers including their choreographers, writers, and musical improvisers. As an example of how specialized divisions of labor can become, Becker offers the highly differentiated technical and creative work that goes into the production of most films. While he uses film credits as an extreme instance of art world activity, claiming that "situations of art making lie somewhere between the extremes of one person doing everything and every smallest activity being done by a separate person," his film example is instructive in rethinking the creative

---

<sup>314</sup> For example, *Absolute Wilson*, directed by Katharina Otto-Bernstein (2006; New York, NY: Film Manufacturers, Inc., 2007), DVD; Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 28–48.

<sup>315</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 7.

relationships that sustain a collaborative art form like opera, which are so often obscured by the conventional attribution of the work to a single composer.<sup>316</sup>

Taking film and the debates that have shaped discussions of cinematic authorship as a model, the following discussion thus posits a distinction between *conceptual* and *contributing* authorship. The hierarchy this distinction implies points up Glass's and Wilson's creative control over their collaborators' contributions (like film directors or producers) and acknowledges the conventional tendency among critics and historians to cede control of the work's narrative to them. This distinction also, however, recovers and valorizes collaborators' contributions as crucial elements (like a screenplay or cinematography) of the cooperative activity that produced *Einstein*, activity whose collective orientation maintained a crucial link to the downtown theater scene even as the opera was presented on the stages of the Opéra-Comique and the Met. While *Einstein's* celebrity stemmed in part from its unique hybridization of downtown theatrical and operatic creative models, expanding our field of view to encompass creative labor outside that which is executed by conventional authors holds analytical and historical potential beyond a single oddball opera. All of the performing arts are to some degree collaborative in conception and execution, and attending to the organizational structures and interpersonal negotiations that fuel this activity brings new historical perspectives to culturally salient artworks.

#### **4.2 Reception of *Einstein* as a Glass Opera or a Wilson "Opera"**

"Nothing in the technology of any art," Becker claimed, "makes one division of tasks more 'natural' than another, although some divisions are so traditional that we often regard them as given in the nature of the medium."<sup>317</sup> Such is the case of Western opera, in which the musical composer is traditionally considered the primary figure contributing "the special gifts or sensibility of an artist" to the work."<sup>318</sup> Because educational and performing arts institutions reinforce the attribution of operas to musical composers through conventionalized

---

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 16.



pedagogical, presentational, and commissioning practices, this division of labor (and thus system of accreditation) is rarely called into question. In *Einstein's* case, however, the operatic director, who is traditionally an interpreter of a composer's dramatic intentions, became an author on par with the composer, disrupting the conventions governing operatic attribution by introducing the authorial practices of avant-garde theater. Scholarship on operatic and theatrical authorship tends toward standard practice, exposing the roots of the disciplinary bias that has led scholars to approach *Einstein* as either a Glass opera or a Wilson "opera," and thus revealing the need for a customized model that can account for the work's collaborative dynamics.

#### **4.2.1 *Einstein* and Conventional Approaches to Opera and Theater Authorship**

Musicological considerations of operatic authorship are typically restricted to exploring the expressive connections between poet/text and composer/music, as Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker do in the introduction to their recent general history of the genre, or else examining the ways in which specific artists have been influenced by or responded to their historical context.<sup>319</sup> In *Opera as Drama*, Joseph Kerman even goes so far as to differentiate opera from other forms of theater by asserting the primacy of the composer's creative authority over the work. Embracing the music theorist Edward T. Cone's contention that whether or not musical and verbal messages reinforce or contradict one another, it is the music rather than the text "that is authoritative in defining the ultimate meaning of the work," Kerman sums up this traditional position in four words: "Music articulates the drama."<sup>320</sup> Glass and Wilson, however, endeavored to produce an artwork that might be expressed (in Kerman's terms) as an opera in which music and drama articulate one another. Wilson explained this approach in an interview during the rehearsal period of the opera's 2012 revival tour:

Can I create something on stage that I see that helps me hear the music better than when my eyes are closed? So often what happens in the visual

---

<sup>319</sup> Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 2–12.

<sup>320</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 17.

“book” of theater is that it’s seconding what I’m hearing, or it’s illustrating or it’s decoration. . . . Theater should be architectural, so that if Phil [Glass]’s music is going quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, quickly, and there’s a movement that’s very slow, there’s a tension that’s created between what I’m hearing and seeing, and perhaps watching this slow movement of something that’s changing rapidly creates a tension that would not be there when my eyes are closed.<sup>321</sup>

Wilson’s aesthetic aims notwithstanding, Kerman’s view of operatic authorship, which continues to inform critical and academic reception of operas, has clearly favored Glass with respect to audio recordings that, with the exception of liner notes, cannot reproduce Wilson’s visual contribution. A traditional approach to operatic attribution also favors Glass where performances of *Einstein* staged by new directors are concerned. These productions rely on Glass’s score as the operatic text, replacing Wilson’s contributions entirely or drawing on his imagery solely for inspiration. Furthermore, performances like those at the Stuttgart State Opera in 1987 (dir. Achim Freyer) and at the State Opera of South Australia in 2014 (dir. Leigh Warren) presented *Einstein* as one third of the “Portrait Trilogy” that also includes Glass’s next two (conventionally authored) operas, *Satyagraha* (1979) and *Akhmaten* (1983), reinforcing institutional attribution of the 1976 opera to Glass.

In terms of theater scholarship, Robert Wilson has not much suffered from this parallel production history. Indeed, drama historians invariably place him at the top of the division of *Einstein*’s artistic labor, just as opera companies and music critics and historians have done for Glass. This equally skewed reception stems from the critical reception of *Einstein*’s first tour in 1976, which tended to attract theater critics. Wilson also had much more avant-garde star power in Europe than Glass did in the mid-1970s. It was largely his reputation that attracted impresarios like the French Minister of Culture Michel Guy and agent Ninon Tallon Karlweiss, and it was networking by the managing director at his Byrd Hoffman Foundation that provided the necessary professional connections to get *Einstein* onto the Met stage. Furthermore, from an Artaudian perspective, Wilson was the project’s guiding *metteur-en-scène*, while Glass provided only the sonic

---

<sup>321</sup> Glass and Wilson, interview by Anne Bogart, “The Power of 2.” My transcription.

element of the overall theatrical experience. Focusing on the theatrical milieu of which Glass and Wilson were a part in the mid-1970s, Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi point out in *The New Music Theater* that even experimental theater works with significant musical components have typically been attributed to their directors rather than their composers, for “the engine that drives most of this work is the staging, which is the real equivalent of a script or libretto; in most of these works it is the stage director, not the composer, who is the true *auteur*.”<sup>322</sup>

Theater historians’ focus on the authority of the stage director rather than a composer can be traced to the historical theatrical avant-garde, including two of the pillars of *Einstein’s* aesthetic lineage considered in chapter 3. In *The Theater and Its Double*, a foundational text for many of the drama collectives that made up the scene in which *Einstein* participated, Artaud wrote:

The typical language of the theater will be constituted around the *mise en scène* considered not simply as the degree of refraction of a text upon the stage, but as the point of departure for all theatrical creation. And it is in the use and handling of this language that the old duality between author and director will be dissolved, replaced by a sort of unique Creator upon whom will devolve the double responsibility of the spectacle and the plot.<sup>323</sup>

Of musical instruments, he wrote only, “[t]hey will be treated as objects and as part of the set,” and of a composer, he made no mention.<sup>324</sup> Bertolt Brecht similarly placed the playwright at the center of his epic theater, declaring, “The

---

<sup>322</sup> Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 231. To use Glass as an example, his work with Mabou Mines leading up to *Einstein on the Beach* was either taped or scored for the group’s performers rather than Glass’s ensemble, and because his contribution did not necessitate performing live with the group, his work has been received as a contribution along the lines of set design. Furthermore, even though a choral work like *Music For Voices* (1972) was billed as a collaboration between Glass and Mabou Mines, its presentation by the theater group has resulted in its reception as part of the group’s repertory rather than as a piece by Glass.

<sup>323</sup> Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 93–5; Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 111–13. The original French reads: “C’est autour de la mise en scène, considérée non comme le simple degré de réfraction d’un texte sur la scène, mais comme le point de départ de toute création théâtrale, que se constituera le langage type du théâtre. Et c’est dans l’utilisation et le maniement de ce langage que se fondra la vieille dualité entre l’auteur et le metteur en scène, remplacés par une sorte de Créateur unique, à qui incombera la responsabilité double de spectacle et de l’action.”

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.* On the role of musical instruments in the theater of cruelty, he writes, “Ils seront employés à l’état d’objets et comme faisant partie du décor.”

playwright could work out his experiments in uninterrupted collaboration with actor and stage designer; he could influence and be influenced," while the painter and composer could work independently.<sup>325</sup> Given Wilson's integration by theater scholars into the history of this avant-garde strain of twentieth-century theater, it follows that such writers have routinely recognized Wilson as the key creative hand guiding *Einstein*, even if Glass retained creative autonomy in the Brechtian sense. Biographies of Wilson and studies devoted to his "theater of images" likewise take his *auteur* status for granted. "Since he is the complete *homme de théâtre*," the historian and director Arthur Holmberg has written, "his work cuts across traditional genres: drama, dance, opera, visual art, performance art, video, film, music, vaudeville," so that "the word *Gesamtkunstwerk* arises when discussing Wilson's multichannel theatre."<sup>326</sup> Even in general studies such as Arnold Aronson's *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*, *Einstein* is presented as a key moment in Wilson's career because of its introduction of music to his oeuvre, and because it constituted Wilson's first foray into a genre with which he has since regularly engaged and over whose direction and design he has exerted significant influence. "Somewhat like modern-day Wagners," Aronson writes, invoking the towering figure of fin-de-siècle opera to describe not composers, but dramaturges, "[Richard] Foreman and [Robert] Wilson each created a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that was the product of a unique and very personal vision," a theater that "was in fact about a post-Einsteinian way of apprehending the universe, a universe of uncertainty principle and chaos theory. (In fact, one of Foreman's plays is called *Particle Theory*, and Wilson's most famous opera is *Einstein on the Beach*.)"<sup>327</sup> In his comparison of Wilson to Wagner and *Einstein* to a total artwork, Aronson notably makes no mention of Glass.

Because the focus of such studies is either specific to theater as a discipline or biographical, such writers inevitably frame Glass as a collaborator and present *Einstein* as a Wilson "opera." In spite of these differences in authorial emphasis

---

<sup>325</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 134. My emphasis. The quote originates in a lecture originally published as "Über experimentelles Theater" in *Theater der Zeit* 4 and *Schriften zum Theater* 3 (East Berlin: 1959), 79–106.

<sup>326</sup> Holmberg, *The Theatre of Robert Wilson*, 1.

<sup>327</sup> Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre*, 111–12.

along disciplinary lines and the reputational pitfalls they have entailed, Glass and Wilson remained committed to collaboration as a creative practice as they gained traction in more conventional institutional settings, though for different reasons.

#### 4.2.2 Collaboration and Glass's and Wilson's Working Styles

Collaboration is central to Wilson's theater praxis. "Wilson has repeatedly said that his only really solitary work is drawing," Wilson biographers Miguel Morey and Carmen Pardo have noted, "while the rest of his creations are the product of a collective process."<sup>328</sup> Initially, this collective process incorporated performances by the members of his School of Byrds, his creative meeting of minds with the deaf mute boy Raymond Andrews and the autistic youth Christopher Knowles fueling his imagination and the theater that resulted during the 1970s. With *Einstein*, he began to work with professional, auditioned actors and singers, and pursued collaborative relationships like the one he shared with Glass for many subsequent large-scale theater works; for example, *The Black Rider* (1990), a three-way collaboration between Wilson, the musician Tom Waits, and the writer William S. Burroughs, based on Carl Maria von Weber's 1821 opera *Der Freischütz*. Unlike many of his downtown theater peers, Wilson has studiously avoided linking his collaborative working style to any particular theoretical or ideological orientation, suggesting that it is largely the product of an idiosyncratic approach to theater rooted in his work as a teacher and visual artist. For Glass, however, theatrical collaboration seems to carry political overtones regarding authorship that were quite characteristic of the downtown performing-arts scene.

In his 1987 autobiography *Music by Philip Glass*, the composer offered a perspective on authorship in musical theater that expressly drew attention to the authorial possibilities inherent in collaboration. He identified four theatrical roles for the composer: contributor of incidental music, coauthor with directors and writers, principal author with a group of collaborators, and in a more Cageian vein, a composer of works "that are completely written in terms of the music but

---

<sup>328</sup> Morey and Pardo, *Robert Wilson*, 40.

await the contribution of other as yet unknown authors in order to be completed for the theater.”<sup>329</sup> It is not unimportant that he identifies these “as yet unknown” contributors as “authors” rather than “directors” or “choreographers.” Such identifications would place them in subsidiary positions with respect to the composer, so his choice of wording subtly undermines accepted standards of attribution in musical theater and opera. Moreover, even regarding projects for which he had served as principal author, Glass freely admitted that while “the initial idea and impulse was mine,” he “invited people of different capacities to aid [him] in the execution.” He explained:

This is closer to the traditional role of the opera composer. But when one considers to what extent collaboration can contribute to the final shaping of a work, it will be obvious that this process is far different from what has brought new works to opera houses in the past.<sup>330</sup>

Glass’s expansion of this point indicates that he wished to emphasize collaboration as a difference that marked his operas as exceptional among new contributions to the genre:

For the most part, these operas in the Italian and German traditions were the work of one man with one vision (the contributions of librettists notwithstanding). The opera houses of the past simply produced these works and did not function as workplaces where artists from different fields collaborated on joint projects. Most modern operas written for present-day opera houses are conceived in exactly the same way.<sup>331</sup>

Glass’s implication seems to be that even in cases in which he serves as the principal author, he treats the opera house as a collaborative workplace. Unspoken but implicit in these statements is the idea that this approach is more productive or desirable than traditional operatic composition and performance practices. It bears noting that Glass likely would not have so publicly advocated collaborative authorship had he felt that it put his ability to accrue symbolic capital at risk. After all, during the decade between *Einstein* and the release of his first autobiography, Glass had secured his reputation as an opera composer of international stature, so in 1987, he could afford to appear generous in a way that

---

<sup>329</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 208.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

he could not in 1976. Reputational concerns aside, however, Glass's commitment to collaborative work over the course of his entire mature career, both before and after he achieved recognition outside New York's counterculture, hints at continuing sympathy with the anti-commercial, community-oriented politics of the downtown art world in the 1970s. A belief in collaboration as an improvement over the status quo would indeed have been an asset in SoHo during the 1970s, where a deliberately cultivated sense of community constituted not just a practical way for financially strapped young artists to support one another and their work, but also a rebellion against the impersonal indifference of the culture industry. In view of Glass's residence in this community and his relationship with the theater collective Mabou Mines, the composer's valorization of collaboration is indicative of his social and professional affiliations as well as personal preference. In her history of Mabou Mines's early years, Iris Smith Fischer explains:

The defining element of the avant-garde in the 1970s was its search for a living tradition through the shaping of community, which brought together like-minded artists 'outside' the ideology of mainstream culture. The community characterized its activity as a generous artistic and personal exchange that seemed to offer the possibility of escape from the conventional subject positions of writer, director, designer, actor, dancer, sculptor, painter, and musician. In an ironic yet utopian gesture, avant-garde artists threw themselves, often with a certain self-conscious humor, against forces and institutions seen as responsible for the selling out and commodification of both the work and the artist.<sup>332</sup>

Fischer concludes that, "[t]his avant-garde attempt to undermine the individual's embedded responses to a culturally imposed identity" enabled the artists and their audiences to realize "a more complete human identity for themselves than they could find or create elsewhere."<sup>333</sup> As a pedagogically-informed artistic praxis and a political stance toward creative labor in a capitalist art economy, collaboration set Wilson's and Glass's work apart from that of artists outside the downtown art world by challenging the status quo through both art itself and, to

---

<sup>332</sup> Fischer, *Mabou Mines*, 11.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

borrow Becker's sociological frame, "the cooperative networks through which art happens."<sup>334</sup>

### 4.3 Death of the Author, Birth of the Collaborator

At the time of *Einstein's* creation, the generally accepted concept of an author as a self-expressive entity was the subject of controversial academic speculation of which many downtown artists were aware.<sup>335</sup> Beginning in the 1960s, critical theorists and philosophers in France sought to blow open the interpretive potential of literary texts by destabilizing or decentering the role of the author, paralleling similar challenges by avant-garde artists (most notably, John Cage) to traditional views of an author's role with respect to his or her art and audience. Rejecting the idea that each text possessed a single purpose, meaning, or existence, poststructuralist writers instead located meaning at the moment of reception, severing the long-assumed equivalence of authorial intent and textual meaning. By insisting that *Einstein* was meaningful, but that only its audience members could endow it with particular meaning(s), Glass and Wilson were clearly in step with, if not consciously adhering to, a current of thought that led Roland Barthes to provocatively declare in 1967, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."<sup>336</sup>

The composer and director were certainly active participants in an art scene whose subversion of Romantic ideology through practices like chance operations and collective development of original plays paralleled the poststructuralists' reassessment of the author as a source of conceptual ideas versus meanings. Michel Foucault's claim that an author is no more than "a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses," turns the

---

<sup>334</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 1.

<sup>335</sup> See, for example, John Howell, "Avant Garde 1976: les performances," *Art Press International*, 14–15, Box 113, Folder 2344: "1976 Art Press International (French)," Mabou Mines Archive. Text first published in *Art-Rite* 10, Autumn 1975.

<sup>336</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 148. Notably, this essay was first published in English, in the multimedia magazine *Aspen* in 1967, a publication that also presented work by Andy Warhol, Susan Sontag, Morton Feldman, John Cage, La Monte Young, Robert Rauschenberg, Hans Richter, and John Lennon and Yoko Ono. While neither Glass nor Wilson specifically mention the magazine. They both arrive in SoHo in 1967, and may therefore have been aware of Barthes's now-famous essay.



colloquial understanding of an author as a human being (let alone one who controls the meaning of his or her work) on its head.<sup>337</sup> Foucault's definition also helpfully draws attention to precisely why Glass, Wilson, and their colleagues found conventional authorial practices worth subverting, contesting, and negotiating. Indeed, by conceiving of an author discursively, as a "functional principle" by which people limit, exclude, and choose, Foucault highlighted the social contingency of attribution and the symbolic and economic capital that recognition brings. High-minded theoretical debates aside, Glass and Wilson were therefore well aware of the stakes in establishing authorial credentials with respect to *Einstein*, and took great care in regulating the opera's creative production and steering its reception. What kind of collaborative model, then, did this kind of management produce, and what differentiates Glass's and Wilson's contributions from those of their collaborators?

#### 4.3.1 Cinema as a Model for Collective Authorship in Opera

C. Paul Sellors explicitly addresses the differentiation of creative contributions in relation to film, a medium that, like theater, is almost always the product of collaboration and thus collective authorship, but in which one or a few individuals—usually directors, and rarely writers, actors, or producers—are regularly treated by critics and scholars as the sole or most important author(s).<sup>338</sup> "The close relationship between opera/music theater and cinema," Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi affirm, "has been often noted but, surprisingly, not very well studied," and venturing onto the interdisciplinary terrain between these fields is particularly advantageous in highlighting the *auteur*-driven assumptions about authorship that marginalize the rich interpersonal histories of collectively authored works like film and opera.<sup>339</sup> Because moving images arrived on the cultural landscape so recently among the arts, and the process of establishing academic credibility necessitated critical agreement on what constituted a "good" film, the discipline of film studies has, since its emergence

---

<sup>337</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 2003), 390.

<sup>338</sup> C. Paul Sellors, "Collective Authorship in Film," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 263–71.

<sup>339</sup> Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 284.

from film criticism, been shaped by debates over canonicity, and as part and parcel of that Romantic structure, authorship. The discipline thus offers a rich theoretical discourse surrounding authorship, one that may be profitably applied to opera, and particularly to an outlier like *Einstein on the Beach*.

To provide some background on this discourse, during the 1950s, a series of critical essays in the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* claimed that certain directors were *auteurs* much in the same vein as Artaud's all-powerful *metteur-en-scène*, controlling their films' expression by dint of their creative oversight even when they did not personally realize every element (e.g., cinematography, acting, editing).<sup>340</sup> Identifying films of quality based on critics' assessment of the talent or genius of their directors was an approach that was conducive to the construction of a canon of great films. Furthermore, it facilitated the task of identifying what elements made a film a work of art, for it is far easier to attribute a film to one author and subsume the collective actions of tens, hundreds, or even thousands of other individuals under his or her creative intention than to contend with the messy, complicated social practice of filmmaking. Early in this debate, the influential French critic André Bazin poked a series of holes in this theory, chief among them the fact that even a brilliant director might produce a bad film, and therefore authorship alone was not a strong enough criterion to serve as the primary standard for measuring filmic quality. Later, scholars took issue not just with the practice of judging a film by its director, but more fundamentally, with the underlying assumption that the director alone was artistically responsible for his or her films. "Rather than rigidly categorizing films by their directors," Berys Gaut argued in 1997, "films should be multiply classified: by actors, cameramen, editors, composers, and so on."<sup>341</sup> Even so, he continued, while "the figure of the film author [is] sometimes supposed to have been engulfed by the tides of semiotics and post-structuralism which swept over film studies in the 1970s," the equation of direction with

---

<sup>340</sup> For an evaluation of the critical debates that contributed to the development of auteur theory, see Donald E. Staples, "The Auteur Theory Reexamined," *Cinema Journal* 6 (1966–67): 1–7.

<sup>341</sup> Berys Gaut, "Film Authorship and Collaboration," in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997), 165.

authorship remains a widely shared assumption, for whether a filmic author is construed as a real figure or a constructed entity, “the notion of film authorship—so appealing to lay intuition and scholarly understanding alike—is oddly mysterious and deeply elusive.”<sup>342</sup>

Reception of performing arts that rely on creative collaboration also tends to operate according to a limited conception of authorship because of its intuitive appeal. The ephemeral nature of live performance, moreover, exacerbates the impulse to identify as authors only those artists whose work leaves observable textual traces. Sellors offers a theoretical corrective to this tendency by presenting a definition of authorship that is expansive enough to include frequently unrecognized contributors while limiting claims of authorship only to those agents who “intentionally token an utterance” within the artistic medium in question.<sup>343</sup> He particularly emphasizes the importance of intention as a limiting factor on attribution, reasoning (not unlike Becker) that collaborative endeavors come into being at the interstices of individual and collective intentions and the actions that follow from them. Working against *auteur* theory’s narrow model of attribution, Sellors helpfully distinguishes between an author who intentionally tokens an utterance and one who tokens an utterance that is not just intentional, but also meaningful and a work of art.<sup>344</sup> This distinction is instructive in grasping *Einstein*’s two-tiered creative production, as Glass and Wilson’s joint conception of the opera’s structure, and their control over its content and processes, has tended to overshadow contributions to the opera’s content (curated by Glass and Wilson) by several performers. That these collaborators tokened utterances that were intended to be meaningful within the overall work—the most obvious example of which is the spoken text, which took the place of a traditional opera libretto—identifies them as what Sellors would term

---

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>343</sup> Building on philosopher and film scholar Paisley Livingston’s definition, Sellors identifies an author as “the agent (or agents) who intentionally token(s) an utterance, where ‘to token’ refers to any action, an intended function of which is expression or communication and an utterance is the result of the act of tokening within a symbolic system.” Sellors, “Collective Authorship in Film,” 265.

<sup>344</sup> To explain this distinction, Sellors cites the difference in value, rather than classification, between a monkey intentionally tokening the utterance “I want a banana” and Shakespeare intentionally tokening the play *Henry V*. Ibid., 265–66.

IMA (an Intentional author of a Meaningful Artistic utterance) rather than the more general IM (an Intentional author of a Meaningful utterance that is not intended to be received as art) of, for instance, a program note writer. By that account, upward of ten choreographers, spoken text writers, and musicians other than Glass and Wilson can defensibly be considered IMA of *Einstein on the Beach*. How, then, can we usefully differentiate the contributions (and consequent billing and reception) of Glass and Wilson from their collaborators?

Glass and Wilson conceptualized the opera during a series of lunch meetings that, before any other artists were brought on board, resulted in a musical score and a series of sketches visualizing the title, skeletal structure, thematic content, and duration of the work. Without this initial creative formulation into which one might insert further creative contributions, *Einstein* could not have existed, and Glass and Wilson may thus be reasonably considered the opera's *conceptual* authors. They conceived the work as a whole, and controlled outside creative contributions with respect to that conception. With regard to their collaborators, Christopher Knowles, an autistic teen with whom Wilson had worked on several projects, contributed the bulk of the opera's spoken text, and was the only creative collaborator not to appear in the opera itself.<sup>345</sup> As Glass recalled a decade later, Wilson suggested that Andrew de Groat choreograph dances for the two Field scenes because like Sheryl Sutton—the actor who performed opposite Lucinda Childs—de Groat was one of Wilson's regular, trusted collaborators and a member of his School of Byrds. Also, Lucinda Childs was “a very well-known ‘postmodern’ choreographer” with whom Glass and Wilson were interested in working, so even though they already had a choreographer at hand, they asked her to play one of the two main characters and to compose her

---

<sup>345</sup> Knowles previously collaborated with Wilson on the following works: *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (1973), *The Life and Times of Dave Clark* (1974), *A Mad Dog, a Mad Man, and a Mad Face* (1974), *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974–5), *The \$ Value of Man* (1975)—for which he is cited as co-author, *The Spaceman* (1976), and *DIA LOG* (1976), for which Lucinda Childs was a fellow collaborator. He also presented solo performances and exhibits such as “A Solo Piece” and “A Typing Work Show,” both of which took place at The Kitchen. Advertisement clipping in *Soho Weekly News*, Thursday, April 29, 1976, Box 225, Series 1, Folder “Book #23, January 1976 – March 1976,” Robert Wilson Papers.

own dance solo during the first Train scene (Act I, scene 1A).<sup>346</sup> During the rehearsal period, Wilson also invited Childs to write a speech to accompany her appearance in the second Trial scene (Act III, scene 2C), and the result was “a speech not *about* the beach, but about *avoiding* the beach! And,” Glass added, emphasizing its thematic significance, “it’s the only reference to a beach in the entire opera.”<sup>347</sup> Similarly, Wilson asked the actor Samuel M. Johnson to compose texts for two of the scenes in which he appeared (Act I, scene 2B and Knee Play 5). Glass recalled:

In the first Trial, Bob [Wilson] wanted the elder Judge to make a speech, and at one of the rehearsals he asked Mr. Johnson if he could write something for himself. Mr. Johnson said he thought he could, and at the next day’s rehearsal launched into his ‘Paris, city of lights’ speech from memory. Bob and I, as well as the entire company, were astonished. The dramatic sense and length of the speech, as well as its general “feel” for the music, were perfect. No changes were necessary, though from time to time during the tour Mr. Johnson would alter a phrase or word, quietly polishing his small masterpiece.<sup>348</sup>

According to Glass, Wilson was so impressed by Johnson’s work that he asked him to compose and deliver another speech as the Bus Driver in the opera’s final Knee Play, effectively determining the final impression with which spectators are left.<sup>349</sup> Finally, from a musical standpoint, Glass capitalized on the fact that many of his ensemble members had eclectic jazz, popular, and classical musical

---

<sup>346</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 39. See also letter, Robert Wilson to Michel Guy, February 11, 1976, Robert Wilson, 1972–1990, 4-COL-70(226) (cote), Département des Arts du spectacles, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Wilson told the commissioner, “I’m again working with Sheryl [Sutton], and of course she’s wonderful, but perhaps even more exciting is Lucinda Childs – a dancer from the early 60s in New York. She just did a dance concert which is the most impressive concert I’ve seen in years.” Both Wilson and Glass went on to pursue independent collaborations with Childs following *Einstein on the Beach*: Childs and Wilson created *I was sitting on my patio this guy appeared I thought I was hallucinating* (1977), and Childs and Glass worked with Sol Le Witt on *Dance* (1979).

<sup>347</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 44.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>349</sup> Johnson’s Knee Play 5 speech describes a sentimental scene between two lovers sitting on a park bench. Wilson echoed the text visually by having the characters originated by Childs and Sutton sit together on one of Wilson’s wire benches. Other than the two-dimensional bus silhouette from which the speaker delivers the text, there are no other actors, props, or drops on stage, emphasizing the speech and thus emphasizing its role as the final statement of the drama.

backgrounds by constructing the Building scene of Act IV around a collective woodwind (and later solo tenor saxophone) improvisation.

All of these artists, much like the screenwriters and actors who Sellors endeavors to credit for their contributions to the creative content (if not the original conception) of a film, may be fairly credited as the opera's *contributing* authors.<sup>350</sup> They provided significant creative material that has shaped the opera's appearance, sound, and reception, but they did not ultimately control what Glass and Wilson included or how they chose to do so. The conceptual/contributing dichotomy is helpful in addressing *Einstein's* collective authorship, but as with any dichotomous theoretical framework, there are outlying contributions that straddle these roles. Knowles, for instance, may have played a greater role in the opera's conception than his textual contribution alone would suggest. In terms of the dramatic impact of his work, in the 1985 documentary film *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, which documented the opera's first revival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1984, Robert Wilson recalled the eccentric means by which he supposedly persuaded Christopher Knowles to answer the question that guided the opera's creation:

I asked Chris once here, in this apartment, I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" And he said, "I don't know." And I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" And he said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who's Einstein?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who's Einstein?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Chris, who is Einstein?" He said, "Let me think." And then he wrote twelve chapters and he gave them to me a couple of days later. And it went something like, "Will I get some wind for the sailboat and it

---

<sup>350</sup> This designation should not be confused with Glass's use of the descriptor "contributor" in his categorization of authorial roles he has adopted a composer. Glass identifies such a "contributor" as a composer of incidental music such as that which he provided for Mabou Mines productions during the 1970s, and such a composer supplies this music from a position on the margins of the creative process, without being intimately involved with the structural, thematic, and performative development of any particular production. As a result, the composer-as-contributor is a figure Glass feels is not properly "an author of the work in any way," and whose contribution, "in a crucial way . . . does not form the work." Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 208.

could be these were it is. It could be Franky, it could be Johnny, it could be a balloon,” etcetera.<sup>351</sup>

While it is unclear at which point in the creative process Knowles wrote those twelve chapters, Wilson incorporated them as the bulk of the opera’s spoken text well before he invited Childs and Johnson to write their own speeches (which was during the rehearsal process), indicating that the teen’s contribution may have played an early role in the director’s development of the opera’s imagery. Furthermore, while their complete disconnection from Albert Einstein’s life and work may make them seem more like a prop than a libretto, it is in fact their juxtaposition against images more readily identifiable with the opera’s title character that makes the opera not just a straightforward portrait of a key historical figure, but rather a postmodern meditation on the (often inconspicuous) impact of his image across all spheres of American popular culture.<sup>352</sup>

Audiences familiar with Wilson’s work would also have been prepared to receive Knowles’s contribution as a significant component of the opera, as his writing formed the basis for the director’s previous large-scale theater project. Just a year before *Einstein’s* first preview performances in New York, critics made much of Knowles’s contribution to Wilson’s three-and-a-half-hour “opera” *A Letter for Queen Victoria*. Among downtown publications, *The Village Voice* devoted a laudatory front-page article to Knowles’s unusual perception of the world, while *The Soho Weekly News* sardonically labeled the piece “Autistic Chic,” questioning the ethics of the Wilson and Knowles collaboration, but still celebrating the youth’s “remarkable feats with numbers and language.”<sup>353</sup> Glass

---

<sup>351</sup> *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, directed by Mark Obenaus (1987; Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, 2007), DVD. My transcription.

<sup>352</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 64–8, 70–8. Knowles’s speeches do not generally cohere in terms of grammar and syntax, having been written for their sound rather than meaning. They also frequently reference pop culture of the 1970s, including radio personalities at New York’s WABC station, Frankie Valli and Four Seasons, the Beatles, Carole King, and the song “Mr. Bojangles.”

<sup>353</sup> Carll Tucker, “An Entirely Unfamiliar Human Way of Perceiving the World,” *Village Voice*, March 24, 1975, 1–4; Elenore Lester, “On Theater: Autistic Chic,” *Soho Weekly News*, Thursday, March 27, 1975, 25, 34; John Simon, “Bad, Worse, Wilson,” *New York Magazine*, April 7, 1975. Lester is among a handful of critics who were suspicious of

has also acknowledged that Knowles attended some of the Thursday lunch meetings during which the composer and director “worked out the principal themes and structures of *Einstein on the Beach*.”<sup>354</sup> While Knowles’s involvement in these early discussions is not entirely clear, his presence and early textual contributions were undoubtedly a factor in the development of the work’s themes, if not its structure. His disability would have placed him at a significant disadvantage in negotiating the power dynamics of those early meetings, and in terms of billing, he is listed among *Einstein’s* contributing authors. What evidence is available concerning his involvement in the opera’s creative process, however, suggests that he may at times have played a more conceptual role than his reception indicates.

Additionally, the singer and composer Joan La Barbara incited a change in the opera’s structure that, while not explicitly creative, constituted a conceptual change whose dramatic effect bears consideration. Throughout the rehearsal period, the penultimate scene of the opera, Act IV scene 2B (Bed), paired an organ solo with the glacially slow movement of a beam of light at the center of a

---

Wilson’s relationship with Knowles, some of whom believed that the director exploited the teen’s talents to bolster his own reputation, while others, like John Simon of *New York Magazine*, felt that presenting a neurological disorder as art was inappropriate. Defending Knowles, Lester wrote, “Wilson’s use of the boy recalls those *Vogue* ads that used to show an elegant model posing with beggar children in some exotic clime. It is interesting that in the extensive publicity Wilson has received on this piece there was no comment on the outrageousness [sic] of this act, and some puffs commended Wilson’s ‘humanity.’ Aside from Christopher there is virtually nothing new in Wilson’s various tableaux.” Simon, on the other hand, bemoaned “that a fifteen-year-old autistic boy should be a kind of co-author and main performer here, his sad condition put on tasteless display. Wilson has worked with handicapped children, and his writing and cast may themselves be specimens of a dementedly self-induced autism, but all that does not justify having the poor boy whirl about like a deranged dervish and spout insensate and ill-articulated verbiage—even if Wilson proclaims it genius and matches it with similar cavortings and cacophony of his own.” To do justice to the issue of presenting disability as postmodern art is beyond the scope of this study, but other scholars have considered this topic in depth. For considerations of disability specifically in relation to music, see, for example, Neil Lerner, Joseph N. Straus, eds., *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>354</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 28–9. He writes, “Our method was to meet every Thursday for lunch whenever we both were in New York. At first the meetings were mostly a way to get acquainted with each other. There was a small restaurant on Sullivan Street where we could talk undisturbed, almost always alone. Some time later we were occasionally joined by Christopher Knowles, who eventually contributed a number of the principal texts for *Einstein on the Beach*.”



dark stage. A single organ accompanied the light (an abstract representation of a bed) as it was leveraged from a horizontal to a vertical position and then raised into the flyspace above the stage. According to Glass, however, during the rehearsal period in Avignon, La Barbara approached him to request a vocal solo. The composer recalled:

“Look,” she said, “this is an opera, and I’m the soprano lead, and I don’t have an aria. I want an aria!” I agreed that it was a good idea. The only possible place for a soprano solo seemed the scene in Act IV where Bob’s beam of light representing the bed ascends and disappears, so that’s where the aria went.<sup>355</sup>

The reductive *mise-en-scène* increases the dramatic impact of this added vocal part, but the addition of the vocalise-like aria likewise increases the dramatic impact of Wilson’s staging, as it divides the scene into three parts: cadenza, prelude, and aria. The cadenza facilitates the transition from the Building to the Bed scene, the prelude accompanies the light beam’s rise from a horizontal to a vertical position, and the aria then accompanies its ascent. La Barbara did not choose the scene in which the aria would appear, nor did she compose the music, but her input nonetheless had a significant effect on the audiovisual interaction that was central to the opera’s aesthetics. Making space for her contribution in an account of *Einstein’s* creative development thus enriches our understanding of art as an essentially social and discursive activity, one that is constantly being produced and reproduced through the dynamic interactions of artists, performers, and others.

#### **4.4 Playing Together**

Establishing a distinction between conceptual and contributing creative activity enables a more nuanced consideration of the kinds of labor that go into the development and execution of the performing arts than is possible if one limits authorship to one or a few individuals. On one hand, the conceptual versus contributing dichotomy allows historians and analysts to account for the social dynamics inherent in any artistic enterprise without unfairly valorizing or marginalizing creative actors whose involvement does not align with the

---

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 48.

authorial conventions of a particular art world. On the other hand, it presents an effective way to model the creative process of an art world crossover like *Einstein on the Beach*, whose celebrity derived in part from its effective hybridization of the practices of American avant-garde theater in the 1970s with those of conventional opera. Like one strand of downtown theater, *Einstein* was produced collectively under the guidance and control of a single *metteur-en-scène*, and consequently, theater historians and critics uniformly treat *Einstein* as a Wilson “opera.” Like opera, its musical score is fundamental to the drama, a point underscored by its widespread circulation in the form of sound recordings and staging of the opera by new directors based on Glass’s score but not Wilson’s “visual book.” The work also incorporates textual contributions by speechwriters who, at various points early in the opera’s reception, were referred to as librettists. As a result, music theorists, historians, and critics generally treat *Einstein* as a Glass opera.

While a number of critics have noted the friction between Glass and Wilson that followed the 1976 production over financial obligations and creative rights, the actual mechanics by which Glass and Wilson crossed the creative practices (and consequent authorial attribution) of two genres have remained largely unexamined.<sup>356</sup> In modeling *Einstein*’s creative process as a collective but two-tiered system that encouraged operatic reception while appealing to the community-oriented ethos of the downtown scene, the foregoing discussion highlighted Glass’s and Wilson’s expert negotiation of art world conventions, but also the problems that inevitably arise when an artist breaks with convention. With this issue in mind, the following chapter presents three case studies in the contestation, negotiation, and compromise of *Einstein*’s authorship. Echoing the traditional divisions of labor in theater and opera that has divided *Einstein*’s reception along disciplinary lines, the first case study examines the three-year

---

<sup>356</sup> For example, David Sargent, “The Met Will Dance to a Mysterious Tune,” *Village Voice*, November 22, 1976, 53, Series I, Box 122, Folder: “EOB – ARTSERVICE – PRESS,” Robert Wilson Papers. He writes: “*Einstein on the Beach* is a collaboration, and, as with any cooperative venture, there is always a difficulty in figuring out who did what. This might not seem important—the work is the work—but it is intensely important to the participants, and the problem for all of them but one is that Wilson’s reputation and contribution are so huge that he overshadows the others, including Glass.”

interpersonal and legal dispute between Glass and Wilson over the opera's finances and production and reproduction rights. The second case study considers Lucinda Child's evolving authorial role over the course of four productions, and the unsettled role of the choreographer within the conceptual/contributing authorial model. Finally, the third case study focuses on the musical improvisers in the Building scene of Act IV, demonstrating how a creative conflict between a contributing author (musician) and conceptual author (director) led to a compromise that productively changed the relationship between the Philip Glass Ensemble and the company of actors, singers, and dancers. Taken together, these narratives provide insight into not just cooperative (and at times *uncooperative*) activity that shaped *Einstein's* creation and artistic evolution, but also the production and reception history on which these authorial negotiations had a powerful impact.

## Chapter 5

### Playing Nice: Negotiating *Einstein's* Collaborative Authorship

"As a collaboration, *Einstein* is a remarkable accommodation of two minds to each other's methods, as well as to additional contributions: the choreography of Andrew de Groat and Lucinda Childs, the sharply varying strengths and weaknesses of the 36-member company, including Glass' regular ensemble and the technical crew. In the wake of the two Metropolitan Opera performances on the consecutive Sundays of November 21 and 28, 1976, strains smoothed over by the production's discipline have appeared. But during the making of *Einstein* differences in temperament were handled as tools, sharpening various angles of perspective to make the opera cohere."

—Barbara Baracks, "Einstein on the Beach," *Artforum* (March 1977): 31.

#### 5.1 A Remarkable Accommodation

*Einstein on the Beach* presents a challenge to scholars seeking to understand its historical significance by approaching it from the perspective of a single discipline because the circumstances that gave rise to its celebrity resist a conventional focus on its artistic quality as an outgrowth of a single artist's skill. Indeed, *Einstein* was conceived jointly by its composer and director and was realized with significant creative input by several of its performer-collaborators, a lack of publicly available audiovisual documentation elevating the authoritativeness of the rare live performances overseen by Wilson and Glass. Moreover, *Einstein's* extended rehearsal period, European tour, and legendary arrival at the Met were arranged and funded by a small number of dedicated American and European (particularly French) administrators. Without these contributing authors and administrators, *Einstein* may not have existed at all, and certainly would not have taken the shape that it did, nor reached audiences outside the confines of Lower Manhattan. As the Glass scholar David Chapman has documented, collaboration and community were key political and aesthetic tenets pursued by many of the artists associated with New York's downtown scene in the 1960s and 1970s, including (but by no means limited to) Wilson's Byrd Hoffman Foundation, the Philip Glass Ensemble, and the Lucinda Childs

Dance Company.<sup>357</sup> By employing the most critically prominent theater piece to emerge from that art community as a lens, we can better understand how the intermedial exchanges—both onstage and off—characteristic of artistic production in this milieu simultaneously subverted and affirmed traditional notions of the author and the symbolic and economic capital it carries.

This chapter introduces three case studies, each of which explores the artistic, interpersonal, legal ramifications, and negotiation of *Einstein's* authorship through newly examined archival documentation and/or oral history. Like the billing of many downtown theater offerings (and, as discussed in chapter 4, like most films), this authorial negotiation exhibited pronounced tension between the ideal of creative collaboration and the practical necessity of organizational hierarchy. The first case study focuses on the opera's two conceptual authors, demonstrating that even as joint authors, Glass and Wilson worried that their claims on the work were by no means guaranteed. As Barbara Baracks hinted in her March 1977 *Artforum* article on *Einstein*, "In the wake of the two Metropolitan Opera performances . . . strains smoothed over by the production's discipline have appeared."<sup>358</sup> These strains gradually coalesced into a full-blown legal dispute that lasted three years and resulted in a contract that determined rights and royalties of all future productions and recordings. This dispute drew not just Glass, Wilson, and their attorneys into the fray, but also their performers and representatives, revealing the extent to which interpersonal relations and legal and financial concerns—that is, the mundane cooperative activity of art worlds—are inconveniently and unavoidably bound up in the artistic process.

A second case study examines *Einstein's* choreography, which has historically been the "third wheel" alongside drama and music, acknowledged by critics and scholars but seldom treated as a contribution on par with the score and direction. By focusing particular attention on Lucinda Childs' evolving role from performer-collaborator to choreographer, which has left her poised uncomfortably between contributing and conceptual authorship, I endeavor to

---

<sup>357</sup> See Chapman, "Collaboration, Presence, and Community."

<sup>358</sup> Barbara Baracks, "Einstein on the Beach," *Artforum* (March 1977): 31, Series I, Box 125, no folder, Robert Wilson Papers.

restore both the opera's structurally and aesthetically significant dances and their creators' voices to *Einstein's* academic reception. Finally, moving from one instance of contributing authorship to another, this chapter closes with a discussion of the musical improvisation that has come to define Act IV, scene 1A (Building). This sequence has provided several woodwind players in the Philip Glass Ensemble, first as a trio and later as soloists, the opportunity to showcase their artistry and virtuosity. Over the course of three revivals, it has also productively reconfigured the relationship between the orchestra pit and the stage. Musicologists have addressed the technical musical details of this scene, but the social dynamics that have informed its dramatic evolution remain unexamined.

In all three of this chapter's case studies, I work against a rigid concept of authorship as a fixed state one might achieve, instead gathering evidence from personal and legal correspondence, critical reception, choreographic "scores," and oral history in order to explore the concept as an ongoing discursive process that takes place in the medial and social space between creative artists and performers, administrators, spectators, and writers. It is worth delving into *Einstein's* unusual division and recognition of operatic authorship not only because it rescues marginalized creative voices and encourages performing arts scholars to continue questioning historical narratives predicated on great men and great works, but also because the opera represents a key moment for the downtown performing-arts community. With its splashy 1976 tour, two of the scene's most successful denizens began the transition from expressly non-commercial, experimental art produced and presented outside traditional institutional contexts to still challenging, but now institutionally supported expressive products. Collaborative or collective authorship may have been a defining ideal of much of the art produced downtown during the 1960s and 1970s, but such authorship was rarely democratic, whether because of temperamental differences in participants, internalized conventional understandings of divisions of labor between artists and performers, or the often unexamined impacts of identity parameters like race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and education on professional relationships. Teasing apart moments of

interpersonal dissonance between *Einstein's* conceptual and contributing authors provides insight into the limits of that particular opera's utopian ideals, and more generally, the tensions that arose as "downtown" performers began to gain purchase in "uptown" art worlds.

## 5.2 The Einstein Debt, the Recording, and the Battle for Equal Authorship

When it premiered in 1976, *Einstein on the Beach* propelled both Philip Glass and Robert Wilson into thriving operatic careers. Revival productions in 1984, 1992, and 2012, as well as follow-up collaborations on the operas *the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down* (1984) and *Monsters of Grace* (1998), attest to the artists' continued enthusiasm for working together. "We are very different men, different personalities, but we share a common sense of time and space and that kind of structure," Wilson observed in 2012, "and if I think back on it, I don't really remember who did exactly what. . . . It was a real collaboration and dialogue, in the making of it."<sup>359</sup> While it is tempting to take such evidence of professional amiability for granted and move on, Carolyn Abbate rightly cautions scholars in her monograph *In Search of Opera*, "If musical works are phantoms inhabiting a network connecting composer, inscription, performer, interpretation, realization, and reproduction, relationships within this space are full of antagonism."<sup>360</sup> This is especially true for musical works with large numbers of participants, and never more so than while they are still being (or have just been) performed, as none of its stakeholders can easily predict to what degree association with the work will benefit or harm their reputations. Indeed, less than a month after *Einstein* closed triumphantly at the Metropolitan Opera in November of 1976, Glass typed a bitter missive bemoaning strife within the company to Paul Walter, a friend, trustee of Wilson's Byrd Hoffman Foundation (or BHF), and the new owner of his autograph score.

Confidentially telling Walter that "the BHF is getting a nasty reputation for itself as a result of the ineptness of its administrator," an ineptness that he worried might damage his own professional reputation, Glass went on to predict the

---

<sup>359</sup> Glass and Wilson, interview by Anne Bogart, "The Power of 2." Transcription by author.

<sup>360</sup> Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, xiii.

premature death of a hoped-for musical recording. "I'm sorry for that," he wrote, "but I don't see how I can get involved in a \$25,000 to \$30,000 project when at the end there may be legal problems preventing the release of the records."<sup>361</sup> Two-and-a-half years later, however, the critic Robert Jones announced the release of a much-anticipated four-record set of the opera. This recording quickly became something of a collector's item and facilitated the opera's widespread cultural diffusion by way of artist lofts and college dorms across America, diffusion marked by the music's appearance in cultural forms as diverse as television commercials, fashion shows, band competitions, YouTube videos, and even an album of Glass and hip-hop mash-ups.<sup>362</sup> Indeed, that recording (and a newer one released after the 1992 tour) has functioned as a sort of ambassador for the opera, making it available in a tangible, if incomplete, form to interested audiences between rare live performances. That the music has had such a significant impact on the opera's public reception over the last four decades is a vital piece of information in making sense of its co-creators' concerns over their

---

<sup>361</sup> Letter, Philip Glass to Paul Walter, December 17, 1976, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers. The administrator to whom Glass refers is Kathleen Norris, then managing director of the Byrd Hoffman Foundation. Norris was a young administrator who had joined the organization not long before the *Einstein* project, and who found herself in the unenviable position of being tasked with managing a project that forced Wilson's and Glass's professional groups into uncomfortably close financial and administrative association for over a year.

<sup>362</sup> Robert Jones, "Einstein on the Turntable," *CUE New York*, March 2, 1979, Series 1, Box 123, Folder: "E.O.B. Record, Cue Magazine – 3/2/79," Robert Wilson Papers. Jones suggested that there was significant excitement, at least in certain quarters, surrounding the record release. "It's entirely possible that *Einstein on the Beach* is not the most eagerly awaited recording of the year," he wrote, "but for about 8,000 people in New York it most definitely is." The *Einstein* recording's appeal was not, however, restricted to New York. During an informal conversation in October of 2015, musicologist Dale Cockrell described how he and fellow music students at the University of Illinois, none of whom had seen the opera in 1976, held an *Einstein on the Beach* party during the early 1980s, which involved gathering to listen to the entire Tomato Records set as a group, an experience enhanced for some participants by use of illicit substances. A few examples of the popular cultural forms that have cited *Einstein* include: PepsiCo, "No Brainer Einstein," television advertisement, 1:00, 2000, accessed February 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wtWuaTVmeg>; The Drum Corps International World Championships, "2013 Carolina Crown encore performance," 13:04, August 10, 2013, accessed February 3, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1Hjr1mgW04>; Nicole Phelps, "Spring 2013 Ready-to-Wear Louis Vuitton," *Vogue*, October 2, 2012, accessed February 3, 2016, <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2013-ready-to-wear/louis-vuitton>.



authorial status following the opera's splashy return to New York, which they both knew would change once the opera left the stage and entered the mediatized sphere of books and recordings. What transpired behind the scenes between the composer's frustrated letter to Walter and Jones's record review has long been a scholarly ellipsis, one whose restoration is key to understanding *Einstein's* internal politics of attribution. Recovering this offstage narrative, which was characterized by interpersonal and legal conflict, also sheds light on the subsequent production and recording history of the opera—as well as Glass's and Wilson's heightened business acumen in approaching subsequent collaborative projects—that followed from these early negotiations. Unsurprisingly, money and the handling thereof lay at the root of the conflict.

### 5.2.1 Connecting the Debt, the Recording, and the Contract

The \$90,000 debt (just under \$375,000 in 2015) that dogged Glass and Wilson for years after the 1976 tour appears in most accounts of the opera's history.<sup>363</sup> This figure is frequently cited without further explanation, implicitly serving as evidence of the work's exceptional opulence, which distinguished it from its more modest downtown theater kin, as well as the delicious irony that the now-famous director and composer were once “starving artists” whose reputational value far outweighed their financial worth.<sup>364</sup> It is perhaps little surprise that Americans in particular, for whom idealism, independence, and grit have traditionally held high cultural value, should continue to perpetuate a story of young, impoverished mavericks audaciously, and perhaps a bit naively, challenging the status quo and remaining true to their vision no matter the cost,

---

<sup>363</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 54; “Einstein on the Beach Debts,” Byrd Hoffman Foundation internal document, September 1978, Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB Figure Statement,” Robert Wilson Papers. Scholars, critics, and performing arts organizations regularly cite this amount or round it off to \$100,000. Glass himself provides this figure in his monograph, and Byrd Hoffman Foundation internal records corroborate this number. The 2015 equivalent of \$90,000, rounded off to the nearest hundred dollars, is \$374,900, and was calculated using the CPI inflation calculator, accessed February 3, 2016, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>364</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 53. Glass sums up the period when his surfeit of cultural capital and dearth of economic capital with the following anecdote: “I vividly remember the moment, shortly after the Met adventure, when a well-dressed woman got into my cab. After noting the name of the driver (New York law requires the name and photograph of the driver to be clearly visible), she leaned forward and said: ‘Young man, do you realize you have the same name as a very famous composer?’”

untainted by either the lure of fast money or creative capitulation in the interest of financial solvency. It is a gratifying story of a celebrity's big break, and one that very likely helped to sell tickets to revival performances. That Glass should implicitly encourage this post-mortem reading of the 1976 *Einstein* tour in his two memoirs is neither surprising nor particularly objectionable given his status as an entrepreneurial artist. Historians, however, have both the luxury and the responsibility of adopting a critical stance toward such easy narratives of the workings of art worlds, as they frequently mask more complicated, informative, and at times ugly accounts of how art circulates in the cultural field. In fact, Glass does gesture, if obliquely, toward the difficulty of resolving the issues of *Einstein's* debt and first recording in his first autobiography. "Like the *Einstein* production," he admitted in 1987, "the *Einstein* recording seemed always to be nicely balanced between public artistic success and behind-the-scenes financial troubles."<sup>365</sup>

These financial troubles had implications for not just the resolution of the *Einstein* Debt and the ability to fund a recording project, but also the division of authorship between Glass and Wilson and attendant royalties and control over future staged and mediatized productions of the opera. The outcome of the conflict these troubles engendered can be found in a six-page legal contract, which enumerates how ownership of the opera and all future royalties were to be divided between its composer and director. The process that led to the existence and content of this contract is traceable in internal administrative and legal correspondence located in BHF records in Wilson's personal papers, where they have remained unexplored until now. The extra-textual history this archival documentation conveys does not just supply new insight into a canonical work, but also points up the extent to which legal documents like the contract between Glass and Wilson can impact the production and recording practices of collaborative music theater projects more generally.

Glass and Wilson signed their contract on April 24, 1979, less than two months after Robert Jones announced the release of the recording, and the close

---

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 56.

proximity of these dates is no coincidence. With a \$90,000 debt to settle after *Einstein* closed at the Met, Glass and Wilson had undertaken a vigorous post-tour funding campaign that had already included the sale of the manuscript score, original drawings, and new fabrications of furniture designed by Wilson for his operas.<sup>366</sup> Having parted with these auratic items, valuable for what Pierre Bourdieu might identify as their *valid imposture* or “the miracle of the signature,” and having had little luck obtaining further funding from large organizational donors, an audio recording was the next logical step, as it had the potential to help lower this deficit through sales while preserving and disseminating the work.<sup>367</sup> Its production, however, also generated further financial demands and had problematic implications for authorship and royalties, as it favored the rights of the composer over those of the director. As a result, the recording project became the locus of growing interpersonal tension over equitable treatment of the musicians that had been simmering between Glass, Wilson, and their respective organizations since spring of 1976. Ultimately, the audio recording became the battleground on which not just the vagaries of the recording contract, but also the legal framework that would shape *Einstein’s* authorial attribution and ongoing production history, was fought.

---

<sup>366</sup> Letter, Kathleen Norris to Philip Glass, June 30, 1976, and Letter, Kathleen Norris to Paul Walters, June 30, 1976, Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB Contracts,” Robert Wilson Papers. Glass agreed to donate the opera score to the Byrd Hoffman Foundation on or around September 30, 1976, and the organization sold it to trustee Paul Walters for \$10,000. Letter, Julie Hymen to Kathleen Norris, July 8, 1976, Series I, Box 114, Folder: “EOB-Miscellaneous Correspondence – Outgoing 1976,” Robert Wilson Papers. Series I, Box 198, Folders: “Robert Wilson Furniture Flyer Nov 22–Dec 31, 1977 Multiples/Marion Goodman Gallery,” “Paula Cooper show Dec ’77 Invitation,” “Multiples (furn. show) 1977,” “RW Prints / Print Collector’s Newsletter Jan 1978,” “RW Furniture Show / Goodman Gallery ’78, Paula Cooper,” and “Objects! Catalog Goodman Gallery Including RW 1979,” Robert Wilson Papers. Wilson sold his original drawings to an Italian collector for \$25,000. In Between March of 1976 and April of 1979, Wilson also exhibited sculptures and drawings at the midtown Jolas, Marion Goodman, and Paula Cooper Galleries. Benches and chairs fetched \$2,000 to \$10,000 each, and Wilson also exhibited photostats and drawings, and advertised his art in publications such as the January 1978 *Print Collectors Newsletter*.

<sup>367</sup> Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 81.

### 5.2.2 Tracking the Dispute, December 1976–April 1979

Archived correspondence reveals that the temporary falling-out between composer and director resulted from a combination of three interrelated issues: discord among Glass's and Wilson's factions, significant financial miscalculation, and the differing economies governing the reproducibility of theater and music. The seeds of the disagreement between Glass and Wilson were sown long before the so-called "Einstein Debt" placed financial pressure on their relationship. When the composer and director first began meeting to develop *Einstein* in 1974, neither of them had experience negotiating an equal creative partnership, and, unwisely, they proceeded without a legal contract. Moreover, working without the support of a single institution forced them to rely on Glass's seven-member ensemble for musicians and equipment. Wilson's Byrd Hoffman Foundation acted as producer, thus taking administrative and financial responsibility for the opera. Rehearsals began in late 1975 and by early summer of 1976 talk of a contract between Glass and Wilson began to appear in internal correspondence.<sup>368</sup> By the end of 1976, the creators were no closer to signing a contract and the November performances at the Metropolitan Opera had pushed the company deep into debt. Simultaneously, Glass was demanding that the BHF pay three of his musicians for unacknowledged services, and allow the sound engineer Kurt Munkacsi to sell the sound equipment.<sup>369</sup>

The details of this interpersonal confrontation, which continued to escalate over two years, can be distilled to two overarching issues: lack of administrative and financial control, and suspicion that the BHF was exploiting Glass and his ensemble. Glass gestures toward both in the same letter to Paul Walter in which he bemoaned the barriers to an audio recording. "I'm asked to help with the debt," he wrote, "which I'm sure you are aware I have already done and continue to do. At the same time I'm not allowed to participate in decisions [as] to how the money is spent or, for that matter, any other administrative

---

<sup>368</sup> For a timeline relating to the development of the contract, see letter, Kathleen Norris to Paul Walter, September 27, 1977, Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>369</sup> Letter, Philip Glass to Paul Walter, January 21, 1977, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5, Robert Wilson Papers.

decision.”<sup>370</sup> In other words, because Wilson’s foundation was in charge of both the administration and the purse strings of the *Einstein* project, Glass found himself in a position of relative powerlessness in resolving the opera’s debt and assuring that his musicians were remunerated fairly and in a timely manner. Glass’s doubts about the organizational experience of Kathleen Norris, the lead administrator at the BHF, did nothing to help matters.

That Glass felt the BHF was exploiting his ensemble peppered the composer’s frustration with suspicion, the flip side of the collaborative coin and a sentiment that was inevitable in a community of institutionally unsupported artists whose generous reciprocity was checked by their individual motivation to build their reputations outside the avant-garde. “For the last year,” Glass wrote later in the letter, “I’ve had to live with an administration which pretended to represent me but in fact, didn’t.”<sup>371</sup> At the time of the first *Einstein* production, Wilson’s reputation among the European (especially French) avant-garde still outstripped that of his collaborator. With the musicians all but hidden in the orchestra pit and the BHF controlling the presentation of the opera and its funding stream, Glass predictably became suspicious that the foundation was more interested in aggrandizing Wilson than in representing the artists’ interests equally. The belief that he and his ensemble were being exploited helps to explain why Glass adopted a litigious attitude toward Wilson’s foundation in the wake of the 1976 tour. It also presents a compelling explanation for why he eventually threatened to record the music without the opera’s spoken text, which would have effectively barred Wilson from receiving royalties. This threat elevated the conflict, merging Glass’s concerns over financial and administrative control with concerns over authorship.

Though closely related to Glass’s frustration with the BHF’s control over logistics and money, the specific grievances that Glass brought on behalf of his musicians also illuminate a facet of the conflict between *Einstein*’s two conceptual authors that extended beyond their professional relationship: financial miscalculation.

---

<sup>370</sup> Letter, Philip Glass to Paul Walter, December 17, 1976, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

The clash between Glass, his sound engineer Kurt Munkacsi, and the BHF director Kathleen Norris exemplifies this issue. According to Glass, Munkacsi contributed a quarter of *Einstein's* sound equipment and asked that Wilson's foundation pay him a rental fee for the use of the \$15,000 gear. Glass unwisely convinced him to waive the fee "as a personal favor to myself and assured him that, if he did, he would be fairly treated."<sup>372</sup> The composer later complained to Walter that not only did he worry that the engineer would not be paid for his work during the Met performances, but also, "it appears to Kurt that though he designed and built the equipment and gave 8 months of outstanding service to E.O.B., he was not considered trustworthy enough to be left with it."<sup>373</sup> Not surprisingly, Kathleen Norris offered a substantially different perspective in a rebuttal likewise directed to Walter. Responding to Glass's suspicion of the BHF's motives concerning his ensemble, she wrote that early in the project, Glass "indicated that he was willing but not eager to participate in the problems of money and administration."<sup>374</sup> Specifically concerning the sale of the equipment, she recalled that when they were first budgeting the opera, she consulted Glass regarding the anticipated expense for sound equipment, and he told her that the foundation could budget low because the only equipment they would need to buy was microphones. "Accordingly," she explained, "I budgeted about \$5,000. After the first run-throughs of the piece, however, Kurt announced that Philip had been totally wrong, and that our sound expenditures would have to be in the neighborhood of \$50,000."<sup>375</sup> Norris goes on to suggest that Glass may not have asked for money at that point to restore his equipment because he felt guilty about his wildly inaccurate budget estimate, but that demanding the money after the fact left her in an untenable position.

---

<sup>372</sup> Letter, Philip Glass to Paul Walter, January 21, 1977, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>373</sup> Letter, Philip Glass to Paul Walter, December 17, 1976, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>374</sup> Letter, Kathleen Norris to Paul Walter, September 27, 1977, Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.* The rest of the quote is: "Since Phillip [sic] well knew that we would really have to scramble to raise this sum, he may have felt that he could not also ask for money to restore his own equipment. The fact is, however, that he did not mention this until the end of the project."

Ultimately, Glass agreed to waive several fees, assume the debt to Munkacsi, and turn over revenue from the sale of the sound equipment to the BHF.<sup>376</sup> I review this particular example for two reasons. First, it was the only issue unrelated to authorial rights and the sound recording whose politics were thorny enough to require mediation in the 1979 contract. Moreover, this confrontation between creator, performer, and administrator highlights how forcing Wilson's and Glass's groups into close administrative proximity drew more than just the director and composer into the fray. The factors that precipitated the contract dispute, that is, were part of a larger context of bad blood that took several years to settle, and that offered a practical demonstration of the inseparability of personal and professional relationships, authorial status, and compensation in artistic production.

Determining who would pay the musicians and control the sale of the sound equipment did not, however, have the potential to shape the rights of *Einstein* in the way that the audio recording did, and it was for that reason that the record project eventually took center stage in the dispute. Both Glass and Wilson were eager to record the opera in order to capture the ephemeral production for posterity, and in early 1978, the Tobacco Pink Fund awarded Glass's Aurora Foundation \$40,000 to offset the recording of the music.<sup>377</sup> This support removed the extra burden of studio costs, but legal and artistic issues still loomed. Glass had composed the music, and the contributing authors Christopher Knowles, Samuel M. Johnson, and Lucinda Childs had supplied the spoken text of the opera. Wilson's artistic labor as a director, designer, and conceptual author was thus unable to be represented in the form of a sound recording. Moreover, Glass's attorney Robert Montgomery indicated in a letter one week before the Tobacco Pink funding came through that, "If . . . there should be an album that

---

<sup>376</sup> Memorandum, Betsy Crawford to Jane Yockel, Paul Walter, Philip Glass, Bob Wilson, Margaret Wood, and Bénédicte Pesle, 31 March 1978, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>377</sup> Letter, Sidney S. Whelan, Jr. to Margaret Wood, "Re: Tobacco Pink Fund," February 16, 1978, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers.

does not include the spoken text, then all of the proceeds from that album would be paid to Glass.”<sup>378</sup>

This was not good news for Wilson, as such a record would encourage reception of *Einstein* as solely a Glass opera, relegating his status to that of a traditional opera director as far as critics, scholars, and the public were concerned. An outraged letter from Lucinda Childs to Glass six months later indicates that by that point the composer was openly considering (or at least appearing to consider) circumventing the legal tangle by recording only the music and sung text. As the sung text comprises only solfège syllables and numbers that outline the music’s rhythmic and harmonic structure, Glass held the rights to what the lawyers, for legal purposes, came to refer to as *Einstein’s* “lyrics.” Childs perceived Glass’s threat as an empty one, but still an overreaction to his frustration with Wilson and the BHF that was destructive to the opera as a whole, writing exasperatedly, “It made as much sense as if Hitler were to have threatened to bomb Germany even on the off chance that Winston Churchill might choke on his tea biscuit.”<sup>379</sup> Notably, Childs was distressed not by the financial and legal implications of the spoken text (some of which was hers) being cut from the recording, but rather by the artistic implications for *Einstein* as a collaborative project. “The most important thing about the text,” she went on, “is the concept in relation to the opera which is Bob’s and I feel it should be represented.”<sup>380</sup> Wilson summarized this same position during a meeting with Glass a month later, writing, “for me, the only true record of our work together would include both spoken text and sung parts.”<sup>381</sup> As audiovisual recording technology was not yet a viable means of mass-producing and distributing the opera, Wilson instead inserted himself in the record project by way of its liner notes. That is, he and Glass agreed that the spoken text would serve as a bridge

---

<sup>378</sup> Letter, Robert H. Montgomery, Jr., Esq. to Michael D. Remer, Esq., February 6, 1978, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>379</sup> Letter, Lucinda Childs to Philip Glass, August 27, 1978, Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it,” Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> “Summary of meeting held on Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 1978: Robert Wilson and Philip Glass in the presence of Mimi Johnson and Bénédicte Pesle,” September 8, 1978, Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it,” Robert Wilson Papers.



between the opera's auditory and visual components, and would therefore be printed in conjunction with Wilson's scene illustrations or "visual book."<sup>382</sup>

For much of the negotiation process, however, the contentious subject was made even more confusing by the fact that Knowles's, Johnson's, and Childs's speeches were alternately referred to as spoken text, speeches, and a libretto. Calling these speeches a libretto failed to differentiate between sung and spoken text, which were neither formally nor topically connected in the opera. Wilson's lawyer employed this "libretto defense" in his communication with Glass's lawyer to argue that no opera can be considered complete without its libretto, and therefore a recording with only Glass's sung solfège syllables and numbers would not be a complete record of the opera.<sup>383</sup> On the other hand, to call the speeches a libretto also invoked the well-established operatic convention of crediting a librettist while reserving ultimate authority over the work for the composer. Glass's and Wilson's representatives at Professional Artservices, Inc., with more experience in matters of artistic nomenclature than their lawyers, drew attention to this particular angle. Representative Mimi Johnson, for instance, wrote to Glass's attorney:

You were right to use the word 'libretto' in quotation marks since there is none. [Wilson's lawyer] Michael Remer makes an error . . . by calling the "speeches" a "libretto." I was deliberately refering [sic] to the spoken words as "speeches." I think we must stop using the word libretto. . . . The

---

<sup>382</sup> In the second paragraph of the contract Glass and Wilson signed, the men agreed that Wilson would "provide a book containing spoken texts and the instructions pertaining to staging, direction and design." To that end, he would "secure all rights to use such texts, and w[ould] take all steps necessary to obtain and maintain in [his] name copyright protection for the texts and design in the United States of America under the Universal Copyright Convention . . . by May 1, 1980." Letter, Robert Wilson to Philip Glass, April 24, 1979, Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>383</sup> Letter, Robert H. Montgomery, Jr., Esq. to Michael D. Remer, Esq., December 15, 1978, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5A, Robert Wilson Papers. In a related letter from the Performing Artservices, Inc. attorney Stanley Stairs to Michael Remer dated September 29, 1978, Stairs notes, "Bob [Wilson] is concerned about the possibility that Glass might not be able to produce a recording of the EOB music that does not contain any of his libretto and thereby circumvent the royalty arrangement described above. Bob should be protected against this risk in his agreement with Glass."

“lyrics” were entirely written by Mr. Glass. We understand “lyrics” to mean sung words (i.e. “do, re me,” or “one two, three, four”).<sup>384</sup>

Ultimately, after many missives, partial drafts of contracts, and meetings that negotiated the inclusion on the audio recording of spoken and sung text (or, in the chosen legal parlance, speeches and lyrics), Glass and Wilson arrived at a contract that both could agree on. In six pages, this deceptively simple document set clear boundaries on attribution and royalties stemming from future live performances and recordings. It also resolved the lingering financial and sound equipment-related grievances that, as Glass’s letter to Walter and the Glass–Munkacsı–Norris quarrel demonstrated, had become bound up with concerns of attribution and reputational value.

### 5.2.3 The Glass–Wilson Contract

Of the contract’s twelve paragraphs, the first six deal with authorship, and may be summarized as follows. Glass claimed all legal rights to the music and lyrics, and Wilson claimed rights to the storyboard sketches, dramatic concept, and design. Accordingly, Glass agreed to publish the score and parts of the complete music and lyrics, and Wilson agreed to produce a book containing the spoken texts, to which he secured the rights, and instructions pertaining to staging, direction, and design. Glass, Wilson, or a third party might undertake new or abridged productions of *Einstein*, but only with the written consent of both conceptual authors. On the other hand, either artist might perform the elements of the opera to which he held sole rights, but only under the condition that he credited the other. Notably, no mention was made of Andrew de Groat’s or Lucinda Childs’s choreography, a point to which I return in the following section, nor does the contract stipulate if or how speech-writers Childs, Knowles, and Johnson should be credited.

The next five paragraphs pertain to royalties generated by sound recordings of *Einstein*. Wilson and Glass consented to the release of an LP set in April of 1979 under the condition, which also applied to all future recordings, that both retain the right to approve the album cover and visual and written materials included.

---

<sup>384</sup> Letter, Mimi Johnson to Robert H. Montgomery, Esq., December 19, 1978, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5A, Robert Wilson Papers.

Taking into account the \$40,000 balance that still remained of the Einstein Debt, royalties from the recording were divided into percentages owed to the opera's producer, the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, before and after the debt was discharged, the percentage owed to Glass rising substantially after.<sup>385</sup> Glass was further permitted to produce a recording of the music and lyrics alone, but only provided it not exceed "one side of a 12-inch record or the equivalent on tape or cassette."<sup>386</sup>

Finally, the last paragraph resolved the interpersonal disputes over payment and sound equipment, stipulating that the BHF take ownership of all sets and equipment associated with *Einstein*. Glass agreed to pay his musicians \$4,000 so that Munkacsi would release a lien on an organ console still in his possession, thus resolving the material manifestation of Glass's and Wilson's professional tensions.<sup>387</sup> In summary, then, this contract enabled a dysfunctional artistic family to settle their differences to Glass's and Wilson's agreement, if not their satisfaction. Furthermore, it outlined the authorial and financial terms of all future recordings and live productions of *Einstein*, setting the tone for an almost forty-year history that now comprises three major revival tours, a handful of performances by new directors, and two studio recordings.<sup>388</sup>

---

<sup>385</sup> Byrd Hoffman Foundation handwritten budget document, January 20, 1977, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5B, Robert Wilson Papers. According to the April 24, 1979 contract, prior to the cancellation of the Einstein Debt, Glass and Munkacsi would receive a record producer's fee of 25%, and both Glass's and Wilson's foundations would receive 37.5%. After revenue exceeded \$40,000, Glass's foundation would receive 56.25% while Wilson's foundation would receive only 18.75%.

<sup>386</sup> Even in such cases, each artist agreed to pay the other 7.5% in royalties for media to which only one man held the rights.

<sup>387</sup> Letter, Robert Wilson to Philip Glass, April 24, 1979, Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>388</sup> Productions directed by artists other than Robert Wilson include: the Stuttgart State Opera under the direction of Achim Freyer in 1988, performed alongside *Satyagraha* and *Akhnaten* as part of Glass's operatic "Portrait Trilogy"; the "Laboratory of Applied Music" at the Berlin State Bank, the former home of the East German Central Bank (DDR-Zentralbank) in 2001, with musical direction by Ari Benjamin Meyers and stage production by Berthold Schneider; and the State Opera of South Australia in 2014, with direction and choreography by Leigh Warren and musical direction by Timothy Sexton.

#### 5.2.4 The Legal Battle in Retrospect

Almost a decade later, Glass recalled that Tomato Records “turned out to be in a lot of financial trouble, and we soon discovered that the sales of the *Einstein* set were virtually keeping them afloat, while little or no royalties were being paid to the authors.”<sup>389</sup> Ironically, then, the first recording turned out to make neither Glass nor Wilson much money initially, forcing them to rely on other forms of funding to dispense with the Einstein Debt. While the debt may have triggered the conflict between Glass, Wilson, and their groups following *Einstein’s* first tour, the audio recording was likely never primarily seen as a means to financial solvency. Rather, for its artists, performers, and audiences, it was a personally meaningful souvenir, and for its conceptual authors, it was also a test case that would determine the future production and reception possibilities for the opera, and whether one creator or both would successfully claim legal rights to the work.

Given the difficulty of balancing artistic ego with the impulse to collaborate, and the financial, legal, and artistic pressures that constantly threaten to tip the scales toward self-aggrandizement, it is little wonder that *Einstein’s* joint authorship between a director and composer presents a unique conflation of downtown theater and conventional opera practices. Theater and music operate according to different logics of production and reproduction, the former reaching its audiences primarily through extended theatrical runs and touring live shows, while the latter reaches its broadest audience through the distribution of sound recordings. Even in the era of Live in HD events, YouTube, and other internet streaming services, when theater and music come together in opera, productions tend to lead two lives: one the ephemeral life of the live stage production, and the other the immortal life of the studio recording.

In 1976, Wilson the director, designer, and *enfant-terrible* of the Paris avant-garde received a major boost to his reputation from *Einstein’s* six-month tour, while Glass the composer, musician, and record producer realized his profit in economic and symbolic capital largely after the curtain fell and the musicians

---

<sup>389</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 56.

entered the recording studio. Indeed, composers and musicians that came of age in *Einstein's* wake have studied the 1978 studio recording for inspiration just as aspiring dramaturges look to Wilson's sketches and, after the 1985 release of the documentary film *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, his direction. In retrospect, then, *Einstein* elevated the professional profiles of its director and composer in relatively equal measure, if not in equivalent ways. It is telling that new releases of *Einstein's* music have paralleled the revival productions, and that theater scholars unanimously refer to *Einstein* as a "Wilson opera" while musicologists uniformly identify it as a "Glass opera." It is also easy to see how, sensing that the odds were tilted in his collaborator's favor, first Glass and then Wilson alternately became suspicious of one another's motives and scrambled to gain the upper hand. While looking back, one can see that the playing field evened out as the opera shifted from the live to the recorded sphere, the effect of the conflict surrounding the rights to *Einstein* and the contract that resolved it extended far beyond 1979, shaping the opera's ongoing production history.

In closing, it is worth bearing in mind that Glass and Wilson were not the only artists with stakes in *Einstein*. In the midst of the conflict, representative Mimi Johnson had written, "A further point to be well aware of is that the speeches in question were in fact written by those who spoke them: Lucinda Childs, Samuel Johnson and Christopher Knowles. We wish to make it clear that we recognize the *authorship* of these speeches as being with the performers."<sup>390</sup> These three writers were among *Einstein's* contributing authors rather than its conceptual authors, but Johnson's defense brings into stark relief the fact that the Glass-

---

<sup>390</sup> Letter, Mimi Johnson to Robert H. Montgomery, Esq., December 19, 1978, Series II, Box 254, Folder 5A, Robert Wilson Papers (my italics). Notably, Christopher Knowles did not perform in *Einstein on the Beach*. This may have simply been a mistake on Johnson's part, but it also indicates how strong Knowles's artistic presence was in the opera. Having attended several of the lunch meetings between Glass and Wilson, his perspective may have informed Wilson's early structural approach to the opera, and his spoken text was the first text introduced to the work. Wilson explains the origin of Knowles's text in *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, directed by Mark Obenhaus (1987; Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, 2007), DVD. Moreover, although Knowles was not on stage to speak the text he composed, the quantity of text he contributed outweighs Johnson's and Childs's put together. His text, and thus his authorial voice, permeates Act I, scene 1A (Train), Act I, scene 2B (Trial), and Act III, scene 1B (Trial/Prison), as well as Knee Plays 1, 2, and 5.

Wilson legal battle was never really between a winner and a loser. Indeed, it was the partnership of two leading figures from Manhattan's downtown scene that had generated such excitement in Europe and among their colleagues in New York, a partnership Wilson and Glass ensured by insisting on equal billing in programs, and sealed with a legal contract three years later.<sup>391</sup>

The 1976–79 contract dispute reveals the extent to which *Einstein on the Beach's* unique approach to collective authorship gave rise to tension between not just the disciplines of music and theater, but also the artists whose careers relied on recognition rooted in those disciplines' authorial standards. Furthermore, the particular nature of the conflict, which centered on a musical recording, highlights a basic incompatibility in the economies of reproduction governing non-literary theater and (operatic) music. This mismatch both artistically and legally favored Glass's contribution—as Kathleen Norris noted in a letter to one of Glass's representatives, “due to the efforts of the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, Mr. Glass will find himself equated with Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner, among others”<sup>392</sup>—compelling Wilson to seek the rights to the non-musical sonic elements of the opera's mise-en-scène in an effort to maintain equal authorship offstage. Ultimately, establishing legal boundaries around the opera benefited

---

<sup>391</sup> Two months before the opera's premiere at the Avignon Festival, Kathleen Norris sent a letter to festival director Paul Puaux specifying how the billing should appear line-by-line, and explaining, “Wherever the name Robert Wilson is used, the name Philip Glass must also be used, on the same line in the same type size. We have had cases in which only one name was used (as ‘Robert Wilson's most recent work’ or ‘Philip Glass's new opera’) and we feel that in fairness to the collaborative nature of the piece we must insist that billing be equal at all times.” Letter, Kathleen Norris to Paul Puaux, 3 June 1976, Folder: “23 – Einstein on the Beach,” 4-ACOL-1 709, Maison Jean Vilar. Concerns over billing continued throughout the tour, however, and in a letter to Margaret Wood at Performing Artservices, Inc. in October, Kathleen Norris appealed, “I welcome you as an advisor on presenting Phil, and have no problems about including you in meetings in which decisions are made. However, my only job is to make this event happen. I have no stake in the personal grandisement [sic] of Robert Wilson. I did not work with him before *Einstein*, and may not continue thereafter. Therefore, I try to see all parts. Frankly, if I had not felt that Philip was a fully equal collaborator, and that the music makes the work a real opera, not just what the French call a Wilson ‘silent opera,’ I would not have approached the foremost music house in the country to be a presenter.” Letter, Kathleen Norris to Margaret Wood, October 21, 1976, Series I, Box 114, Folder: “EOB Miscellaneous In House 1976,” Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>392</sup> Letter, Kathleen Norris to Margaret Wood, October 21, 1976, Series I, Box 114, Folder: “EOB Miscellaneous In House 1976,” Robert Wilson Papers.

both men. Critics like Alan Rich publicly recognized the musical recording's inability to capture the opera's interdisciplinary drama, and a legal contract enabled Glass and Wilson to confidently exploit the work to the benefit of their careers without fear of litigation.<sup>393</sup> The effect of their agreement on rights and royalties, however, has had the side effect of pushing *Einstein's* contributing authors further into the historical margins, and so it is to the most prominent of these authors, who performed in, contributed spoken text to, and eventually choreographed the opera, that I now turn.

### 5.3 Lucinda Childs's Evolving Authorship

As noted above, in order to legally control and receive royalties from all of *Einstein on the Beach's* components other than its music and lyrics, Robert Wilson secured the rights to the opera's spoken text from its copyright holders (Christopher Knowles, Samuel M. Johnson, and Lucinda Childs) in advance of signing the April 1979 contract with Philip Glass. While these contributors' concession of financial and legal control over their writing is not a trivial matter, equally notable is the conspicuous absence of any mention in the contract of the opera's extensive choreography, composed in 1976 by Wilson's frequent collaborator Andrew (Andy) de Groat and in 1984, 1992, and 2012 by Lucinda Childs.<sup>394</sup>

---

<sup>393</sup> Following the first remount at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Alan Rich commented, "The original 'Einstein' recording, which skillfully cut the time from 270 to 163 minutes, has been reissued on CBS, but it's only one dimension of a work with dimensions beyond counting." Alan Rich, "Once More Onto the Beach," *Newsweek*, December 31, 1984, 67, Box: "Box: 1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein Prod. Notes," Hamm Archives.

<sup>394</sup> I am unaware of any available documentation describing the process by which Wilson solicited the rights to the opera's spoken text from Childs, Johnson, and Knowles. Given the weight of the "Einstein Debt," the speech writers' awareness that the opera was not a profit-generating venture, and those writers' employment in 1976 as contracted actors (rather than financially accountable producers), it is possible that the speech writers felt motivated to grant Wilson reproduction rights because he and his foundation took financial responsibility for the debt-ridden project, textual contributions included. In a personal letter to Glass in August of 1978, Childs indicated that she did not consider her Supermarket speech to be a great creative loss to her as an artist, but she was more protective of Knowles, who she felt was "an extraordinary talent," and whose mental disability may easily have left him at a disadvantage in defending the rights to his textual contribution. See Letter, Lucinda Childs to Philip Glass, August 27,

The opera's dance sequences likely did not arise during the contract dispute because the impulse behind the legal document was to address the opera's mediatization as a sound recording absent Wilson's visual contributions. As choreography likewise fell into the visual category, and as Wilson had no compelling reason to seek the rights to a non-aural component of the opera, it may have simply slipped under the contractual radar. This omission makes sense in the techno-legal context of 1979, but it should *not* be taken as evidence that the choreography of the opera's two scene-length Field Dances—that is, the ensemble dances that comprise Act II, scene 1C and Act III, scene 2C—played a negligible role in the drama. On the contrary, turning our gaze to these dances reveals them to be vital dramatic and aesthetic components of an opera whose positioning in histories of theater and musical minimalism often leaves their choreographers on the margins, if not outright ignored. Turning from drama and music to dance also exposes Childs's imperative, yet unsettled, role on *Einstein's* creative team. Indeed, her replacement of de Groat as the opera's choreographer in 1984 resulted in the evolution of her participation from a featured performer-collaborator in 1976 to a performer-collaborator *and* choreographer during the 1984 and 1992 remounts in New York City and abroad, and from a performing artist to solely a choreographer during the 2012 revival, joining the opera's director and composer backstage during performances and onstage during bows and promotional interviews.

In other words, when Childs replaced de Groat's choreography with her own, and his cast of untrained dancers with her own trained company, a major shift occurred in the nature and reception of her authorship. In 1976 her creative role had been roughly equivalent to that of her fellow featured performers Samuel M. Johnson and Sheryl Sutton (who acted opposite her during the knee plays). Even choreographing and executing her own dance solo in Act I, scene 1A (Train), entitled the "Dance on Three Diagonals," did not significantly shift Childs's creative labor outside the bounds of what I have previously referred to as contributing authorship, as she supplied creative material within a larger

---

1978, Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it," Robert Wilson Papers.



theatrical framework conceived and (most importantly) controlled by Glass and Wilson. When de Groat choreographed the Field scenes, the division of dance labor between him and Childs rendered neither of their contributions sufficiently weighty enough to threaten the ultimate creative authority of the director and composer, but once Childs assumed his position, her creative presence as both an onstage performer and an offstage choreographer suffused almost every scene of the opera, shifting her role in the collective endeavor toward the conceptual authorship of Glass and Wilson. Childs has, in fact, never sought to claim the opera in this way, listing the Field Dances on her professional website among her choreographed works in general rather than among operas she has worked on, and refraining from performing the dances as separate concert pieces, which would enable her to reframe them as separate works over which she held ultimate creative authority. Her own reluctance to seek such authority over the landmark opera and its historical legacy, however, while understandable given the gradual nature of her promotion as a collaborator, is all the more reason for its historians to take stock of her involvement, lest the voices of *Einstein's* choreographers, performers, and particularly its female collaborators, continue to be superseded by the more assertive voices of the director and composer.

To examine the evolution of Childs's role as the "third wheel" on *Einstein's* creative team is to reveal the extent to which authorial recognition—especially in the collaborative performance practice endemic to the downtown scene in the 1970s—is less a state to be achieved and maintained than an unstable, ongoing process of discursive negotiation, and one that often resists easy disciplinary division. In that sense, Childs's unique position as both a performer and a choreographer exposes the usefulness of a dualism like contributing and conceptual authorship. Indeed, these concepts succeed in illuminating the tension present in theater that aspires to collaboration while remaining at least partially hierarchical, and they also provide poles by which one can measure Childs's evolving role with respect to *Einstein*. In 1976 she contributed an original dance and speech to the opera, but as she took over de Groat's position as choreographer, and as original members of the *Einstein* creative team moved on (de Groat, Knowles) or passed away (Johnson), critics have gradually begun to

treat her more like a conceptual author than a contributing one. Modeling *Einstein's* authorship as divided between conceptual and contributing artists therefore provides important information about the opera's initial construction and reception, but also maps the mutable and socially contingent nature of authorial recognition.

### 5.3.1 Playing Einstein: Lucinda Childs as Performer–Collaborator (1976)

A key difference between *Einstein on the Beach* and Wilson's earlier "operas" was *Einstein's* employment of auditioned actors, dancers, and singers instead of the members of Wilson's School of Byrds.<sup>395</sup> He nevertheless made one important exception, inviting Lucinda Childs to join the company without having to pass an audition, and the director's eagerness to single her out as a ringer in the company was well founded. Childs had attended Sarah Lawrence College in the late 1950s, and began participating in the Judson Dance Theater (JDT) in 1962. This group emerged out of a series of workshops led by accompanist Robert Dunn between 1960 and 1962 at John Cage's request, and its early members—including Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, and Steve Paxton—form a "who's who" of postmodern dance. Indeed, the dance historian Sally Banes avers that the group's initial dance concert initiated "the first avant-garde movement in dance theater since the modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s," rejecting the codification of ballet and modern dance as well as the traditional dance concert format,

---

<sup>395</sup> The first *Einstein* company included a mix of amateur and trained performers, and because Glass, Wilson, and de Groat asked them to act, sing, *and* dance, they were not expected to have professional training in all of these fields. Holding auditions did, however, give the director, composer, and choreographer control over who they admitted to the company, providing Wilson in particular with a degree of selectivity that he had lacked when he worked only with his School of Byrds. Notably, a few Byrds did make the transition from Wilson's more populous, baroque, and faux-naïf early "operas" to the formalist *Queen Victoria* and *Einstein*, particularly the black actor and dancer Sheryl Sutton who played opposite Lucinda Childs. Unlike Childs, Sutton was not invited to contribute original creative material to *Einstein*. However, her physical appearance and even the grain of her voice, juxtaposed against Childs's, was implicitly encoded as a stable feature of the operatic text like Wilson's sketches, Glass's musical score, and Childs's choreography. Indeed, when another actress took her place in the 2012 remount, Wilson chose another black actress (Helga Davis) with a similar vocal timbre.

embracing a diversity of choreographic styles, and joining downtown theater troupes in producing performances by cooperative means.<sup>396</sup>

Having studied with Cunningham and Dunn and joining JDT soon after the group began presenting public concerts, Childs possessed an undeniably attractive dance pedigree, as well as a history of performing solo dances that resonated with Wilson's approaches to theater. Indeed, in addition to presenting works by Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer in the early 1960s, Childs had often performed original, non-narrative solos that integrated movement, objects, and spoken dialogue. In *Museum Piece* (1965), for instance, she dropped colored circular mats onto the stage and used a mirror to navigate through them backwards while delivering an explanatory monologue. After taking a four-year hiatus from dance, Childs did away with such objects and texts out of a phenomenological concern for "directing the viewer's attention, perception, and recognition directly to the movement itself," but as Childs has explained more recently in an interview with Philip Glass and Mark Swed, her contribution of spoken text to *Einstein*—as well as her delivery of this text while interacting with a variety of objects onstage—benefited from her familiarity with the process of combining gesture, dialogue, and objects in performance from her time with JDT in the early 1960s.<sup>397</sup>

In 1973 Childs formed her own company, establishing her reputation as an art director and choreographer as well as a performer. Her work exhibited an interest in "pure movement structures."<sup>398</sup> In *Reclining Rondo* (1975), for example, three performers repeat a series of eighteen movements twelve times, changing

---

<sup>396</sup> Banes, *Democracy's Body*, xi.

<sup>397</sup> James Dillon, "Lucinda Childs and Her World of Reason," *Nit & Wit*, November/December 1984, 17, Box: "Box: 1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein Prod. Notes," Hamm Archives. See also Childs and Glass, interview by Mark Swed, "Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs Discuss *Einstein on the Beach*." My transcription. Responding to Swed's question, "Lucinda, had you written text before [*Einstein*]?" Childs answered, "Well, in the Judson Theater, we worked with dialogues and subject matter that, at moments, had something to do with what we were doing, but for the most part, didn't have something to do with what we were doing. And that was the nature of that kind of experience. And the supermarket speech was a request from Bob to come to the studio because he said, 'We need something about the beach.'"

<sup>398</sup> Banes, *Democracy's Body*, xviii.

direction each time to produce a slight alteration in the pattern. This resulted in a visual analogue to the musical processes then being explored by Glass and other minimalist composers.<sup>399</sup> Wilson was sufficiently impressed with this first of Childs's mid-1970s "dances in silence"—perhaps responding to their unaccompanied and pattern-based construction, which paralleled his own early "silent operas"—to ask her to join the *Einstein* cast as a featured actor, and to dance an extended solo of her own devising during the first main scene. In fact, in personal correspondence with his French commissioner and friend Michel Guy during the opera's rehearsal period, the director enthused, "I'm again working with Sheryl [Sutton], and of course she's wonderful, but perhaps even more exciting is Lucinda Childs — a dancer from the early 60's in New York. She just did a dance concert which is the most impressive concert I've seen in years."<sup>400</sup>

In the 1976 *Einstein* production, Childs was presented mainly as a performer, but in addition to the "Dance on Three Diagonals" that she choreographed and danced, she also performed as one of the two principle characters that appear during the five Knee Plays and throughout the nine main scenes. Robert Wilson also asked her to compose a speech to deliver during Act III, scene 1B (Trial/Prison), supposedly to remedy the lack of mention of the titular beach elsewhere in the opera.<sup>401</sup> While European critics by and large responded to the opera as a whole, rarely singling out particular moments or performances of note, Childs's solo dance and the performance of her speech made a strong

---

<sup>399</sup> To see performances of both of the dances cited above, see "Dances" in the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage's online publication *A Steady Pulse: Restaging Lucinda Childs, 1963–78*, [http://danceworkbook.pcah.us/asteadypulse/menu\\_dances.html](http://danceworkbook.pcah.us/asteadypulse/menu_dances.html).

<sup>400</sup> Letter, Robert Wilson to Michel Guy, February 11, 1976, "lettre manuscrite portant l'en-tête de Byrd Hoffman Foundation," 4-COL-70(226) (cote), Robert Wilson, 1972–1990, Département des Arts du spectacle, site Richelieu, Bibliothèque nationale de France. In the original manuscript of the letter, Wilson writes, "She just did a dance concert which is the most impressive concert of her own work I've seen in years," crossing out "of her own work" with black marker to intensify his praise.

<sup>401</sup> Childs and Glass, interview by Mark Swed, "Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs Discuss *Einstein on the Beach*" and Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, and Lucinda Childs, interview with Matia Tarnopolsky, "Robert Wilson, Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs discuss *Einstein on the Beach*," Cal Performances, Zellerbach Playhouse, University of California, Berkeley, October 28, 2012, accessed September 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8iLOGPm7AY>.

impression on American critics familiar with postmodern dance currents in New York. "Among the amazing people involved," Alan Rich gushed in *New York Magazine* a week after *Einstein's* second Met show, "I bow with particular awe to a dancer named Lucinda Childs who, somewhere inside my head, is still dancing."<sup>402</sup> John Rockwell, writing under the pen name David Sargent in the *Village Voice*, likewise made a point of highlighting her performance and credentials lest they be overshadowed by the work of the opera's official choreographer. "De Groat is hardly the only dancer in *Einstein*," he explained. "Lucinda Childs has a solo career that goes back to the Judson Church days, and if any of the performers is the 'star' of the 26-member cast it is she."<sup>403</sup> His colleagues at the *Village Voice* agreed, awarding her an Obie for her performance in 1977.<sup>404</sup>

Childs was indeed the first actor (along with Sutton) to take the stage in the opera during *Knee Play 1*, and during the first main scene, she dominated the action with her "Dance on Three Diagonals," the other props and characters that moved around her serving less to detract from her solo than to frame and emphasize it. As the dance's pedestrian gestural vocabulary was not drawn from classical ballet technique, critics struggled to describe this performance, and a sampling of their accounts gives some sense of what audiences in Paris and New York experienced. The English dance critic Dale Harris, using the solo as evidence of *Einstein's* lack of "anything that the ordinary theatergoer would recognize as action," claimed, "Lucinda Childs does nothing but march back and forth across the stage over and over again."<sup>405</sup> Seeking to convey more than

---

<sup>402</sup> Alan Rich, "From Byzantium to the Beach—The Lunatic Fringe of Opera," *New York Magazine*, December 6, 1976, Box: "Box: 1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein Prod. Notes," Hamm Archives.

<sup>403</sup> David Sargent, "Einstein on the Beach: The Met Will Dance to a Mysterious Tune," *Village Voice*, November 22, 1976, 53, 55, Series I, Box 122, Folder: "EOB – ARTSERVICE – PRESS," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>404</sup> *Village Voice* and American Theater Wing, "Obie Awards: 1970s," 2015, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://www.obieawards.com/events/1970s/year-77/>. Notably, Glass won an Obie Award for his operatic score, but the committee passed over Wilson in the categories of both direction and design.

<sup>405</sup> Dale Harris, "Slow Mover," *The Observer*, August 1976, Series I, Box 123, Folder: "R. Wilson Papers, Einstein O.B. Press, The Observer 8/76," Robert Wilson Papers. The same article was printed in *The Guardian*. Edmund White likewise recalls this particular

simply the repetitive quality of the dance, one *Soho Weekly News* critic favored analogy, calling Childs's solo "a nonstop hesitating running back and forth on three succeeding paths, in which she seemed to be exhorting or haranguing a crowd and not getting an answer, like a sideshow barker or someone demonstrating a potato peeler in a department store."<sup>406</sup> This description gestures toward the theatrical quality of Childs's performance, which develops gradually over the course of the long scene. Archival video shows Childs's walking motion, for instance, morphing from a casual saunter through a loose swagger to a purposeful stride, and finally to frenzied pacing. Accompanying this transformation is a gradual escalation of upper body movement from the relaxed arm gestures of a conductor—she holds an orchestra conductor's baton throughout—to sharp, tense arm and head motions that suggest a person on the verge of losing control.<sup>407</sup> The gradual loss of control she enacts creates a strong visual contrast with the movement of characters around her, who proceed in orderly, controlled fashion: one character moves across the stage imitating the repeated hand motions of a train conductor, another walks slowly while reading a newspaper, and three others enter as a unit holding a string between them so that forms the shape of a triangle. Childs's use of a baton also suggests a parallel with music, and indeed, the gradual process by which her dance develops operates very much like Glass's minimalist score.

---

dance, though he does not identify Childs by name. See Edmund White, "Einstein on the Beach," *Christopher Street*, January 1977, 53, Series I, Box 125, no folder, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>406</sup> Marcia B. Siegel, "How to Build a Cloud," *Soho Weekly News*, December 2, 1976, 17.

<sup>407</sup> The idea of losing control is one that Childs herself described in an interview with the film director Mark Obenhaus following the 1984 remount of *Einstein* in Brooklyn: "I feel that I have to have some kind of emotional involvement in the process. It doesn't sort of happen mechanically, unless there's some sort of emotional sense of getting out of control, and I primarily established that with two focal points, one directly into the diagonal, and one to my left, up. And these two points of orientation eventually become a point of confusion that a sense of indecision builds up between which point of orientation to be dealing with. And this is the pivot point for going out of control. And I feel that by changing the direction of the head, I can sort of make that work movement-wise and emotionally speaking. Even though it's a very simple thing for me, it is the solution for making this kind of dramatic statement. . . . In the train, the character from the [Dance on] Three Diagonals is, in a sense, performing a kind of slow-motion explosion." Lucinda Childs, interview with Mark Obenhaus, January 28, 1985, 22–24, transcript, Box: "1984 Einstein on the Beach Material (Moldy)," Hamm Archives.

In fact, following his comment on the repetitive nature of Childs's "Dance on Three Diagonals," Dale Harris added, "Later on she repeats a great many times a short monologue about seeing some bathing caps in an air-conditioned supermarket."<sup>408</sup> The speech to which he refers has become the best-known spoken text in the opera, largely because of this repetition, abetted by its brevity and memorable peculiarity. Childs credits Wilson with the selection of the text, which he supposedly drew from a longer, improvised monologue that he asked her to generate relating to the beach. Nevertheless, the words and the highly individual manner of their delivery—critics remark with some frequency on the compelling "grain" of her voice—remain a function of Childs creative agency:

I was in this prematurely air-conditioned super market  
and there were all these aisles  
and there were all these bathing caps that you could buy  
which had these kind of Fourth of July plumes on them  
they were red and yellow and blue  
I wasn't tempted to buy one  
But I was reminded of the fact that I had been avoiding  
the beach.<sup>409</sup>

During the Trial/Prison scene that features this text, Childs, outfitted in a white dress and playing the role of the witness, lies on a bed in the center of the court. She gradually stands and moves to the half of the stage arrayed as a prison, miming the then-current drama of Patty Hearst's trial (February 4–March 20, 1976) through a series of costume changes. Childs appears first as socialite, then as a bank robber, and finally as a prisoner, all the while intoning the short speech above. I mentioned earlier this sequence's similarity to Childs's early work with the JDT, which frequently integrated movement, objects, and speech. The added element of verbal repetition with changing vocal inflection produces a mantra-like verbal analogue to the slowly modulating repetition of Glass's minimalist score.

---

<sup>408</sup> Dale Harris, "Slow Mover," *The Observer*, August 1976, Series I, Box 123, Folder: "R. Wilson Papers, Einstein O.B. Press, The Observer 8/76," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>409</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 74–5. Immediately preceding the text is the attribution, "Text written by Lucinda Childs; To be recited from lying on bed through exit, repeating as necessary.)"

Perhaps as a result of her history of using and setting aside spoken text in her own choreographic and performance work, Childs did not exhibit a particular attachment to this speech, telling Glass in a 1978 letter related to the contract dispute, “I was reluctant to defend my Supermarket speech as the greatest contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> century literature.”<sup>410</sup> Both this speech and her “Dance on Three Diagonals” were and continue to be credited to her, but as copies of Childs’s and Johnson’s signed contracts reveal, their creative contributions did not have any impact on their salaries, so Childs’s reward in 1976 was one measured in symbolic, rather than economic, capital.<sup>411</sup>

This capital was not, however, without immediate and lasting value. Even in the relatively limited authorial capacity of a featured performer, Childs’s creative contributions to *Einstein* in 1976 drew sufficient attention to her individual performance to earn her an Obie Award and advance her career. Further, the gradual development of her deceptively simple-looking solo dance and the repetitive delivery of her spoken text closely paralleled the music that accompanied them, her aesthetic compatibility with Glass rendering Childs an integral player on the original *Einstein* creative team and making her the logical choice to replace de Groat when the Brooklyn Academy of Music remounted the opera in 1984.

### **5.3.2 Setting Einsteins in Motion: Lucinda Childs as Performer–Collaborator and Choreographer (1984 and 1992)**

The first revival of *Einstein on the Beach* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music marked a turning point in the opera’s production history for several reasons. At the level of production and reception, it shifted financial responsibility for the

---

<sup>410</sup> Letter, Lucinda Childs to Philip Glass, August 27, 1978, Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it,” Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>411</sup> Letter, Kathleen Norris for the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, Inc. to Samuel M. Johnson, March 7, 1976, and letter, Kathleen Norris for the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, Inc. to Lucinda Childs, March 7, 1976, Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB Personal Contracts,” Robert Wilson Papers. Both performers were paid \$150.00 weekly during the first rehearsal period, \$190.00 weekly during the second rehearsal period and European tour, and \$25.00 per diem to offset food and lodging expenses. At the time of the signing of these contracts, according to Glass’s autobiographies, Johnson (and possibly Childs) had not yet been invited to compose spoken text for the opera, but both had been cast in featured acting roles.



remount from Wilson and Glass onto presenting institutions, and its commercial success validated the work's continuing appeal to audiences eight years after its premiere. At the level of the operatic text, this production also introduced new choreography by Childs that departed in crucial ways from de Groat's original dances. Her choreography would become a fixed contribution to the opera and expand Childs's authorial role as a collaborator. By comparing de Groat's and Childs's backgrounds and approaches to the Field Dances, as well as the impact the latter dancer's promotion had on her billing, we can see Childs's authorship begin to shift away from the pole of contributing authorship and toward the conceptual authorship that enabled Glass and Wilson to claim *auteur* status toward the work as a whole.

The Field Dances comprise only two of the opera's fourteen scenes and Knee Plays, but they play an important structural role worth describing in order to emphasize the impact that the change in choreography had on the opera's dramatic flow. As the common denominator linking drama, music, and dance is time, Wilson and Glass initially used that dimension to demarcate the structure of the work. The five Knee Plays (K1–5) would be 4, 4, 5, 4, and 4 minutes in length, and the main scenes (A1–3, B1–3, and C1–3) would be 24, 23, 22, 23, 24, 22, 18, 16, and 17 minutes in length. Once Wilson and Glass had agreed on three central images (A: train, B: trial, C: field) and organized them according to a "theme and variation" form drawn from Western classical musical composition (Figure 5.1).<sup>412</sup>

---

<sup>412</sup> Robert Wilson, interview by John Rockwell, American Theatre Wing and Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation Masters of the Stage, March 20, 1997, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://sdcfoundation.org/conversations-community/masters-of-the-stage/>. These timings underwent modification over the course of the first tour, and with the temporal tightening and polishing that occurred during subsequent productions. From a conceptual perspective, however, Wilson and Glass clearly envisioned the dances as dividing the opera in thirds, both temporally and dramatically. Legally, Glass has not taken credit for the temporal and thematic elements of the opera's structure, but in both of his autobiographies, he describes the process by which he and Wilson decided on these elements together. See Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 29–34 and *Words Without Music*, 285–90. Shevtsova likewise describes the early collaborative process thus: "Wilson explains that he always starts with a title and then determines the structure and duration of the proposed work. He then fills this 'architecture' (Wilson's term) with content. His architectural approach, together with his

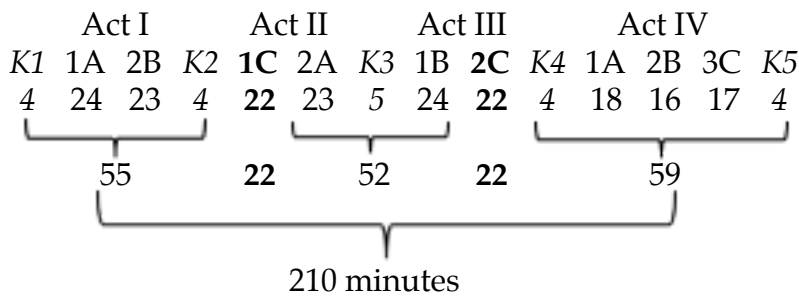


Figure 5.1 Early temporal structure (in minutes) of *Einstein*.

The highlighted scenes and times represent the two Field Dances, and as the lower row of numbers indicates, the scenes and interludes surrounding Act II, scene 1C and Act III, scene 2C are of almost equal length. In other words, the dances' positions separate the opera into neat thirds, making the dances key structural pillars. Furthermore, the dances were conceived as dynamic landscapes, as opposed to the Knee Plays and Train and Trial scenes, which were conceived in the much tighter and more static perspectives of the portrait and still life. A sudden broadening of perspective, paired with a whirlwind of bodily motion after nearly an hour of slow-motion tableaux, rendered each Field Dance a dramatic shot of adrenaline. The Field Dances, in other words, played a vital role in enlivening Wilson's dramaturgy at key structural points, and in restoring kinetic drive to music whose layered rhythmic cycles, which Glass has described as "wheels inside wheels," can be perceived as moving either extremely slowly or extremely rapidly.<sup>413</sup> The nature of the dance that supplied this adrenaline has

---

sense of organization and exactitude, suited Glass's way of writing music, and the two men went about their respective tasks, although not as fully independently of each other as Cunningham and Cage. Wilson, for instance, would suggest images for Glass to think about for the music." Shevtsova, *Robert Wilson*, 89.

<sup>413</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 59. Glass specifically uses the descriptor "wheels inside wheels" to describe his technique of cyclic structure. Glass explains, "I have used rhythmic cycles (repeating fixed rhythmic patterns of specific lengths) to create extended structures in my music by superimposing two different rhythmic patterns of different lengths. Depending on the length of each pattern, they will eventually arrive together back at their starting points, making one complete cycle. This has been described by some writers as sounding like 'wheels inside wheels,' a rather fanciful but not wholly inaccurate way of evoking the resulting effect," the constantly shifting relationship between the faster-moving and slower-moving patterns enabling a perceiver to hear the resulting combination at the metric pace of either pattern, or to switch back and forth between them.

taken two forms. De Groat's choreography stressed spinning, improvisation, and amateurism, while Childs's emphasized carefully graphed patterns, precision of execution, and a trained, athletic aesthetic, and the styles in which they diagrammed their work emphasizes these differences (Figure 5.2).

The downtown community nurtured both de Groat and Childs early in their dance careers, but their training, the aesthetic aims that guided their choreography, and the dancers with whom they worked on *Einstein* resulted in dances that made decidedly different contributions to the music and staging around them. De Groat, as he explained in an interview following *Einstein's* 1976 tour, was a latecomer to dance, beginning shortly after meeting Wilson in 1967 while he was studying painting. "Bob was conducting a body movement workshop which I attended," he explained. "I'm untrained in any formal sense, though I've choreographed pieces for as many as twenty dancers. Training for me is doing it."<sup>414</sup> Like Wilson, who also lacked rigorous dance training, he was impressed by the abstract work of George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, and Merce Cunningham, and valued an aesthetic of amateurism, claiming that "working exclusively with a trained company seems less interesting to me than working with untrained people," or a combination of the two.<sup>415</sup> Due in part to this interest, and in part to the financial necessity in 1976 of hiring a company whose members could act, sing, *and* dance, de Groat worked with performers who were by and large amateur dancers. This restriction resulted in dances possessed of "a friendly, unassuming, *faux-naïf* air," in the words of one critic, and of "an engagingly innocent awkwardness, as if humans were playing at being heavenly bodies," in the words of another.<sup>416</sup>

---

<sup>414</sup> Andrew de Groat, interview by Jeff Goldberg, "Robert Wilson and 'Einstein on the Beach'," *New York Arts Journal* (Spring 1977): 18.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> John Howell, "Forum: What A Legend Becomes" *Artforum* (March 1985), and Deborah Jowitt, "The Torsoi Tortoise Returns to the Finish Line," *Village Voice*, January 1, 1985, Box: "Box: 1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein Prod. Notes," Hamm Archives.

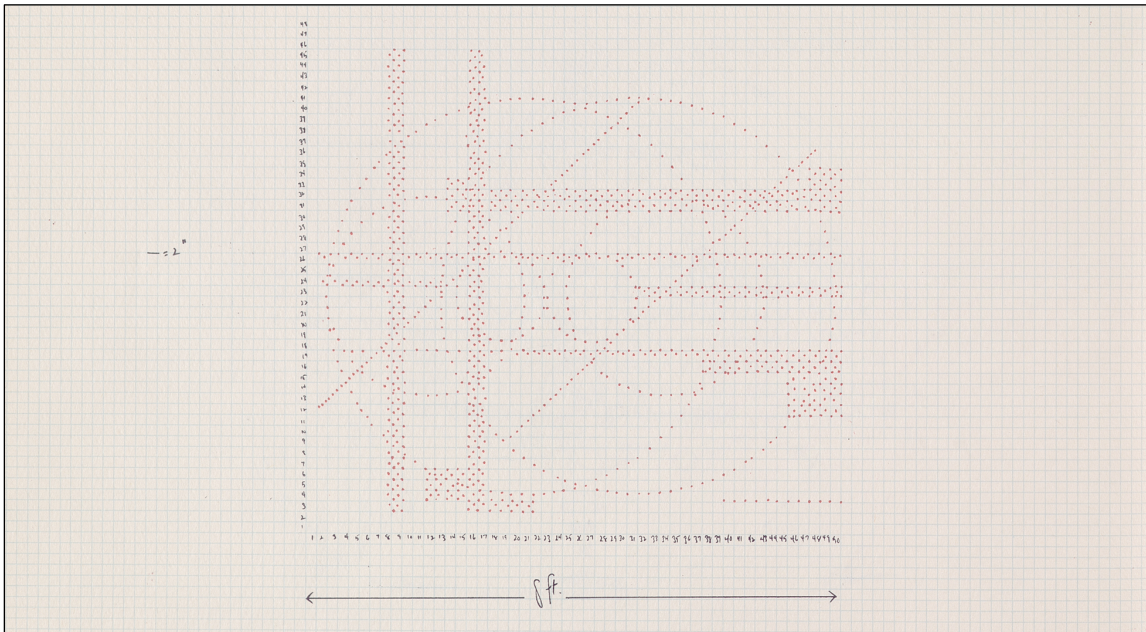
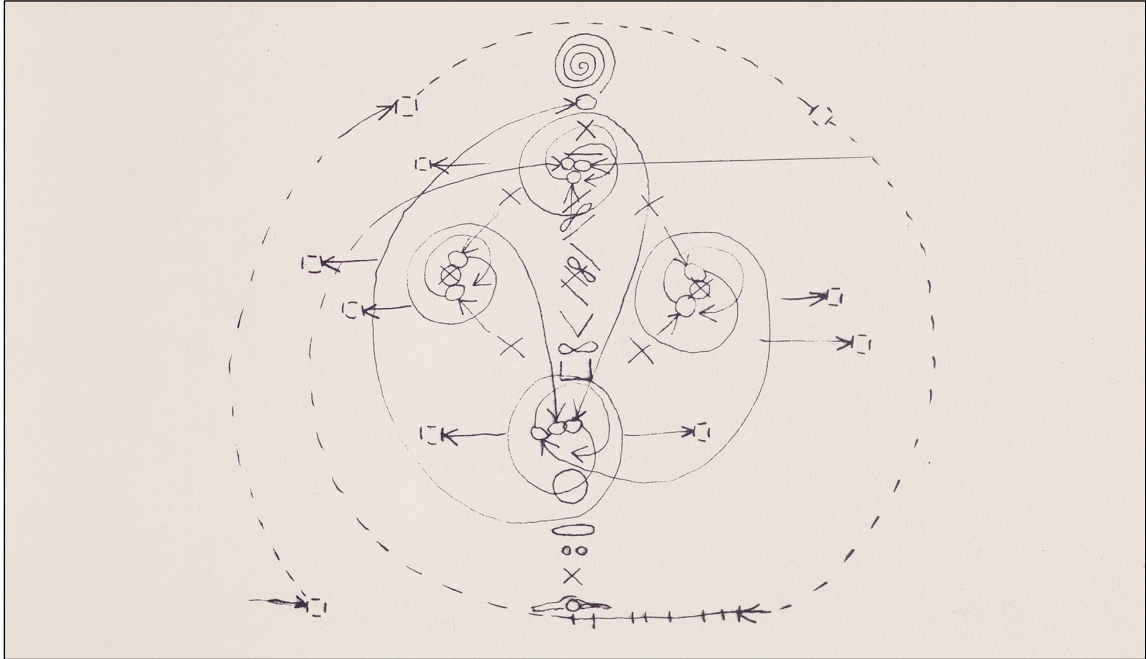


Figure 5.2 Diagrams of: Act III, scene 2C (Field); Knee Play 3 light panel and Act IV, scene 3C (Space Machine) movement of actors.

Andrew de Groat's choreography for the second Field Dance (above) and Lucinda Childs's diagram of the light panel and corresponding movement of the actors in Knee Play 3 and Act IV, scene 3C (Spaceship) (below) demonstrate the importance of circular patterns in both of their approaches to the opera, as well as Childs's more polished, geometrical style. Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, with Andrew de Groat, *Einstein on the Beach: An Opera in Four Acts*, ed. Vicky Alliaata (New York: EOS Enterprises, Inc., 1976).

De Groat described his choreography thus:

The dances for Act II scene 1 and Act III scene 2 of *Einstein on the Beach* are based on combinations of four simple movements: jumping, walking forward and backward, a series of sixteen arm movements, and a twenty-two beat phrase of running and leaping with eight energy and spatial variations. These natural movements are performed at a fast, even pace to the simplest possible counts in interconnecting geometrical patterns. Dancers perform this simple vocabulary, variations of this vocabulary, and their own movements. All movements are danced in choreographed patterns and also in spontaneous, improvised patterns. All movements are structured for increasing and decreasing numbers of one, three, four, seven and eight dancers.<sup>417</sup>

Critics in 1976 generally commended the results. "Only Andrew de Groat's choreography," one French critic asserted, "introduces to the structures of vision and sound the breath of the body, the naturalness of racing and jumping, a certain harmonious improvisational quality."<sup>418</sup> The American critic Barbara Baracks echoed this praise, noting that while "the dances are not particularly related to the rest of the opera," nevertheless "their cheerfulness is a welcome bar of color," and the dance critic Anna Kisselgoff drew attention to the parallels between Glass's music and de Groat's "simple and restricted" movement vocabulary "whose repetitiveness also contains variation," concluding that the musical score "seemed almost to chant an aural echo of the dance, but actually created a highly theatrical resonance for it."<sup>419</sup>

Lucinda Childs likewise constructed her versions of the Field Dances by combining the simple movements of individual dancers to form complex patterns in parallel with Glass's musical structures. Her background in formal

---

<sup>417</sup> Letter, Kathleen Norris to Paul Puaux, June 11, 1976, Folder 23: "Einstein on the Beach," 4-ACOL-1 709, Maison Jean Vilar.

<sup>418</sup> Jean-Jacques Lerrant, "La creation de 'Einstein on the beach': Cinq heures de fascination et de rêve au festival d'Avignon," *Le Progres*, July 27, 1976, 8, Series I, Box 124, Folder: "EOB – Artservice – Press," Robert Wilson Papers. The original French reads: "Seule la chorégraphie d'Andrew de Groat introduit dans ses structures de l'image et du son le respiration du corps, le naturel de la course et du bond, un certain hasard d'improvisation harmonieuse."

<sup>419</sup> Barbara Baracks, "Einstein on the Beach," *Artforum* (March 1977): 31, Series I, Box 125, no folder; and Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance: Fascinating Work by Glass and deGroat," *New York Times*, May 27, 1976, 32, Series I, Box 122, Folder: 1976 EINSTEIN," Robert Wilson Papers.

training, access to trained dancers, and perhaps most importantly, her experience working with Glass and his music in the interim between the 1976 and 1984 productions of *Einstein*, however, resulted in dances that appeared more professional and polished than de Groat's originals. The *Artforum* critic John Howell described them as "more complex, more inventive, and better performed" than their predecessors, while Deborah Jowitt noted, "Childs, a more accomplished choreographer now than De Groat was in 1976, has dehumanized and geometrized the dancing. . . . Her dancers graph the cosmos that De Groat's dancers played in."<sup>420</sup>

Howell's claim that Childs's versions were "more of a piece with Glass' and Wilson's intricate musical and theatrical vision" than de Groat's likely stems from the fact that Childs had had the opportunity to work with Glass on the ninety-five-minute piece *Dance* (1979) prior to choreographing the Field Dances. A collaboration that integrated film by the visual artist Sol LeWitt, *Dance* enabled Glass and Childs, who were already familiar with one another's technical approaches to music and dance from their work on *Einstein*, to refine the interaction of their respective arts. By the time Childs took over de Groat's position in the *Einstein* company, then, her interest in constructing complex patterns from a deliberately restricted vocabulary, as well as repetition enlivened by gradual development, was so in tune with Glass's compositional techniques that she admitted to the director Mark Obenhaus in a 1985 interview for the documentary film *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera* that, "One of the things that we actually worried about in working together was the fact that we were aesthetically so compatible that our ideas are so similar." Indeed, she went on, "there are a lot of similarities [to my work] in the way he structures his thematic material. . . . The introduction of a new theme isn't just a step that has no transition. There's always a feeling of building up a phrase, and you never

---

<sup>420</sup> John Howell, "Forum: What A Legend Becomes" *Artforum* (March 1985), and Deborah Jowitt, "The Torsoi Tortoise Returns to the Finish Line," *Village Voice*, January 1, 1985, Box: "Box: 1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein Prod. Notes," Hamm Archives.

completely let go of where you're coming from."<sup>421</sup> Glass and Childs both applied additive procedures to simple musical and gestural phrases, respectively, in order to foster development and thematic cohesiveness in the absence of conventional musical and dance forms. Similarly, their musical and choreographic approaches echoed Wilson's structural design, which subjected three thematic images (train, trial, field) to a process of patterned variation. To prevent the sonic and visual components from becoming too closely aligned, Childs told Obenhaus that she endeavored to use Glass's music "as a sounding board" rather than as a template, or as "an opportunity to place a counterpoint against the structure, to create a structure of my own that didn't fit exactly with the structure that he had set up."<sup>422</sup>

The fact that Childs intentionally engaged with aesthetic concerns about parallelism and juxtaposition between what is seen and what is heard on stage, the same concerns that guided Wilson's and Glass's approaches to the score and staging, is indicative of the substantive nature of her creative contribution as a collaborator. Indeed, in both *Dance* and the Field scenes of the first *Einstein* revival, Glass's music paired with LeWitt's film and Wilson's painterly lighting to construct audiovisual environments in which Childs's choreography could take center stage, effectively allowing Childs in both instances to take a position of top billing. Furthermore, by bringing her own dance company with her as she stepped into de Groat's position in 1984, Childs effectively killed two birds with one stone: she used *Einstein* to create jobs for her dancers, just as Glass used the opera to employ his ensemble, and she also helped the opera to achieve a degree of polish that many critics cited as an improvement over the first production because her dancers' training equipped them to adapt to Wilson's dramatic roles with greater facility than the amateur actors of the 1976 production. Finally, by remaining a performer in 1984 and 1992, while also adopting a directorial

---

<sup>421</sup> Lucinda Childs, interview with Mark Obenhaus, January 28, 1985, 7–9, transcript, Box: "1984 Einstein on the Beach Material (Moldy)," Hamm Archives. Childs likewise discusses aesthetic aims in her choreography that correspond with Glass's aims in his music. James Dillon, "Lucinda Childs and Her World of Reason," *Nit & Wit*, November/December 1984, 17–18, Box: "Box: 1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein Prod. Notes," Hamm Archives.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*



position previously divided between her and de Groat, Childs became distinctly elevated as a collaborator with respect to performer-collaborators like Christopher Knowles and Samuel M. Johnson.<sup>423</sup>

The change in *Einstein's* choreography and its attendant impact on authorship and billing did not go unnoticed by the opera's composer and director, nor by its administrators. In fact, six months before the revival opened at the Howard S. Gilman opera house, internal correspondence at BAM relates that the Lucinda Childs Dance Company wanted "to be mentioned whenever the Philip Glass Ensemble is mentioned" in order to benefit from the same publicity, and to alert potential spectators to the fact that Childs was now *Einstein's* choreographer, and her own dance company part of the overall opera company.<sup>424</sup> Later that summer, the program too became a site of negotiation. Seeking to balance Childs's desire to emphasize her directorial role with Wilson's and Glass's concern about retaining clear joint authorship over the opera as a whole, the production's general manager Michael O'Rand suggested in a letter to Wilson that Childs's choreography be billed at 55% the size of the opera's title, compared with Childs's and Sutton's performances at 50% and Glass's and Wilson's contributions at 75%. "I feel that in this version," he explained, "the relationship of Lucinda's choreography credit to yourself and Phil is reduced sufficiently by limiting 'Choreography by' above and in a smaller type size than Lucinda's name so that, in comparison to the 60% version, it clearly indicates that Lucinda is not a co-creator of the opera with you and Phil."<sup>425</sup> While such exacting

---

<sup>423</sup> Knowles wrote the vast majority of *Einstein's* spoken text, but while he did attend many of the early lunch conversations from which the opera's structural and thematic ideas emerged, he did not participate as a performer as he had in *A Letter for Queen Victoria*. Johnson did have the opportunity to both write and deliver two speeches during the opera, but while the feminist and romantic content of his Trial and Knee Play 5 speeches does contribute significant semiotic texture to Wilson's visual staging, there is no evidence available that indicates that he shaped his speeches to correspond with Wilson's and Glass's aesthetic aims.

<sup>424</sup> Internal correspondence, E. J. to J. V. M., June 21, 1984, Box: "1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein PROD. NOTES," Hamm Archives. The subject of billing arises again in another internal memorandum dated June 19, 1984.

<sup>425</sup> Letter, Michael O'Rand to Robert Wilson, August 27, 1984, Box: "1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "Einstein PROD. NOTES," Hamm Archives.



attention to billing is hardly remarkable in the theater world, this behind-the-scenes compromise points up *Einstein's* unusually collaborative disposition among operas, of which Childs's evolution from a featured performer-collaborator to a performer-collaborator-choreographer serves as a particularly visible reminder. The director and composer ultimately agreed to bill Childs's choreography at 60% in 1984, a concession that turned out to be prescient, for when (after a two-decade hiatus following the 1992 production) *Einstein* was revived a third time in 2012, presenters began to regularly welcome Childs as an original member of the creative team, if not quite a conceptual author.

### **5.3.3 Passing the Torch: Lucinda Childs as Choreographer (2012)**

Prior to auditions for the 2012 *Einstein on the Beach* revival tour, Wilson, Glass, and Childs agreed that they would not perform in the production, enabling them for the first time to watch the entire opera from the same perspective as their audience members. For Wilson, this meant that he would not perform the brief, wild flashlight dance in Act IV, scene 3C that forms a sort of dramatic bookend with Childs's "Dance on Three Diagonals" in Act I, scene 1A. For Glass, this meant that Mick Rossi would take over the second keyboard part alongside keyboardist and Philip Glass Ensemble director Michael Riesman. And for Childs, this meant that not only would she not perform in the Field Dances along with her company, but also that an actress (Kate Moran) and a dancer in her company (Caitlin Scranton) would replace her as a character and soloist, respectively, on stage. Passing the torch to a younger generation of actors, dancers, and musicians for the first time, then, placed not just *Einstein's* director-designer and composer, but also its choreographer, in purely directorial positions. Practically, the choice to remain off-stage reflected the aging bodies of Wilson, Glass, and Childs, all of whom were septuagenarians by the 2010s. Professionally, however, it also served to emphasize their creative authority over both the largely young performers—who related to the downtown artists more as mentors, or even idols, than as peers—and the drama, music, and dance they oversaw.

As I have discussed previously in this study, one of the defining characteristics that set *Einstein* apart from conventional operas was fixed creative contributions

to the operatic text by not just its composer, but also its director and several of its performers. Between 1976 and 2012, however, most of these performers had passed away or moved on in their careers, and this gradual exodus left Glass, Wilson, and Childs as the three most prominent remainders of the original creative team. Indeed, aside from longtime Philip Glass Ensemble members Jon Gibson, Michael Riesman, and Kurt Munkacsi, they were the *only* artists left who had been involved with the opera since its inception. In the process of promoting the third revival tour and making sense of its cultural significance, presenters thus frequently arranged opportunities for interviewers and critics to pick the artists' brains, so to speak, granting Childs special access to and authority over *Einstein's* history and aesthetics along with Glass and Wilson. This access and authority was, however, carefully managed.

In the midst of preview performances in Ann Arbor, Michigan in January of 2012, for example, an interview open to the general public provided Glass and Wilson with a forum in which to reflect on the opera's four-decade production history for an American audience, an opportunity both men seized with alacrity. Childs was invited onto the stage halfway through the interview in a semi-impromptu gesture that, like her billing in the 1984 program, simultaneously affirmed her status as the crucial third wheel that balanced the creative team while reminding those in attendance that when all was said and done, *Einstein* was a Glass and Wilson opera with choreography by Childs, not a Glass, Wilson, and Childs opera. Though the Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon, which gave *Einstein's* 2012 tour its world premiere, actually did gesture toward Childs as a conceptual author in its seasonal program, crediting the opera to "*des trois créateurs Robert Wilson, Philip Glass et Lucinda Childs,*" programs for the opera itself consistently billed the choreographer in a noticeably smaller font size than that devoted to her colleagues, the position of her name just below Glass's and Wilson's offering a visual analogue to her carefully negotiated creative status.<sup>426</sup> Indeed, when Cal Arts facilitated an interview

---

<sup>426</sup> Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon, "Programme de la saison 2011–2012," 54–55, WNB–1283, Site Richelieu, Département des Arts du spectacle, Bibliothèque nationale de France (my italics).

similar to the one that had taken place in Michigan, the organization also took a similar approach to including Childs in the event. A third empty chair on stage, awaiting Childs's arrival partway through the interview, eloquently spoke to the almost-but-not-quite-conceptual nature of her authorship, formalizing the public presentation of Glass, Wilson, and Childs as equally longtime participants, but not as equal authors.

One of the downtown scene's most potent contributions across the arts has been its social, aesthetic, and ideological emphasis on collaboration, but as *Einstein* made clear early on, a modus operandi that sought to challenge and subvert conventionally regulated, hierarchical relationships between creators, performers, and audience members was no guarantee of a significant change in the status quo. Composers and directors still benefitted from a music and theater system ready to recognize them as primary authorities on the work, leaving choreographers and performers in a position of secondary billing and academic marginalization. Childs has by and large been denied a position of authority over *Einstein's* history and aesthetics, with evidence ranging from being left out of the pedagogically popular documentary film *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera* (for which she was interviewed) to her calculated belated entrances during promotional interviews on the 2012–15 tour. Nevertheless, her reception as *Einstein's* choreographer and its star performer-collaborator over the last four decades indicates that public, and now academic, recognition of her authorship continues to evolve along with her role in the opera, a process that is likely to continue as new generations of directors and choreographers take on Glass's score.

#### **5.4 The Philip Glass Ensemble Musicians as Authors**

Programs accompanying live performances of *Einstein on the Beach* changed as Lucinda Childs stepped into the role of choreographer and new companies were assembled for each revival. Nevertheless, the order of the billing, which places conceptual authors before contributing collaborators, and all stage performers before instrumental musicians, remained unchanged. These musicians, though no less fundamental to the opera than its actors and dancers—and, given the crucial role that musical recordings have played in *Einstein's* transmission,

arguably *more* fundamental—consistently occupy a position at the bottom of the billing, where they straddle the designation between cast and crew. In any other operatic program this order of accreditation would be unremarkable, as instrumental music, even when it communicates vital dramatic information, still plays a supportive role for the onstage actors and their voices. After all, it is the presence and character of the onstage drama that sets opera apart from other musical genres, and other than the technical crew and administration, the pit orchestra is literally the least visible branch of any opera company. Physically located beneath the stage, musicians traditionally wear black attire, and lighting is designed not to reveal the musicians to audience members, but rather to illuminate the scores on the music stands. Only the conductor, who mediates between pit and stage, is regularly accorded special consideration, and the remainder of the audience's attention is directed toward the virtuosic performances of singers and the drama their bodies and voices convey. *Einstein on the Beach*, however, is no ordinary opera, and in key ways, its musical forces are no ordinary pit orchestra.

In fact, the pit orchestra is not really an orchestra at all, but rather the Philip Glass Ensemble (PGE). Initially an informal group of composing and performing colleagues who began playing as together as they arrived and became established in and around New York's SoHo neighborhood between 1967 and 1972, the PGE's diminutive size, unusual and amplified instrumentation, and institutional independence—more akin to a jazz or rock band than a classical ensemble—offered a striking contrast to the large, acoustic affair of strings, woodwinds, and brass audiences expect to encounter in an opera house. The PGE owes its trademark sound to a combination of two electric organs, three winds (whose players double on flute, clarinet, and saxophone), and amplified soprano voice, with a 1976 roster including Philip Glass, Michael Riesman, Jon Gibson, Richard (Dickie) Landry, Richard E. Peck, Jr., the sopranos Joan La Barbara and (replacing her partway through the tour) Iris Hiskey, and sound engineer Kurt Munkacsi.<sup>427</sup> Differentiating *Einstein* from other works Glass

---

<sup>427</sup> Of these musicians, only Philip Glass, Jon Gibson, and Michael Riesman, as well as the audio engineer Kurt Munkacsi, still play with the Philip Glass Ensemble. During the

composed for his ensemble are the added forces of a single violin, its player costumed as the amateur fiddler Albert Einstein, and a twelve-member SATB chorus.

As these musicians perform music composed by Philip Glass, they would seem to have little to do with a discussion about either conceptual or contributing authorship. Recall, however, that it was Joan La Barbara's complaint to Glass that there was no aria for her to sing that prompted him to add a soprano vocalise to the organ solo of *Einstein's* penultimate scene, Act IV, scene 2B (Bed). This minimal scene presents nothing but a beam of light that gradually rises from a horizontal to a vertical position and rises into the flyspace above the dark stage, and comparison of archival video of the spring rehearsal at the Video Exchange Theater (before Glass added a vocal line) and documentation of performances following its inclusion reveals the significant dramatic impact of adding even a single independent musical voice to such a visually and sonically spare sequence.<sup>428</sup> La Barbara did not compose the music that she (and later Hiskey) sang, but by perceiving a need for the addition and voicing it to Glass, the Ensemble member participated, in a small but significant way, as a conceptual author alongside composer and director.

Other members of the PGE likewise functioned meaningfully as authors of *Einstein* both on stage and in the recording studio, but in a contributing, rather than a conceptual, capacity. Indeed, the Cajun roots and eclectic training of several of the Ensemble's early members made it possible for, and perhaps inspired, Glass to introduce improvisation to Act IV, scene 1A (Building) in the

---

1984 revival of *Einstein on the Beach*, other instrumentalists included the saxophonist and flautist Richard E. Peck, Jr., keyboardist Martin Goldray, flautist, saxophonist, and clarinetist Andrew Serman, and soprano Lisa Bielawa, with Dan Dryden acting as live sound mixer. For the 1992 remount, this line-up remained the same, and in 2012, on-stage audio engineer Stephen Erb joined Dan Dryden, and keyboardist Mick Rossi and woodwind player David Crowell joined the Ensemble after Peck and Goldray departed.<sup>428</sup> "Einstein on the beach: a new opera by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, presented by the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, Inc.," Video Exchange Theater, March 3, 1976, NCOV 3006; see also, for comparison, "Einstein on the Beach: an opera in four acts," The Brooklyn Academy of Music, December 12, 1984, NCOV 3000, Performing Arts Research Collections, Theater on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

form of a woodwind cadenza. The improvised cadenza, which in *Einstein* has now come to be a (literally) spotlighted performance, was a well-established virtuosic practice in opera of the eighteenth century. Closer consideration of the musical score and recordings capturing these improvisations, however, reveals that the Building scene does not just evoke improvisation as an operatic convention. It also defamiliarizes the practice, gesturing toward traditions atypical of opera that likewise endow their performers with significant creative agency, particularly North Indian classical music and modal jazz. Beyond providing a featured performer with an opportunity to shine, then, improvisation in the context of *Einstein* also blurs the line between author and performer or interpreter. It introduces a plastic moment to an otherwise tightly regulated score, and in the process, makes audible the collaborative, reciprocal approach to composition and performance that defined the PGE during its first ten years. Glass makes this plasticity possible by composing the rhythmic and harmonic equivalent of a bare stage. In doing so, he provides a platform for improvisation on the sonorities of a pentatonic mode just as Wilson's actual bare stage provides a set on which the entire cast gradually assembles in a tableau vivant and then departs.

#### **5.4.1 Composing a Bare Stage: The Musical Structure of Act IV, scene 1A (Building)**

The first scene of Act IV provides a strong visual analog to the music Glass composes. The backdrop features a brightly lit, fortress-like brick building—modeled on the structure that houses the Holland Tunnel air ventilation system in Lower Manhattan—painted at an angled perspective. This is the same perspective in which the Night Train appeared in Act II, smoothing the transformation of the opera's dynamic train image into a static building in the last act. A cast member, seated in profile in the left of two windows at the top of the building, writes in the air, with small but rapid motions that draw the eye. While it is unclear what she may be writing, her action is the dramatic locus of the scene. Meanwhile, the actors and dancers in the cast assemble on stage one by one, most adopting the stiff comportment, arms held slightly away from the torso, that those familiar with Wilson's theater informally call the "Wilson walk."

Others enter in more idiosyncratic fashion: a boy who threw paper airplanes in Act I, scene 1A rides in on a skateboard, and a woman who read a book in Act I, scene 2B enters while again reading a book. As each character reaches his or her allotted stopping point, he or she freezes in place so that after about seven minutes, the cast has created a tableau vivant. As one, the group looks down at the ground as if searching for a lost item, then gradually stands and turns to gaze up at the woman in the building. A minute passes before the first cast member exits the stage, and the rest follow, one by one, until only the building and the woman in the window remain.

As this tableau vivant coalesces and disperses, the music roughly imitates its moving parts. Two organs, like the building and the woman it contains, provide a backdrop to the action that is simultaneously static (based on a single chord) and in constant motion (additive rhythmic development). Against this backdrop, the chorus and the woodwinds (a soloist during revival productions) sporadically sing/play and lapse into silence, just as the cast members' alternating motion and stasis as they enter, freeze, slowly look down and up, and leave the stage, shapes the dramatic arc of the scene. Although the chorus's voicing does not change substantially over the course of the scene, the woodwinds engage in a slow-building, dynamic jazz improvisation. With the reduction of the woodwind ensemble jam to a tenor saxophone solo during the 1984 production, this particular performance was engineered to draw spectators' auditory attention just as the woman in the window draws the gaze of the assembled characters (and with it, the gaze of the audience). In that way, the improvisatory elements of Glass's musical score for *Building* parallel the activity of the characters on stage, emphasizing the dramatic arc of the scene.

The musical structure of *Building* therefore presents an opportunity to examine not only the audiovisual montage characteristic of Wilson's drama, but also the opera's improvising musicians as authors. Musical analysis offers one valuable perspective on how Glass's score and his musicians' creative contributions together train our attention on an element of the drama that is, for all intents and purposes, invisible. As mentioned above, the musical score of the scene includes three forces: electric organs, chorus, and woodwinds. Of these, only the organs

play fully notated parts, arpeggiating a pentatonic chord (derived from the E-flat major and including the pitches F, A-flat, C, B-flat, and E-flat) in contrary motion to produce a theme heard in all three opera scenes based on the image of a train. The choral and woodwind parts, by contrast, remain partially in the hands of the performers. That is to say, Glass directs his musicians when to enter and on which pitches to sing or play, but not the manner of that delivery. In his 2013 memoir, the composer connected this semi-improvisational approach to two earlier instrumental works he composed for his ensemble:

In *Music with Changing Parts*, the players improvised, within prescribed limits, extended long tones. At times, clouds of notes would emerge that formed harmonic clusters, as if surfing through the ongoing ocean of rhythm. Because I was using a much larger musical structure, it became possible to make a very extended piece. There were certain things that remained the same: a constant beat would always be there—a steady stream of notes. Within that, the texture could change and the melodies could float throughout. There could be a wash of sound, places with just a little bit of rhythm, and places with barely more than long tones. It could sound like a cloud of music that would shift from being structured to amorphous. At moments, just as the rhythmic structure became audible, the long notes had a way of overriding it, adding a depth to the music. The only other times I would use this technique would be in Part 4 of *Music in Twelve Parts* and in 'Building' in *Einstein on the Beach*.<sup>429</sup>

Throughout *Building*, then, the two organs provide the “steady stream of notes” and “constant beat” that function as a dynamic sonic backdrop for the melody instruments. This is a bass ostinato in the literal sense of a “persistent” or “obstinate” bass whose speed emphasizes the slower-moving lines above, and whose static harmony enables the electric organ to function as the equivalent of a drone instrument. This is a very complex drone, however. Unlike a drone in Indian classical music, it includes not just the sa (Western “do”) and pa (Western “sol”) scale degrees, but also three other pitches that render the “drone” pentatonic and thus modal. Furthermore, the rhythmic emphasis of the keyboard lines shifts rapidly between duple and triple groupings, the pattern of which varies throughout the scene.<sup>430</sup> The phrases that comprise the first two rehearsal

---

<sup>429</sup> Glass, *Words Without Music*, 253.

<sup>430</sup> Robert Haskins notes the complexity of not just the keyboard line, but also of the scene as a whole, which he describes as “an extended series of addition variations.” Haskins, “The Music of Philip Glass, 1965–1975,” 97.



numbers demonstrate the additive principle by which Glass varies these groupings, doubling and then tripling the first two eighth notes of the fundamental six-note pattern to produce polyrhythmic cells that are heard metrically as 6/8, then 2/8 + 6/8 + 6/8, the following cells continuing to add on to the 6/8 base: 2/8 + 2/8 + 6/8 + 6/8, then 2/8 + 2/8 + 6/8 + 6/8 + 2/8 + 6/8 + 6/8, and so on (Figure 5.3). The harmony, then, is like the painted backdrop of the building, while the additive rhythmic principle by which he enlivens this harmony parallels the woman writing in the window.

Figure 5.3 Act IV, scene 1A (Building), rehearsals 1–2.

Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach* (London: Chester Music, 2003), 151.

The woodwinds and the chorus gradually enter onto this sonic “stage” like the characters of the tableau vivant Wilson assembles. Indeed, the pairing of the human voice (and instruments voiced by human breath) with the entry and exit of a crowd of characters en masse reinforces the audiovisual connection: the silent characters’ presence focuses our attention on the chorus and PGE who “speak” for them, while the intimate familiarity of the voice and breath humanizes characters whose stiff postures and unnaturally frozen poses produce a Brechtian distancing effect. At Rehearsal Number 5, Glass includes the instruction “W.W. Enter here during 5<sup>th</sup> repeat,” and at Rehearsal Number 9, he writes, “Vox enters here” (Figures 5.4 and 5.5).

Figure 5.4 Act IV, scene 1A (Building), rehearsal 5.

Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach* (London: Chester Music, 2003), 152.

Figure 5.5 Act IV, scene 1A (Building), rehearsal 9.

Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach* (London: Chester Music, 2003), 153.

Glass instructs both forces to commence improvising on the five notated pitches at Rehearsal Numbers 5 and 9, respectively, and to continue to Rehearsal Number 36, after which a coda transitions to the next scene. Although Glass's instructions for each group are nearly identical in the score, the chorus's and the woodwind players' approaches to improvisation in performance (and on recordings) are rather different, affecting both their relationships to the drama and their creative agency. In all four productions, the chorus has entered and

withdrawn periodically as a sound mass, each singer selecting a pitch at will from the pentatonic chord, the group swelling and fading out in a dynamic arc that suggests the inhalation and exhalation of breath. The woodwinds, however, while beginning the scene in a similarly understated fashion, gradually progress to virtuosic improvisation.

As the theorist Milos Raickovich explains, focusing on the woodwinds, Glass's indication of whole notes "suggests that the improvisation should be restricted to long tones. In both the recorded version of the opera and subsequent performances, however, the improvisation ultimately becomes extremely chromatic and jazz-like at the climax of the music."<sup>431</sup> Indeed, during the 1976 tour, Landry, Peck, and Gibson performed as a trio to produce a wild, soloistic free jazz jam. While this trio was reduced to a tenor saxophone solo during the 1984 remount, an approach to the Building improvisation that remained the same during the following two revival tours, the overall aesthetic effect and jazz styling of the woodwind improvisation during this scene remained the same. Glass thus gave the operatic cadenza a thoroughly postmodern twist. Setting down a drone-like bass ostinato whose additive development (and perhaps its drone function) was derived from classical Indian music, the composer relied on his ensemble members to set the stylistic tone of the scene, a tone that has varied between modal and free jazz from production to production. Indeed, over the course of four productions, the woodwind improvisation, and thus the relationship between the aural and visual components of this scene, has undergone two significant modifications. By examining this improvisation first as a trio in 1976, and then as a solo developed by Richard Peck in 1984 and 1992

---

<sup>431</sup> Raickovich, *Einstein on the Beach* by Philip Glass: A Musical Analysis," 99. Notably, neither audio recordings nor live performances adhere strictly to the written score. Played in full, as it was at a rehearsal performance at the Video Exchange Theater on March 3, 1976, this scene can last seventeen minutes, but in order to fit the entire opera on four LPs, Glass reduced the music to only seven and a half minutes for the Tomato Records set released in 1979. The opening bar, for instance, which is played by the electric organs and provides the basic motivic material for additive variation, was reduced from forty-eight repetitions to only twelve. In the 1992 recording, moreover, the chorus enters at Rehearsal Number 3, substantially before marked in the score. This sort of flexibility indicates that the score functions more like a lead sheet than a Western classical score, establishing each musician's basic rhythmic and melodic material, but with the ability to expand or contract as needed in performance or the recording studio.

and taken over by Andrew Serman in 2012, we can better grasp the creative contributions of Glass's ensemble members to the drama and make visible the voices in the dark.

#### **5.4.2 Building as Jam Session (1976)**

The Building instrumental improvisation of *Einstein's* 1976 performances, captured in abbreviated form on the 1978 LP recording, differs substantially from its treatment in 1984, 1992, and 2012. During all three of the opera's revival productions, a single soloist took the limelight, opening a breach in the carefully managed creative firewall between Glass and Wilson that, as we will see shortly, became a contested site of authorship among Wilson, Glass, and the saxophonist Andrew Serman. In 1976, on the other hand, all three woodwind players in the PGE improvised together. While this approach did not give rise to the interpersonal creative conflict that shadowed the 2012 production, it reveals an equally significant aspect of contributing musical authorship: the trio jam reflects the collaborative performance practice characteristic of the nascent Philip Glass Ensemble in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, during the ten years between Glass's return to New York and *Einstein on the Beach*, the PGE gradually coalesced around an informal group of musicians and composers, many of whose members were engaged in the same experimentation as Glass. The composer had encountered Ravi Shankar and Alla Rakha shortly before returning to the United States, spending his first decade downtown refining an idiom that merged his Western training with North Indian developmental strategies and that reached its apogee with *Einstein*. As a result, rehearsal sessions frequently involved substantial creative give-and-take between Glass and his colleagues, and their technical facility and strengths shaped the kind of music that he wrote for them.

As the musicologist David Chapman stresses in his study of the Ensemble's early years, the PGE, like its sibling ensemble Steve Reich and Musicians, "professionalized a set of casual relationships that had existed since the early sixties," and throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, new compositions and premiere performances by its members "appear less to reinforce the 'patent office' claims of individual composers than to emphasize the intimacy and

collaboration within a network of social actors.”<sup>432</sup> That is to say, in its early years the Ensemble was not “an association of performers hired to transmit the musical intentions of its resident composer,” but rather “an assembly of creative musicians who shared creative impulses and sensibilities, who also were willing to help each other accomplish their artistic objectives.”<sup>433</sup> Glass himself corroborated Chapman’s claim, if a bit more understatedly, when he wrote that after he first arrived in SoHo and met fellow composer Steve Reich, “I discovered that there was another group of musicians working in a way similar to the way I had begun working. For a number of years immediately after that, we spent a good deal of time together. We showed our music to each other. There was a very active dialogue going on.”<sup>434</sup>

The saxophonist and early PGE member Richard (Dickie) Landry in particular introduced several colleagues of his from Lafayette, Louisiana to the ensemble in 1972, musicians who could, according to Landry, “read and play it faster” than the composers with whom Glass had primarily been playing.<sup>435</sup> These performers, Chapman writes, sometimes came together to play Glass’s music, but “at other times they played all-night free jazz jams until dawn and beyond, fueled by alcohol, amphetamines, and marijuana.”<sup>436</sup> Because their eclectic jazz and classical training had endowed them with greater technical facility than the composers writing for them, the musicians felt free to offer criticism during rehearsals of Glass’s work, after which the composer would regularly, according to Landry, “get red-faced and go back and rewrite the whole thing.”<sup>437</sup> By the

---

<sup>432</sup> Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 18–19.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>434</sup> Philip Glass and Steve Reich, interview by Tim Page, “Dialogue with Philip Glass and Steve Reich (1980),” *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 46; Haskins, “The Music of Philip Glass, 1965–1975,” 43–4. Haskins adds that Glass had drawn on his musicians’ technical virtuosity and improvisational skill as a compositional resource before in his 1970 piece *Music with Changing Parts*.

<sup>435</sup> Dickie Landry, interview by Alex V. Cook, “The Legendary Dickie Landry,” *Country Roads Magazine* (October 2009), 2013, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://www.countryroadsmagazine.com/culture/visual-performing-arts/the-legendary-dickie-landry>.

<sup>436</sup> Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 103–4.

<sup>437</sup> Richard Landry, telephone conversation with author, October 20, 2013.

time Glass and Wilson first became acquainted in 1974, Landry recalls that the composer had developed sufficient confidence that “he’d walk in and say, ‘This is it, no input,’ which is how *Einstein on the Beach* was.”<sup>438</sup> While Glass may not have solicited feedback concerning the opera’s musical structure, however, his approach to the Building scene did showcase his ensemble members’ virtuosic musicianship, virtuosity that he himself did not possess on his own wind instrument (the flute) and that harkened back to the reciprocal social and professional dynamic of the group’s early rehearsals and performances.

Just as Lucinda Childs and Samuel M. Johnson became contributing authors as they wrote and performed their own speeches, so Jon Gibson, Dickie Landry, and Richard Peck (all composers in their own right) became contributing authors as they performed what is essentially a free jazz jam during the Building scene. Like the solos that were to follow during the revival productions, the trio heard on the 1979 recording opens with long tones. The choral singers take up these long tones halfway through the abbreviated version of the scene, and when the two groups reenter together, the woodwind musicians shift away from the restrained pitches marked in the score. Instead, they introduce increasingly agitated trills, rapid arpeggiations, and scalar figures that shrill and whine in the soprano saxophone’s upper range. Wide-ranging tempi, rhythms, and timbres combine with more and more abrasive dissonances to produce a sonic analogue to the gradual loss of control Childs enacted during her “Dance on Three Diagonals” at the beginning of the opera.

Although this improvisatory contribution may not have been either as long or as fixed as Childs’s significant creative work, however, the group improvisation performed during the 1976 tour and on the 1978 recording nevertheless gestures

---

<sup>438</sup> Ibid; Glass, *Words Without Music*, 81, 85. Regarding Glass’s musicianship, when he began as a student at the Juilliard School, he writes, “I was painfully aware of how defective my basic skills were. Whatever I had accomplished in playing the flute or piano, and especially in composition, was the result of youthful enthusiasm. In fact I had a very poor grasp of real technique.” Juilliard’s emphasis on teaching composers composition forced composers like Glass, who wanted to perform as well as write, to pursue technical mastery without much formal support: “I was given a piano teacher for several years, but no one in the composition department was in the least interested in the possibility that I might want to be a performer-composer.”

importantly toward the impact Glass's ensemble members had on not just the Building scene early in *Einstein's* production and recording history, but more generally on the importance of improvisation during the early years of his ensemble. By creating a static harmonic canvas for his woodwind players, the composer extended *Einstein's* collaborative creative process to his musicians, reflecting an ensemble performance practice that had nurtured Glass's compositional development from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. In that sense, the authorial role that Gibson, Landry, and Peck played in the first *Einstein* production bears witness to an important transition in Glass's career, and not just from the loft to the opera house. It also marks his shift from working collaboratively with a fluid ensemble to being an employer of a professionalized group whose formalization opened new funding opportunities, but also focused the ensemble's practice on Glass's music alone, restricting the social dynamism of the "very active dialogue" that had initially drawn Glass to the downtown music scene.

#### **5.4.3 Building as Jazz Solo (1984 and 1992, 2012)**

By 1984, the general "W.W." (woodwinds) designated in the Building score had resolved into a woodwind solo. "Musically," John Howell commented on the first revival production in *Artforum*, "Glass' ensemble has changed in membership and instrumentation, and was given clearer amplification. Also the composer added occasional new touches to his score; in 'The Building' scene, for example, longtime Glass ensemble horn player Richard Peck improvised a new, thrilling saxophone solo within the guidelines of the music."<sup>439</sup> This "thrilling" tenor saxophone solo, which Peck reprised during the 1992 remount, differed from the 1976 trio improvisation in more than just performance forces. Indeed, Peck retained the long tones of the trio's first entrance *throughout* his solo, refraining from the free jazz-influenced turmoil of the original production in performance and in the recording studio. That is not to say that Peck's improvisation did not undergo dramatic development over the course of the

---

<sup>439</sup> John Howell, "Forum: What a Legend Becomes," *Artforum*, March 1985, Box: "1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "EOB Publicity," Hamm Archives.

scene. As captured on the 1993 recording, his solo begins with sustained notes in the tenor saxophone's low to mid range, but his meandering melody gradually extends to the full range of both instrument and mode, punctuated by regular pauses in which the chorus voices Glass's pentatonic gamut. Each saxophone entrance introduces new ornamentation, from gently throbbing vibrato to sporadic scalar runs, rapid arpeggiation, and turns. Combined with an almost imperceptible rise in range over the course of the scene, these ornaments enliven a solo whose moderate pace, mellow timbre, and understated technical delivery belie its virtuosity.

While the dramatic development of Peck's solo was more gradual than that of the original version, the musician nevertheless sculpted it so that, like the jam session of the 1978 recording, the energy and movement in the scene evolved from static to active in preparation for the reductive Bed scene aria. Peck's southern blues-inflected approach thus did not significantly alter the dramatic flow of the Building scene, but rather caused it to more closely parallel the deliberate, understated entry and withdrawal of the actors that assemble on Wilson's stage in a tableau vivant. Furthermore, the reduction of the trio to a single saxophonist more closely aligned the improviser with the character seen writing through the window of the building. That is, the increasingly virtuosic musical voice draws spectators' aural attention just as the lone character gradually draws the attention of the assembled crowd on stage. Peck performed this solo not only during the first two *Einstein* revivals, but also during concerts with the Philip Glass Ensemble. Following Peck's retirement, according to fellow member Andrew Serman, the group ceased playing Building in concert because it was so identified with him.

When the 2012 tour materialized and Glass asked Serman to play the solo, the composer was thus asking him to take on a creatively loaded performance, and not just because Peck had been playing the solo for years. Within *Einstein's* drama, Peck's was an authorial position that had, like Lucinda Childs's, Sheryl Sutton's, and Samuel M. Johnson's performances, informally solidified into a fixed feature of the opera. In fact, when Wilson cast the elderly black actors Jasper McGruder (1992) and Charles Williams (2012) in Johnson's roles following



his death, he billed them not just as Judge and Bus Driver, but also (in an eccentric breaking of the fourth wall) as Mr. Johnson. Similarly, when Childs and Sutton retired from their roles as Characters 1 and 2 in 2012, the director cast Kate Moran and Helga Davis, actors who bore strong physical resemblances to the original performers. These casting and billing decisions suggest that for Wilson, the performers who have played *Einstein's* main characters were not just actors donning the masks of their roles. Rather, Wilson seems to have envisioned them as individuals whose onstage identities incorporated substantial aspects of their offstage identities (e.g., age, gender, race, and physical stature). From this perspective, Richard Peck's tenor saxophone improvisation might be understood, for Wilson, as more than just a quirky element of Glass's score. As a unique authorial contribution by a performer, it fell into the same category as Childs's and Johnson's speeches in terms of its dramatic function in a scene that notably lacked dialogue. Therefore, Sterman's significant stylistic changes to the solo distressed the director in the same way that changes to Childs's or Johnson's speeches might have. Put another way, Peck's stylistic and developmental approach to the Building solo informally became a fixed text like the opera's speeches in spite of the slight variation from one performance to another that improvisation entailed. Wilson thus expected that whoever took up the solo would be playing Richard Peck, just as McGruder and Williams played Mr. Johnson. The extent of Wilson's creative investment in Peck's authorial voice, however, did not become readily apparent until Sterman took a radically different approach than his predecessor, exposing the Building improvisation as a site of impending authorial contestation.

"In *Einstein on the Beach*," Sterman explained, "there's a traditional firewall between music and staging," a firewall that was vital to a collaborative project overseen by two mature, independent artists.<sup>440</sup> When Sterman failed to play Peck, however, Wilson requested that he alter his approach, revealing a weakness in this firewall: Glass's music, like Wilson's staging, was understood to be off-limits to creative intrusion by either director, but because image-sound montage is central to the opera's aesthetics, Sterman's improvisation affected

---

<sup>440</sup> Andrew Sterman in conversation with author, June 6, 2014.

both drama and score and was thus subject to the direction of both conceptual artists.<sup>441</sup> The minor drama that unfolded reveals the stakes of the Building improviser's authorship. The compromise that resulted also exposes that scene as a site of continuing creative flexibility within the opera. Indeed, in 2012, it provided Serman, Wilson, and Glass with the opportunity to establish the PGE musicians as integral members of the opera company rather than unseen accompaniment.

To provide some context for the creative clash that ensued, Wilson had not sought to influence the Building improvisers' performance practice during either the original operatic production (before the 1976 actors became closely identified with their roles) or its first two revivals (during which Peck performed the solo that appealed to Wilson). In part, the director's hands-off attitude stemmed from a Brechtian separation of disciplinary oversight that he and Glass established early in the creative process in order to avoid stepping on one another's toes. "Bob and I were two authors representing either side of the music-theater equation," Glass explained in his 2013 memoir. "We were mature enough—both of us in our mid- to late thirties—to have developed independently our own personal language."<sup>442</sup> While Glass described both himself and Wilson as being "comfortable in a 'time-binding' medium that takes place on a stage," he claimed to favor a structural approach that allowed him to measure and map time, whereas Wilson worked with images and "liked to feel time in his body."<sup>443</sup> This difference in working style was ideal for a collaborative opera like *Einstein* because it reduced the likelihood that either conceptual author would make

---

<sup>441</sup> In her biography of Wilson, Maria Shevtsova explains the centrality of mutually reinforcing auditory and visual components of Wilson's theater: "The paradox of hearing better in a space of seeing makes sense when we realize that, for Wilson, seeing and hearing, although separate activities, reinforce each other; the high resolution of one—the picture in the proscenium—enhances the quality of the other." Shevtsova, *Robert Wilson*, 53–4.

<sup>442</sup> Glass, *Words Without Music*, 291.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

suggestions or requests that would impose upon the other creatively. Instead, discussions tended to revolve around formal issues like speed and duration.<sup>444</sup>

Furthermore, because *Einstein* came together at a point in Glass's and Wilson's careers when each man had "a well-trained team of technicians" to hand, they were able to go about preparing and rehearsing their dramatic and musical contributions with relative autonomy: Glass retained directorial authority over his ensemble and the chorus, Wilson oversaw the singers, actors, and dancers when they were onstage, and de Groat coordinated the two Field Dances.<sup>445</sup> While Glass and Wilson refrained from criticizing or altering the content of one another's work, however, contributing authors presented a different case. Childs, recalling the circumstances in which she produced her "Supermarket" speech, told interviewers in 2011 and 2012 that Wilson asked her to improvise verbally and then selected a small excerpt from the resulting text, investing the choreographer with contributing authorship, but divesting her of control over how (and how much of) it was incorporated into the opera.<sup>446</sup> Similarly, when

---

<sup>444</sup> Glass and Wilson, interview by Anne Bogart, "The Power of 2." In an interview during the rehearsal period for the 2012 tour, for instance, Wilson—perhaps diplomatically, perhaps lacking clear memory of the experience—described his working relationship with Glass in extremely general terms. What detail he does offer, however, suggests that they tried to avoid interfering with one another's creative processes: "[W]e are very different men, different personalities, but we share a common sense of, I think, time and space and that kind of structure. And . . . if I think back on it, I don't really remember who did exactly what. It was a real collaboration. But I would say, 'You know, maybe, Phil, this should be a little shorter,' and he would say, 'Well, you know, I think maybe what you're doing could be a little quicker, or could be stretched out more in terms of the staging.'"

<sup>445</sup> Glass, *Words Without Music*, 286–95; Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 31, 42–6. In both his 1987 and 2013 memoirs, Glass describes the rehearsal process as one in which he, Wilson, and de Groat were usually present, but each day was broken down into theater, music, and dance rehearsals overseen by only one of them at a time, which would have reduced the likelihood of conflict predicated on artistic interpretation and directorial authority.

<sup>446</sup> Glass and Childs, interview with Mark Swed, "Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs discuss *Einstein on the Beach*"; Wilson, Glass, and Childs, interview with Matias Tarnopolsky, "Robert Wilson, Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs discuss *Einstein on the Beach*." In interviews Lucinda Childs gave with Glass and with both Glass and Wilson at UC Berkeley in 2011 and 2012, moderators Mark Swed and Matias Tarnopolsky each asked her to recall the circumstances that led to the composition of her *Einstein* speech, and in both cases, she answered that because the titular beach of *Einstein on the Beach* was missing from the opera, Wilson asked her to improvise a monologue on the topic, and the director then selected a portion of that improvised text to use in the work.

Glass introduced improvisation to the Building score, he imposed a pentatonic gamut as a limiting factor, but as discussed previously, he was also familiar with his ensemble members' specific training and improvisational performance practice from their work together in the years leading up to *Einstein*. As a result, during all four major productions of the opera, he had a sense of what sort of improvisation he would get when he instructed the PGE woodwinds to "enter here" in the score. Wilson, however, did not have that sense of the PGE members' performance backgrounds and stylistic preferences for improvisation, and when an element of the audiovisual drama to which he had become accustomed suddenly changed, he responded by approaching Serman directly.

The musician, understandably, responded defensively to what he perceived as an attack on his creative autonomy, particularly given the fact that Glass had given him explicit permission to perform the solo as he wished.<sup>447</sup> This breach of the firewall between stage and pit thus risked inciting a dispute between Wilson and Glass over Serman's creative freedom—that is, which conceptual author had the right to grant or curtail that freedom—raising the specter of the 1976–79 contract dispute and the bad blood it had caused between Glass's and Wilson's groups four decades earlier. Indeed, during the 1976 tour and the interpersonal and financial difficulties that followed, the distinction between the onstage opera company and the musicians in the pit had simultaneously been a failsafe to ensure the creative autonomy of the conceptual authors and a source of anxiety for Glass, who worried that his ensemble would be perceived as accompaniment and that Wilson would be hailed as the opera's primary author. The Byrd Hoffman Foundation's control over the company's finances had further opened a rift between Wilson's administrators and the PGE, as Kurt Munkacsi wished to retain the right to sell the sound equipment and the BHF wished to absorb that duty into its overall administration of the opera and its debt. With this history in the background, it is little wonder that both parties were eager to reach a compromise with Serman as quickly as possible.

---

<sup>447</sup> Andrew Serman in conversation with author, June 6, 2014.

According to Sterman, Glass, upset by his musician's initial confrontation with Wilson, approached the saxophonist in the green room prior to the first preview performance in January of 2012, telling him, "We've got a problem. You've got to please Bob, me, and yourself."<sup>448</sup> He suggested that Sterman play in a more blues-inflected style reminiscent of Peck's solo while the actors walked onto the stage and took their positions in the tableau vivant, then play what he wanted to as they exited the stage. Because Sterman's preferred improvisational style was situated in a lineage leading back to John Coltrane and collaborators like Pharoah Sanders, Glass's suggestion inspired Sterman to interpret Wilson's desired dramatic development as a sort of history of jazz. "I spilled paint on the floor as they counted each domino, you know?" he quipped of his solo in the midst of Glass's mathematically worked-out score and Wilson's exacting direction. "He would have played my solo for me, if he could," Sterman said of Wilson, encompassing both the director's intense, detail-oriented managerial style and the saxophonist's sympathetic awareness that for Wilson, this was likely the last time that he would have directorial control over the opera and wanted it to be as close to his ideal version as possible.<sup>449</sup> Ultimately, just as Glass diplomatically suggested that Sterman divide his solo between what Wilson desired and his own creative contribution, so Wilson settled for describing the dramatic arc he desired for the solo and relinquishing control over the musical content.

During the rehearsal performances in Ann Arbor, Michigan, this compromise rescued the relationship between stage and pit, and over the course of the tour, this resolution even offered a way to bridge the firewall so that the musicians became a visible part of the opera company. This bridge first began to appear when Sterman stood up during his solo in Ann Arbor, drawing attention to the pit by introducing a performance convention derived from jazz (Figure 5.6). Later in the tour, PGE director Michael Riesman suggested that Sterman step forward to a solo microphone to further enhance spectators' awareness of his featured status. Sterman then asked if he could turn around to face the stage, not

---

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

just breaking the fourth wall, but actually dissolving the firewall between musicians and actors two scenes before the PGE would ordinarily join the rest of the cast in the onstage in the spaceship of Act IV, scene 3C. In turning to face the same building as the actors, Sterman further enhanced the drama, bridging the real and imaginary space that connected stage, pit, and audience, and enabling the featured musician to visibly join the drama on stage by turning to gaze up at the woman in the window of the building along with the rest of the actors.

In response to Sterman's symbolic participation in the tableau vivant by turning around, Wilson insisted on spotlighting the saxophonist and painting his face with the same Japanese Noh-derived white makeup as the rest of the onstage cast. In doing so, Wilson welcomed Sterman into his sphere of influence, acknowledging his importance to the drama as a whole without interfering with the saxophonist's musical authorship. What began as a potentially damaging argument between Wilson and Sterman over the permanence versus flexibility of contributing authorship in *Einstein* thus became a site of ongoing creativity that gestured meaningfully toward the opera's original spirit of community and collaboration. The saxophonist's modified improvisational performance made the ensemble more visible to the audience as equal members of the opera company, and Wilson was able to use Sterman's performance to point up the relationship between sound and image that is central to his dramaturgy. The musician and director thus reached a compromise that allowed the saxophonist to retain sufficient creative freedom to spill paint, as Sterman described his performance, across Glass's and Wilson's precisely arranged dominos.



Figure 5.6 Act IV, scene 1A (Building), January 21, 2012, Ann Arbor, MI. Above, Serman stands to perform his tenor saxophone solo as the cast gathers on stage in a tableau vivant. Below, Serman bridges the space between audience and stage. Reproduced with permission.

Over the course of four productions, the woodwind improvisation of Building has undergone perhaps the most transformation of any element in the opera: a jam session reminiscent of the PGE's early years gave way to an understated, bluesy tenor saxophone solo in 1984 and 1992. That solo in turn gave way to a new version whose performer was spotlighted, made up as a cast member, and turned toward the stage in a gesture of dramatic unity. The assumption, contestation, and negotiation of authorship at the heart of these transformations offer insight into not just the contingency of contributing authorship in a downtown opera. The trio version of the woodwind improvisation also gestures toward the collaborative performance practice typical of Glass's ensemble in the decade prior to *Einstein*, and with the shift from one soloist to another, Sterman facilitated the bridging of the firewall between stage and pit that had set the PGE apart from the rest of the company for four decades. Sterman's disagreement with Wilson thus marked an important change in the spirit of the opera as a collaborative endeavor that aimed to subvert, rather than replicate, the hierarchical separation of music and drama in conventional music theater.

## 5.5 Playing Nice

For *Einstein on the Beach's* creative contributors, as for many of their peers based in and around SoHo, collaboration offered the utopian possibility of producing art that subverted the Romantic ideology of the independent artistic genius. Working as a team also sidestepped the educational, institutional, critical, and economic forces that they felt had a dehumanizing effect on the artist and his or her work, reducing their identities and creative expression to consumer goods. In his discussion of art distribution, Becker pragmatically explains that while alternative distribution systems (like downtown performance spaces and the use of private lofts for concerts) may not bring an artist's work to the attention of a desired audience or may run the risk of marking its participants as amateurs or non-serious artists, "with sufficient outside resources, they can create their own distribution systems," an endeavor significantly aided by social and professional cooperation.<sup>450</sup> Indeed, collaboration also offered artists like Glass, Wilson, and Childs, disaffected with their disciplines' accepted conventions, the social and

---

<sup>450</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 96–7.



emotional support of camaraderie, the intellectual stimulation of working with likeminded artists, and the financial security of sharing the economic burden of new endeavors. “The defining element of the avant-garde in the 1970s was its search for a living tradition through the shaping of community,” theater historian Iris Smith Fischer has noted, adding that the resulting community, “characterized its activity as a generous artistic and personal exchange that seemed to offer the possibility of escape from the conventional subject positions of writer, director, designer, actor, dancer, sculptor, painter, and musician.”<sup>451</sup>

The three discussions of authorial negotiation in this chapter would suggest that *Einstein on the Beach* offers a case in point, its director and composer adopting a dual leadership position atypical of conventional opera and avant-garde theater, its choreographer doubling as an actor and writer, and its woodwind musicians doubling as composers. As these explorations have also demonstrated, however, escape from conventional subject positions in the arts had real limitations. “Even when you don’t want to do what is conventional,” Becker explains, “what you do want to do can best be described in the language that comes from the conventions, for it is the one language everyone knows.”<sup>452</sup> This reliance on established conventions by artists attempting to eschew them becomes especially visible when collaboration produces real or perceived professional conflict. Glass’s and Wilson’s concern that differing conventions regarding authorial attribution in theater and opera would favor one artist’s reputational value over the other caused a protracted legal dispute. Childs’s promotion to choreographer in 1984 altered the opera’s creative power dynamic such that she and the composer and director felt compelled to renegotiate its marketing and billing. On a smaller scale, Sterman’s modification of Richard Peck’s tenor saxophone improvisation during the Building scene in Act IV produced unexpected tension between Wilson’s and Glass’s quarters that necessitated creative compromise, but that also gave rise to a productive breakdown in the firewall between stage and pit that unified the PGE musicians with the rest of the opera company.

---

<sup>451</sup> Fischer, *Mabou Mines*, 11.

<sup>452</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 57.

Although *Einstein's* ambition to keep one foot in the non-commercial, experimental "downtown" art world and the other in the commercial, conventional "uptown" art world placed it in a particularly awkward position with regard to the negotiation of authorship and its attendant rewards, "generous artistic and personal exchange" was no guarantee of equality even among unconventional performance groups. Indeed, in theater troupes like Mabou Mines, the Ontological Hysteric Theater, and Wilson's School of Byrds, one director-*auteur* frequently adopted a leadership role or was so christened by critics; in the case of these groups, Lee Breuer, Richard Foreman, and Robert Wilson, respectively. Likewise, the most critically successful American minimalist composers, Philip Glass and Steve Reich, began their New York careers as members of loosely organized assemblies of composers and musicians, but gradually adopted increasingly authoritative positions over their ensembles for both professional and financial reasons, eventually limiting the groups' repertoire to solely their work. The same is true of Lucinda Childs, who initially participated in the democratic Judson Dance Theater, but in 1973 founded her own company in order to train ensemble members in her unconventional dance vocabulary.

This is not to say that collaboration was not the lifeblood of the downtown performing-arts scene. In fact, challenging the hierarchical structure of these disciplines and the conventional allocation of their creative and economic authority was one of the 1970s New York avant-garde's most visible contributions to the conventional performing arts as its practitioners gained institutional traction and new generations learned from their predecessors' entrepreneurial acumen. That commitment to cooperative art production, however, did not preclude interpersonal, professional, and aesthetic conflict. Art works that intentionally subvert conventional recognition of who is an artist and who constitutes support personnel can be enormously creatively productive. In the case of *Einstein on the Beach*, framing an unconventionally interdisciplinary creative process within a conventional genre designation produced an artistically compelling instance of collaborative authorship, with two joint conceptual authors controlling both the opera's development and their respective

organizations, and nine contributing authors supplying crucial dance, speech, and music. While academic accounts of *Einstein's* revolutionary status frequently gesture toward its division of creative authority between a director, composer, and several of their performers, to grant total or near-total authority over the opera's reception to Glass and Wilson is to consign important contributors to the historical margins. It also limits our understanding of the artistic, social, economic, and legal complexity of a collaborative creative process that was not always amicable, and that sought to eschew convention while relying on its language to get *Einstein* performed in conventional institutions and accepted as a conventional opera.

In drawing *Einstein's* contributing authors out of the margins and giving them a stake, however modest, in the opera's historical narrative, I do not intend to devalue Wilson's and Glass's contributions to the work. They are *Einstein's auteurs*, the conceptual authors who first dreamed up the project, who produced its staging and music, who assembled its company and solicited contributions from its members, and who accepted creative and financial responsibility for the work and for the solvency and remuneration of their foundations. To focus solely on their aesthetic aims and the quality of their realization, however, is to miss the opportunity to understand the social mechanics of that collaboration, the power dynamic that underlay it, and the way in which that dynamic has shaped not just *Einstein's* production history, but also the opera itself. In drawing attention to moments of authorial conflict and negotiation spanning the opera's conceptual and contributing authors and its three primary artistic disciplines, I have sought to reveal one way in which *Einstein* functioned less as an autonomous work than as an evolving institution produced and reproduced by the cooperative activity of its participants over the course of four major productions.

Up to this point, I have remained close to the work itself, focusing on *Einstein's* creative participants. To understand not just how *Einstein* offered a compelling new approach to its genre, but also how the unconventional theater piece gained access to conventional modes of distribution—i.e., how the art work was connected to Glass's and Wilson's desired audiences—we must turn our attention to the systems of patronage and support personnel that arranged

*Einstein's* first international tour. Not only did these systems contribute directly to the opera's critical and academic consecration and make remounts in 1984, 1992, and 2012 possible, but they also reveal the broader context of a transatlantic circulation of American art and European money and prestige that powered New York's downtown avant-garde scene.

## Chapter 6

### Playing American: Patronage, Diplomacy, and the 1976 Tour

STEVE REICH: I would say that the largest source of my income is—and has been for a number of years now—European. We couldn't live here without it—and yet I have no desire to live there.

PHILIP GLASS: Yes, I calculate that 90% of my income is made in Europe. There is much more government support of the arts. Nothing like that exists here.

REICH: Well, let's give credit where credit is due. There is a New York State Council on the Arts and a National Endowment for the Arts. I have been to a lot of premieres that wouldn't have been possible without them. So I certainly want to give them the credit. I just think they stand alone.

GLASS: They do the best with what they have, but they work with a very limited budget.

—Tim Page, "Dialogue with Philip Glass and Steve Reich (1980)," *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism*, ed. and intro. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 49–50.

"Who is the most appreciative patron of American artists? The government. What government? The French government."

—Robert Wilson, "An American in Paris," *Rockefeller Foundation Illustrated* 4, no. 1 (April, 1978), 6.

#### 6.1 Cooperative Links

In 2012, not long after the third remount of *Einstein on the Beach* had its world premiere in Montpellier, France, the retired Philip Glass Ensemble member Dickie Landry flatly stated, "America is a cultural wasteland."<sup>453</sup> On the face of it, such a hyperbolic indictment of his native country's cultural landscape hardly seems fair. From the perspective of a musician and photographer who has devoted his career to music and theater on the commercial margins, however, the reasoning underlying his negative bias begins to come into focus. Indeed, such bitterness speaks to the United States' chronic dearth of strong governmental support for unconventional art, especially in view of the comparatively generous state funding that many European countries made available to innovative arts

---

<sup>453</sup> Richard Landry, phone conversation with author, October 20, 2013.

programming during the third quarter of the twentieth century. As Robert Wilson's 1978 comment in this chapter's epigraph suggests, while American corporate patrons like the Rockefeller Foundation contributed to his original works, such funding—as well as the location of his Watermill Center on Long Island—belies the fact that the financial support that has sustained his career originates by and large from outside his native country.<sup>454</sup>

Steve Reich's and Glass's comments to the music critic Tim Page in 1980 likewise indicate that even before Ronald Reagan took office and began to cut federal funding for the arts, the situation was little different for new music composers involved with the downtown scene. While the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) saw a significant expansion in funding between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, it was still not enough to sustain full-time composition and performance careers by composers with ensembles, nor was that funding linked to performance opportunities geared toward boundary-pushing performing arts, like Paris's annual Festival d'automne (founded 1971) or the Théâtre des Nations (founded 1954).<sup>455</sup> Indeed,

---

<sup>454</sup> Robert Wilson to John Rockwell, "Robert Wilson After 'Einstein'; Robert Wilson After 'Einstein,'" *New York Times*, November 26, 1978, Arts & Leisure Section, Series I, Box 122, Folder: "EOB – ARTSERVICE – PRESS," Robert Wilson Papers. In an interview with John Rockwell in 1978, Wilson was more explicit about his disappointment in his own country's unwillingness to support his theater: "Mr. Wilson had to spend an enormous amount of time soliciting funds from governmental agencies here and abroad and from private individuals, and he says now the effort and the wheedling position he felt himself in was both exhausting and repugnant. 'It's draining and unappealing and awful. I was very bitter about the lack of American support for 'Einstein.' Europe heavily supported us. If we had had the same kind of help in America, we would have made it—there have been no deficit. It just didn't *happen* in America.'"

<sup>455</sup> Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 5–9. Compiling sociological data from a number of studies during the 1970s and early 1980s, Crane notes that among all types of museums in the US, 67 percent were founded after 1940 and 47 percent were established after 1940. Also, funding for the National Endowment of the Arts, whose creation in 1965 stimulated expatriate artists like the founders of Mabou Mines to return home, ballooned from \$1.8 million in 1966 to \$131 million in 1983. During that same timeframe, corporate, state, and foundation support kept pace, increasing from \$22 million to \$436 million, from \$2.7 million to \$125 million, and from \$38 million to \$349 million respectively. The reasons for this influx of arts funding after World War II, she suggests, may have been a combination of governmental perception of the arts as "socially useful," both domestically in increasing the opportunity for the underprivileged to participate in artistic activities, and internationally as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Businesses with interests in real estate and tourism responded to the artistic gentrification of downtown

a brief glance at the 1976 roster of the cosmopolitan Festival d'automne reveals that among its American invitees, the downtown community dominated.<sup>456</sup> Artists like Glass and Wilson did not, however, attract the notice of institutional directors and festival organizers solely on the strength of their creative work and individual promotional efforts. On one hand, *Einstein's* hybrid operatic and downtown theatrical model of authorship may offer, as discussed in the previous chapter, important insights into its artists' negotiation of symbolic and economic capital and its effects on the opera's production and reception history. On the other hand, focusing only on the discourse surrounding the creative activity of *Einstein's* artists misses an important part of the story of the opera as an institution: the role that its offstage personnel, state and private funding sources, and distribution networks played in making it happen.

Attending to these behind-the-scenes actors helps us, firstly, to subvert the longstanding tendency in scholarship on the arts to pin the historical value of cultural expression to the biographical and aesthetic details of the artist(s) and work, respectively. Indeed, even while examining *Einstein* as a work in the first half of this study—its promotion and reception as a genuine opera, and the avant-garde aesthetic lineage that guided its director and composer—our attention was turned continually outward from the show itself to the character of the social formation from which it emerged, and the ways in which that formation distinguished itself from conventional modes of artistic production and circulation. Exploring the details of the opera's European and American commissioning process, then, further serves to unveil the iconoclastic nature of the 1970s downtown New York art world, revealing foreign exchange as the taproot that nourished its participants' careers.

---

Manhattan, and corporations saw the arts as vehicles for public relations with the expanding middle class.

<sup>456</sup> Festival program, Festival d'automne à Paris, September 15–December 19, 1976, accessed February 16, 2014, <http://www.festival-automne.com/archive>. Out of eleven theater or music theater offerings, three troupes hailed from the United States: Wilson's and Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* company, Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theater, and Robert Anton's marionette theater. The music line-up was even more skewed in favor of downtown-centric new music. Participants included John Cage, David Tudor, Pauline Oliveros, Alvin Lucier, Roger Reynolds, Dave Behrman, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, La Monte Young, Gordon Mumma, and Robert Ashley.

Although downtown musical ensembles, theater troupes, and dance companies were generally small-scale, financially lean outfits, they frequently relied upon external administrative labor, technical expertise, and agents at home and in Europe to arrange tours outside the New York area. This support often came in the form of organizations and well-placed and/or well-connected individuals who helped artists like Philip Glass, Robert Wilson, Andrew de Groat, and Lucinda Childs to bring their artistic visions to new audiences (and the critics who had it in their power to attract still more audiences). For “an ersatz opera company designed to travel,” as Glass has called *Einstein on the Beach*, the composer and director relied on not just the administrative efforts of Wilson’s Byrd Hoffman Foundation, but also the services of the local non-profit management, producing, administrative, and technical service organizations Performing Artservices, Inc. and the Technical Assistance Group, Ltd. (TAG).<sup>457</sup> The Performing Artservices Paris-based representative, Bénédicte Pesle, facilitated the arrangement of performances by American theater, dance, and music ensembles like *Einstein* in Europe, while impresarios including the European agent Ninon Tallon Karlweiss and the 1974–1976 French Minister of Culture and Festival d’automne director Michel Guy convinced presenters in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and Yugoslavia (now Serbia)

---

<sup>457</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 46; Performing Artservices, Inc., accessed January 9, 2016, <http://artservices.org/artservices.html>; Patricia MacKay, “Americans Abroad: Europe in Search of the Avant-Garde,” *Theatre Crafts* 11, no. 2 (March/April 1977): 13; Beverly Emmons, interview with Monica Snellings, “In Conversation with Beverly Emmons” *Culturebot*, September 26, 2013, last modified 2016, accessed January 9, 2016, <http://www.culturebot.org/2013/09/19149/in-conversation-with-beverly-emmons/>. Notably, the four primary BHF administrators acknowledged in 1976 tour programs were all women: managing director Kathleen Norris, production assistant Betsy Crawford, and personal assistants Julie Hymen and Sarah Berg. Performing Artservices, Inc. was founded in 1972 to support downtown performing arts groups, and during the 1970s, it represented John Cage, David Tudor, Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theater, The Sonic Arts Union (Robert Ashley, David Behrman, Alvin Lucier, and Gordon Mumma), The Grand Union (Yvonne Rainer, David Gordon, Steve Paxton, Douglas Dunn, Trisha Brown, and Nancy Lewis), The Viola Farber Dance Company, Mabou Mines, and the Philip Glass Ensemble. Performing Artservices offered these groups “business and fiscal management, fund raising, booking and contract negotiation, tour management, publicity and promotion and local production.” The Technical Assistance Group, co-founded by Bill Hammond and Beverly Emmons, provided management and technical services to theater and dance companies during the 1970s. Emmons was involved in the 1976, 1984, and 1992 productions of *Einstein on the Beach*, co-designing the lighting during the first two revivals.



to co-commission the opera. As Howard Becker has perceptively noted, the function of such agents and festival organizers, while not necessarily creative in nature, is every bit as crucial to the realization of performing arts projects as artistic labor, for such impresarios “undertake to do whatever is necessary to gather an audience in an appropriate place for the performance to occur . . . provid[ing] the opportunity to display work to an informed and appreciative audience which shares the perspective and conventions that inform the artist’s work, and thereby produce sufficient revenue to let the work continue.”<sup>458</sup> In other words, Glass, Wilson, and their collaborators may have constructed *Einstein*, but Pesle, Karlweiss, and Guy engineered the circumstances of its reception. As a result, wherever *Einstein’s* conceptual and contributing authors depended on such personnel, there existed “a cooperative link” whose social, financial, material, and temporal dimensions constrained the type of opera Glass and Wilson could produce and who it could reach.<sup>459</sup>

Though Glass has been particularly conscientious about crediting Guy and Karlweiss with providing the necessary early funding and festival contacts to set the 1976 *Einstein* tour in motion, it is worth exploring the details of *Einstein’s* initial commissioning process for several reasons. First, the basic procedure has not changed significantly from one revival to another, so the 1976 tour offers a representative look into the opera’s backstage production history generally.<sup>460</sup> Second, tracing the discourse around *Einstein’s* administrative activity exposes the dependence of the opera on the social and economic vicissitudes of its art world, a revisionist history that complicates *Einstein’s* more typical scholarly reception as an autonomous art object. Third, by observing the differences in

---

<sup>458</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 119–20.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–6.

<sup>460</sup> Linda Brumbach, telephone conversation with author, October 31, 2014. As *Einstein on the Beach’s* 2012–2015 tour producer, Linda Brumbach indicated that the primary differences between the organization of the 1976 tour and the two later international revival tours were: production companies—International Production Associates in 1992 and Pomegranate Arts in 2012—took complete financial responsibility for the opera, ensuring that neither Wilson nor Glass would shoulder responsibility for any debt the tours might incur; and later productions relied upon the reception of the original production for the purposes of attracting commissioning organizations and marketing the work.

*Einstein's* sources of funding in the United States and Europe, we can see why so much downtown music, theater, and dance was seen and heard overseas, but had difficulty gaining traction at institutions at home. More specifically, the French locus of *Einstein's* support and its coincidence with the American Bicentennial celebration in 1976 is indicative of a well-established relationship between the American avant-garde and postwar French cultural apparatus, particularly after Michel Guy's appointment to the post of Minister of Culture in 1974 ushered in a new generation of regional theater directors sympathetic to progressive and avant-garde theater.<sup>461</sup> Finally, examining the offstage details of exactly how *Einstein* got from SoHo to Europe's premier opera venues, and from those venues back to the Metropolitan Opera House, reveals more than just the story of one stand-out product of the downtown scene: it also reveals the social workings of the distribution network that powered the *entire* avant-garde wing of the scene during the 1970s.

Both Karlweiss and Guy were fierce supporters of Wilson's work, but the former had no venue of her own to offer, and the latter figure's Parisian festival could only afford to fund such an expensive venture with the aid of co-commissioners. Thus, their roles as champions of *Einstein* must be understood in the broader social context of the transatlantic avant-garde art world in which they participated, which included: the artistic groups themselves, external production and technical service organizations, festival and performing arts organization directors in the United States and Europe, the critical apparatuses at home and

---

<sup>461</sup> Brigitte Salino with Emmanuelle Klausner and Claire Baldewyns, *Avignon 88: histoire d'une génération: les metteurs en scène vingt ans après* [Avignon 88: story of a generation: the directors twenty years later] (Paris: Actes Sud-Papiers, 1988), 8–9. In describing the national performing arts environment in which the Festival d'Avignon participated in the 1970s and 1980s, Salino, Klausner, and Baldewyns explained, "'Power to the creators,' cried those who, in May of 1968, had occupied the Odeon. . . . In a few years, they imposed a theater that played with conventions. They were between twenty and twenty-five years old, and they rushed into the work, if not with rage, at least with urgency: what they had to say was unexpected. They wanted to show their wildest desires, their way of being in the world, and their despair too. . . . They chased after money, but they had a public that resembled them. Then came recognition: they arrived at a time when the great dream of Malraux was an empty shell, and they took advantage. In 1974, Michel Guy assigned Georges Lavaudant to Grenoble, Jean-Pierre Vincent to Strasbourg, Gildas Bourdet to Lille, Daniel Benoin to Saint-Etienne, and Bruno Bayen to Toulouse. A new card of decentralization was drawn."

abroad, and the governmental, foundation, and private contributors whose money powered new projects. In *Art Worlds*, Howard Becker more than once offers the list of credits at the end of Hollywood films as an ideal model of how artistic creation really happens, for as he recently explained to *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik, “nobody ever figured out who the real artist is: the screenwriter or the director or who? Or, rather, *everybody* figured it out, but never figured out the same thing.”<sup>462</sup> Figure 6.1, which displays the program that accompanied *Einstein’s* two October 1976 performances at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, Germany, offers the theatrical equivalent of film credits, condensing on a single page both the opera’s stars (the artists and performers) and its credited staff, but also helpfully boldfacing key administrative figures in deference to their critical organizational roles.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu made a point similar to Becker’s in a 1980 essay on the economy of symbolic goods, asking his readers, “Who is the true producer of the value of the work – the painter or the dealer, the writer or the publisher, the playwright or the theatre manager?”<sup>463</sup> Notably, Bourdieu does not ask who the “real artist” is, but rather who the “producer of the value of the work” is. This is an important distinction, for the socially agreed-upon value of an artwork and what it has to tell us about the specific milieu from which it hails is not just the work of its creators. Rather, it is also the work of the human apparatus that surrounds those creators, without which their efforts could reach only the most limited audiences, precluding the critical and public reception necessary for artists and their labor to achieve recognition, cultural accreditation, and the financial stability to continue producing art. Paramount among the duties of administrators, agents, and impresarios is finding money to support artists and their projects, for as the legal battle between Glass and Wilson discussed in the previous chapter demonstrated, debt both hinders productivity and sows discord among those charged with settling the bill.

---

<sup>462</sup> Adam Gopnik, “The Outside Game,” *New Yorker*, January 12, 2015, 29.

<sup>463</sup> Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 76.

THE BYRD HOFFMAN FOUNDATION  
zeigt

# Einstein on the Beach

Oper in vier Akten von  
ROBERT WILSON & PHILIP GLASS  
Choreographie: Andrew de Groat

---

*Characters :*

<p><b>Lucinda Childs</b> <b>Samuel M. Johnson</b></p>	<p><b>Paul Mann</b> <b>Sheryl L. Sutton</b></p>
-----------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------

*Company :*

<p><b>George Andoniadis</b> <b>Connie Beckley</b> <b>Ritty Ann Burchfield</b> <b>Frank Conversano</b> <b>Charles Dennis</b> <b>Grethe Holby</b> <b>Jeannie Hutchins</b> <b>Mark Jacoby</b> <b>Richard Morrison</b> <b>Dana Reitz</b> <b>Marie Rice</b> <b>Ronald Roxbury</b> <b>David P. Woodberry</b></p>	<p>actor/singer/musician actor/singer actor/singer/dancer actor/singer/dancer actor/dancer actor/singer/dancer actor/singer/dancer actor/singer actor/singer actor/singer/dancer actor/singer actor/singer actor/singer/dancer</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Musicians :</i></p> <p><b>Jon Gibson</b> soprano saxophone/flute <b>Philip Glass</b> electric organ <b>Iris Hiskey</b> voice and soloist with the chorus <b>Richard Landry</b> soprano saxophone/flute/ bass clarinet <b>Richard E. Peck, Jr.</b> alto saxophone/flute/ clarinet <b>Michael Riesman</b> electric organ <b>George Andoniadis</b> electric organ <b>Robert Brown</b> violin</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Production Staff :</i></p> <p><b>Robert LoBianco</b> Production Manager <b>Anthony Tucci</b> Lighting Supervisor <b>Julia Gillett</b> Stage Manager <b>Lewis Mead</b> Technical Director <b>Gregory Shriver</b> Master Carpenter <b>Monsa Norberg</b> Assistant Stage Manager <b>Julie Hymen</b> Production Assistant <b>James Finguerra</b> Scenic Design Assistant <b>Peggy Weil</b> Wardrobe Mistress <b>James Grant</b> Technician</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Production Coordination Assistance : **TAG Foundation, Ltd., New York**

Staff for the Byrd Hoffman Foundation : **Kathleen Norris**, Managing Director / **Betsy Crawford** / **Julie Hymen**  
**Sarah Berg**

European Administration : **Benedicte Pesle**, Art services, Paris.

European Agent : **Ninon Tallon Karlweiss**, Office Artistique International, Paris.

Costumes : D'Arcangelo-Mayer, Paris - Lighting : Beverly Emmons - Vocal direction : Gene Rickard - Audio : Kurt Munkacsy.

Music and vocal text : Philip Glass - Spoken text : Lucinda Childs, Samuel M. Johnson, Christopher Knowles - Movement for Character on Three Diagonals, Act One Scene One, choreographed and performed by Lucinda Childs. Additional choreography : Lucinda Childs, Richard Morrison, Dana Reitz, Sheryl L. Sutton.

Scenery designed by Robert Wilson, Christina Giannini. Constructed by Broggi Brothers, Milano.

---

Spieldauer fünf Stunden. Keine Pause.  
Die Zuschauer können während der Vorstellung  
nach Belieben kommen und gehen.

---

## DEUTSCHES SCHAUSPIELHAUS IN HAMBURG

Figure 6.1 Program, Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, Germany, October 17–18, 1976.

Series I, Box 114, Folder: "EOB Miscellaneous In House 1976," Robert Wilson Papers 1969–1995, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. Reproduced with permission.

## 6.2 Comparing European and American Financial Support

In his discussion of the distribution of artworks, Howard Becker has pragmatically noted, “The artist with a patron need only please that patron,” and “politically, financially, and socially powerful patrons often control opportunities to exhibit or to have performed the works they commission. In that way, they partially shape the taste of others.”<sup>464</sup> From the Medici family, whose wealth and political power rendered its members a major force in shaping art production during the Italian Renaissance, to the de Menil family, which a 1986 *New York Times* headline described as “the Medici of Modern Art,” affluent patrons of the arts have traditionally played an important role in cultivating particular artists. By putting the weight of their money and social status behind them, they also seek to cultivate particular tastes in their communities and societies. Whether that patron is a private contributor like the Medici and de Menils, a business, or the state, the financial, material, and professional support they offer shapes artworks in profound (if often invisible) ways. Indeed, the limitations they place on the resources they allocate to artists determines not just how those artists go about producing their work, but also what kind of access they have to places in which that work can be displayed so that it generates the greatest possible returns for its patron(s) and artist(s).<sup>465</sup> As Wilson’s pointed comment in this chapter’s epigraph indicates, paramount among *Einstein’s* patrons was the French government. Like many of its downtown peer performances, however, the opera depended on a combination of private, corporate, and state patronage to fund its 1976 tour (and its subsequent debt) and three remounts, and it is helpful to consider a few important differences between these types of patronage, particularly with regard to American versus European sources.

Given that *Einstein on the Beach* was performed on only two nights at a single venue in New York, while it had almost thirty performances in six European countries, the proportions of funding that it garnered from sources in the United

---

<sup>464</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 100.

<sup>465</sup> Grace Glueck, “The de Menil Family: The Medici of Modern Art,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 18, 1986, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/05/18/magazine/the-de-menil-family-the-medici-of-modern-art.html>.

States versus those in Europe were not as lopsided as one might expect (Table 6.1).<sup>466</sup> Indeed, European funding came out only \$25,000 ahead of American earnings, but that money's sources and relationship to performance opportunities reveals major differences in avant-garde performance distribution on either side of the Atlantic. Wilson, writing for an audience oriented toward American corporate investment in the arts, offered this perspective in 1978:

I have just returned from a fund-raising trip. New York? Washington? Houston? No: Rome, Belgrade, Paris. Like many other American artists, I discovered some time ago that to many European governments, Western and Eastern, nothing in the arts is really "foreign." A sampling of the many American artists whose work the government of France sponsored in the past year illustrates this point. Among the choreographers were Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Martha Graham, George Balanchine, and Jerome Robbins; among the composers, John Cage, Steve Reich, David Tudor, and Philip Glass; among the writers and directors, Richard Foreman and myself. In addition to *enabling foreigners to present their own work* in France, the government in many cases *provides extended preparatory periods* on French soil, sometimes for the creation of new work, other times for the rehearsal of already existing work.<sup>467</sup>

The two phrases I have stressed are key to differentiating the impact of European and American funding on downtown music, dance, and theater troupes like the *Einstein* company during the 1970s. Namely, with the exception of a small, diplomatic contribution to *Einstein's* Belgrade performances from the U.S. State Department Office of International Arts Affairs, American government, foundation, and individual contributions funded projects independent of performance engagements. Contributing cash only meant that funders like the NEA and NYSCA treated avant-garde artists as not just creators and performers, but (barring the involvement of progressive institutions like the Brooklyn Academy of Music) also their own promoters and presenters.

---

<sup>466</sup> The 2015 equivalents of the 1976 contributions, rounded off to the nearest hundred dollars, were calculated using the CPI inflation calculator, accessed January 19, 2016, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>467</sup> Robert Wilson, "An American in Paris," *Rockefeller Foundation Illustrated* 4, no. 1 (April 1978): 6, Series I, Box 125, Robert Wilson Papers.



<b>U.S. Government Agencies</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>2015 Equivalent</b>
National Endowment for the Arts	\$60,000	\$250,300
New York State Council for the Arts	\$20,000	\$83,400
U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C.	\$6,000	\$25,000
U.S. State Department in Belgrade	\$2,000	\$8,300
<b>U.S. Foundations</b>		
Rockefeller Foundation	\$8,500	\$35,500
Shubert Foundation	\$2,000	\$8,300
Kaplan Foundation	\$2,000	\$8,300
Deutsch Foundation	\$1,000	\$4,200
The Doll Foundation	\$2,250	\$9,400
<b>U.S. Individual Contributions</b>		
Christophe, Francois, and Dominique de Menil	\$77,000	\$320,000
Paul Walter	\$32,500	\$135,500
Robert Wilson	\$18,150	\$75,700
Betty Freeman	\$8,000	\$33,400
John Jamison	\$7,000	\$29,200
Barbara Jakobson	\$7,000	\$29,200
Eberstadt's	\$4,000	\$16,700
Elizabeth Kean	\$2,000	\$8,300
Individual donations of \$1,000 or less	\$7,950	\$33,200
<b>Metropolitan Opera Performances</b>		
Ticket sales	\$75,000	\$312,800
Benefit tickets	\$33,250	\$138,700
<b>U.S. Total Contributions</b>	<b>\$375,600</b>	<b>1,564,000</b>
<b>Europe Presenter Fees</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>2015 Equivalent</b>
France: Festival d'automne	\$79,500	\$331,600
France: Festival d'Avignon	\$55,500	\$231,500
Belgium: L'Opéra National de la Monnaie	\$26,000	\$108,500
Italy: La Biennale di la Venezia	\$75,000	\$312,800
Germany: Deutsches Schauspielhaus	\$26,000	\$108,500
Yugoslavia: Belgrade International Theatre Festival	\$15,000	\$62,600
Netherlands: Rotterdamse Schouwburg; Theatre Carré	\$50,000	\$208,500
<b>Europe Individual Contributions</b>		
Schlumbergers	\$50,000	\$208,500
Collection of French sponsors (org. Mme. David-Weill)	\$8,500	\$35,500
Bianca Zevi	\$6,700	\$28,000
Ethel de Croisset	\$3,000	\$12,500
Mark Rudkin	\$3,000	\$12,500
Baroness van Zuylen	\$1,000	\$4,200
<b>Europe Total Contributions</b>	<b>\$399,200</b>	<b>\$1,665,200</b>

Table 6.1 *Einstein* contributions and income, 1976–1977.

Figures based on “U.S. Contributions and Income” and “European Contributions and Income,” Series I, Box 113, Folder: “EOB – Sources for Funding,” Robert Wilson Papers 1969–1995, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

European governments, on the other hand, generally tied funding to specific performance opportunities in the form of annual summer and fall festivals and more traditional fall/winter seasons, allocating money to artists in the form of performance fees rather than grants. Because this kind of funding was funneled through established organizations with their own administrative apparatuses, European festivals and theaters also offered groups like the *Einstein* company valuable non-monetary support: maintaining and paying the staff of venues, handling marketing and ticket sales, (in some cases) making venues available for extended on-site rehearsal periods, and most importantly, providing an established audience base. Indeed, as I will discuss in the following section, both the *Einstein* company and the choreographer Merce Cunningham benefited from month-long rehearsal periods at the Festival d'Avignon during July of 1976.

To break down the differences between *Einstein's* American and European funding in more detail, Robert Wilson neatly summarized his European commissioning strategy in Rockefeller Foundations' *RF Illustrated* as a case study to argue the need for greater governmental funding of the arts in the U.S. "I attempted to raise funds for *Einstein* on a share basis: each country in which we hoped to present the opera was asked for \$75,000," Wilson explained. "Prior to the European tour, a New York-based rehearsal period was made possible by private contributions from both French and American individuals."<sup>468</sup> European festivals and venues drew on their own individual, corporate, and domestic governmental agencies. While only two festivals (the Festival d'automne à Paris and the Biennale di la Venezia) were able to meet Wilson's asking fee, the Biennale contributed to the building of the opera's sets and the Festival d'Avignon provided a luxurious month-long rehearsal period. In sum, European fees totaled \$327,000 (just under \$1.4 million in 2015) for twenty-eight performances at eight venues.<sup>469</sup>

---

<sup>468</sup> Robert Wilson, "An American in Paris," *Rockefeller Foundation Illustrated* 4, no. 1 (April 1978): 6, Series I, Box 125, Robert Wilson Papers. American private donors gave approximately \$140,000, and Europeans \$72,200, to fund this rehearsal period.

<sup>469</sup> Of *Einstein's* eight European presenters, only the French Festival d'automne and the Biennale di la Venezia met or exceeded the \$75,000 asked, giving \$79,500 and \$75,000 respectively for five performances at each festival. The Festival d'Avignon—working



American governmental agencies and corporate foundations, by contrast, awarded Wilson's Byrd Hoffman Foundation only \$103,750 in grants, and this money was not tied to any specific commissioning organization. As a result, first, the bulk of the American funding that enabled *Einstein's* preparation—\$140,000 during the production, and an additional \$23,600 post-tour to offset the Einstein Debt—came from individual contributors Glass and Wilson had courted among New York City's moneyed elite.<sup>470</sup> Second, when Glass and Wilson did receive an invitation to perform *Einstein* at the Metropolitan Opera House as the last stop on the 1976 tour, not only did they receive no fee, but they were instead charged \$20,000 rent and a \$40,000 labor deposit for two performances. Furthermore, while the Met made its seasoned stagehands and front-of-house staff available to Glass and Wilson, the company was responsible for paying the unionized

---

with the Festival d'automne to double funding from the Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites by each applying in 1975 and 1976—loaned the small city's only opera house, the Théâtre Municipal, to the *Einstein* company for rehearsal gratis, and accordingly paid a reduced fee of \$55,500. Both the Belgian Ópera National de la Monnaie and the German Deutsches Schauspielhaus offered only \$26,000 for two performances each in Brussels and Hamburg, and the Rotterdamse Schouwburg and Théâtre Carré in the Netherlands followed suit, promising \$50,000 for three performances split between the two venues. Finally, the Belgrade International Theatre Festival gave only \$15,000 for two performances, but the U.S. Department of State had offset this cost by awarding the Byrd Hoffman Foundation \$8,000, bringing the fee closer to that of its peer institutions. The 2015 European contributions estimate, accounting for inflation, was calculated using the CPI inflation calculator, accessed 19 January 2016, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>470</sup> "U.S. Contributions and Income," Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB – Sources for Funding," Robert Wilson Papers. See also Grace Glueck, "The de Menil Family: The Medici of Modern Art," *New York Times Magazine*, May 18, 1986, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/05/18/magazine/the-de-menil-family-the-medici-of-modern-art.html>; Martin Filler, "Postcards From the Edge," *Departures*, March 30, 2010, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.departures.com/shopping/worldly-goods/postcards-edge>. *Einstein on the Beach's* most generous patrons were three members of the de Menil family. John and Dominique de Menil's investment in Schlumberger, a multinational oil-field services company, had enabled them to amass one of the world's largest private art collections, and Dominique, along with her children Christophe and François, collectively contributed \$77,000 to the opera's production and debt reduction. The European Schlumberger family contributed \$50,000. *Einstein's* other prominent donor was Paul Walter, the head of the electrical equipment company Thermo-Electric, and an avid art collector who, incidentally, purchased Glass's autograph score. Along with serving on the boards of both New York's Museum of Modern Art and Wilson's Byrd Hoffman Foundation and acting as a mediator between Glass and Wilson during the 1976–79 legal dispute, he also contributed \$32,500 to the production. Nearly twenty other patrons gave between \$25 and \$7,000 each toward the production or debt, and Wilson himself contributed over \$18,000 of his personal funds toward the opera.

workers' salaries and overtime, selling tickets, and paying a percentage of the cost of newspaper advertisements. In other words, the Met offered Wilson and Glass the professional labor that the director had lacked when he showed *A Letter for Queen Victoria* at the ANTA Theater on Broadway in 1975, but as a non-commissioning institution, its administration charged them for organizational amenities that its European venues had provided for free. The outcome suited the cash-strapped Met just fine, for the institution could boast that it was supporting a new and innovative opera without taking any unnecessary financial risks. While it likewise benefited Glass and Wilson from the perspective of increasing their symbolic capital, economically it plunged the Byrd Hoffman Foundation far deeper into debt than it would have been had the American institution bought into *Einstein* as a co-commissioner. Wilson explained:

The scale of this work is large, its mechanics complex. For these reasons, the Met was the most appropriate New York theater in which to house the work. The cost of mounting these two performances alone, with a single day to set up, was \$180,000. The only U.S. government support for the New York production of *Einstein* was a grant of \$30,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts [augmented in 1978 by an additional \$30,000 grant]. That left a total of \$150,000 for us to find, an exhausting effort, especially while rehearsing and mounting the piece. Through the generosity of several private individuals and the New York City Council on the Arts, plus the grant from the Endowment, the show managed to go on. However, despite two sold-out performances of *Einstein* at the Met, a large outstanding deficit remains.<sup>471</sup>

In sum, then, although U.S. and European funding were fairly close in quantity (\$375,000 compared with \$400,000), they were extremely different in quality, the latter providing assistance with no strings attached, but also no specific performance prospects. When those prospects did present themselves in the form of the Met, two performances cost far more than the producing Byrd Hoffman Foundation was capable of paying without going into debt, even with generous governmental, foundational, and individual contributions to hand. To that end, in spite of bringing in \$775,000 in grants, donations, and fees, Glass and Wilson found themselves fully \$90,000—what, at the end of the opera's third revival in fall 2015, would have been the equivalent of over \$375,000—shy of the

---

<sup>471</sup> Robert Wilson, "An American in Paris," *Rockefeller Foundation Illustrated* 4, no. 1 (April 1978): 6, Series I, Box 125, Robert Wilson Papers.

estimated \$865,000 final production cost of *Einstein* following its Met premiere.<sup>472</sup> Furthermore, the \$775,000 budget was only intended to fund the European presentations of the opera, as Glass and Wilson had hoped that the opera's European success would cajole American institutions like the Brooklyn Academy of Music to become co-commissioners rather than, as the Met was, a lessor.

*Einstein on the Beach* thus followed a similar trajectory to Wilson's *A Letter for Queen Victoria*, which received fees for performances at European festivals and then returned to New York to be presented in a rented theater. The essential difference was that when *Einstein* returned to the Met, it had that organization's explicit public support, promotional aid, and backstage crew. Nevertheless, Glass and Wilson were still charged for the privilege of performing there, rather than being paid a fee to do so, reinforcing the financial differences between presenting avant-garde performing arts in Europe versus the U.S. There was simply not a network of performing arts festivals invested in boundary-pushing works at home at that time, and uptown institutions like the Met were generally leery of the risk inherent in investing money in new works that might fail and that would be more labor-intensive to promote than conventional fare. When Harvey Lichtenstein, an American impresario of the same caliber as Michel Guy in France, inaugurated the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in 1982, New York at last entered the same field of distribution that had made downtown works possible in Europe. Notably, the first revival of *Einstein on the Beach* was among that festival's early headlining productions. Nevertheless, in 1976, as well as in 1992 and 2012, international support played a crucial role in *Einstein's* production and reception. Leading up to and during its first tour, French patronage in particular paved the way for not just the creation and

---

<sup>472</sup> The BHF circulated several budgeting documents relating to the foundation's 1975–1976 and 1976–1977 fiscal years, as well as relating specifically to *Einstein on the Beach*. The most complete summary following the tour, *not* including the sale of the autograph score, Wilson's drawings and other art, the musical recording, and other contributions is "U.S. Contributions and Income" and "European Contributions and Income," Series I, Box 113, Folder: "EOB – Sources for Funding," Robert Wilson Papers. The composer comes up with roughly the same overall cost and contributions and the same deficit in his chapter on *Einstein on the Beach*. Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 54. The 2015 debt estimate, accounting for inflation, was calculated at approximately \$375,400 using the CPI inflation calculator, accessed January 12, 2016, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

rehearsal of the opera, but also the invitation to the Metropolitan Opera that secured its reputation as *the* art event of the year.

### 6.3 French Patronage

The dithyrambic French critical response to *Einstein on the Beach* in 1976 played a vital role in setting the tone for the opera's reception as a legitimate opera of Wagnerian proportions. Furthermore, the exuberant reviews of the opera's Avignon premiere in papers ranging from the left-wing *Libération* to the moderate *Le Monde* piqued the interest of the Metropolitan Opera. Indeed, the prestige of a well-received French premiere, followed by a similarly well-received run in Paris, was enough to entice a notoriously conservative uptown institution to offer its stage for the first time to a downtown production. In doing so, the Met reinforced the longstanding relationship between French and American artistic networks, and also revealed the mutual benefit of circulating avant-garde art across the Atlantic. That is to say, by funding and presenting American shows, French festivals and performing arts organizations could on the one hand offer their audiences engaging, cutting-edge foreign performances. On the other hand, they could also attract domestic funding for presenting artworks whose international profile helped to establish Paris as the post-World War II cultural capital of Europe. For their part, American institutions could exploit the European performance circuit and critical apparatus as a sieve, choosing to invest in projects that earned European esteem, and that thus provided the symbolic capital needed to attract hesitant American donors and audiences to new works.

Among *Einstein on the Beach's* eight European presenters, from both a financial and organizational perspective, the French Festival d'Avignon and Festival d'automne had an outsized influence on the opera's creation, early reception, and subsequent reputation. Firstly, in addition to Avignon's presentation of the opera's world premiere, the festivals provided the money and space that helped support rehearsals, and together they supplied culturally sophisticated festival audiences and critics for nearly half (fourteen out of thirty) of the opera's tour performances. Secondly, the French Minister of Culture, theater impresario, director of the Festival d'automne, and enthusiastic Wilson champion Michel

Guy took an active role in committing the \$79,500 fee and nine performances in Paris at the Opéra-Comique that laid the groundwork for the first tour, and helped to overcome Festival d'Avignon director Paul Puaux's initial reluctance to add the work to his festival's 1976 program. Furthermore, while *Einstein* returned to Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands during its two revival tours, only the Festival d'automne has commissioned the opera during all three of its international tours (in 1976, 1992, and 2012), demonstrating the French state's commitment to not just Robert Wilson's career, but also to *Einstein on the Beach* among his many original works. The French government recently demonstrated this ongoing investment in the opera's consecration in January of 2014, when it filmed the Théâtre du Châtelet performance for France Télévision's online streaming channel Culturebox, making a French presentation of the opera available for free for six months to anyone in the world with Internet access.<sup>473</sup>

To make sense of the strong early French investment in and positive critical response to *Einstein*, it is helpful to first consider that government's interest in the performing arts following the Second World War. Indeed, in the wake of the civil unrest that brought France's entire economy to a halt in May 1968, the death

---

<sup>473</sup> As the sole American organization to commission the opera on its own in 1984 and as a co-commissioner in 1992 and 2012, the Brooklyn Academy of Music is the only institutional patron that approaches the French government's role in establishing and contributing to *Einstein on the Beach*'s reputation. The art critic Patricia Degener, reflecting on the opera's revival in 1984, noted BAM's long association with Wilson, but the reluctance of any other American institutions to commission works by him: "For Wilson the revival of 'Einstein' meant a welcome return to his homeland. The Brooklyn Academy first produced his works—'The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin,' 'The \$ Value of Man,' 'The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud,' and 'Deafman's [sic] Glance'—in the early 1970s. Since the Met production of 'Einstein' in the Bicentennial year, however, Wilson's long, slow-moving, dreamlike spectacles have been produced chiefly in Europe. The state-subsidized theaters there are better able to bear the cost of realizing his complex theatrical visions." Patricia Degener, "'Einstein': A 4½-Hour Opera With Revival Power," *Post-Dispatch*, Box: "1984 Einstein on the Beach Material (Moldy)," Folder: "TOUR – EOB Press," Hamm Archives. Also, with the assistance of the PBS, BAM also produced a one-hour television documentary film on the opera (*Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, 1985) to commemorate the 1984 remount and make some rehearsal and performance footage available to a general public. Although this documentary film is a valuable pedagogical resource, it presents only short excerpts of the nearly five-hour opera, and until France Télévision filmed an entire performance of the opera at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 2014 and for six months made it available for free on its Culturebox website, the only complete audiovisual recordings of the opera were contained in archives restricted to researchers.

of the respected Festival d'Avignon founder Jean Vilar in 1971, and the appointment of Michel Guy to the post of Minister of Culture in 1974, a concerted investment in regional theater gave rise to a generation of highly-placed performing arts directors who pushed strongly for innovative music, dance, and progressive and non-literary Western theater, as well as non-Western performance programming in their regions and at their festivals. In doing so, they brought together on an annual basis young French troupes, established European artists like Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Stein, and members of New York's downtown scene.

### 6.3.1 The Downtown Avant-garde and the Postwar French Cultural Apparatus

When Wilson, Glass, and their cast and crew decamped from New York to Provence in early July of 1976, the Festival d'Avignon no doubt seemed to some members of the company no more than a fortuitous event at which to premiere the work.<sup>474</sup> The reality, however, was that both the Festival d'Avignon and the Festival d'automne were much more than just two of four international performing arts festivals on the tour docket, for their directors had nationalistic, as well as artistic, interests in the opera. For one thing, *Einstein* gave French presenters the diplomatic opportunity to contribute to the circulation of art and ideas between the U.S. and France during the American Bicentennial year (a point I will address in more detail later in this chapter), particularly as both Wilson and Glass had significant professional ties to the European country. Louis Aragon's ecstatic response to Wilson's *Deafman Glance* at the Festival de Nancy in 1971 had led the French critical establishment to embrace the director as a sort of honorary Frenchman.<sup>475</sup> Also, Glass had studied abroad in France during the

---

<sup>474</sup> Letter, Kathleen Norris to Paul Puaux, June 21, 1976, Folder: "23 – Einstein on the Beach," 4-ACOL-1 709, Maison Jean Vilar. The *Einstein* company staggered their arrivals in France, as Kathleen Norris notified Paul Puaux in a letter in June 1976: "The first members of the technical crew will arrive in Avignon on June 27<sup>th</sup>. We now expect that the scenery will arrive from Milan on June 29 or 30. For this first week, only the technical crew will be in Avignon to set up and work with scenery, lighting and sound. The full company will arrive on July 5<sup>th</sup> to begin rehearsals on July 6<sup>th</sup>. The musicians will arrive July 12<sup>th</sup>."

<sup>475</sup> See chapter 2 and Edward Baron Turk, *French Theatre Today: A View from New York, Paris, and Avignon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 106. Turk, a French and

1950s, returning in the mid-1960s to study for two years with the respected French music pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. While he was less than complimentary toward what he perceived as the “heavy European didacticism” of Pierre Boulez’s *Domaine Musical* in his first memoir, he also credited Michel Guy with one of his “first big appearances in Paris” in 1973.<sup>476</sup>

Beyond the director’s and composer’s personal connections to France, the festivals’ interest in *Einstein on the Beach* was also rooted in a national historical and political context whose impact on state-sponsored art, especially theater, extended back at least as far as the end of World War II.<sup>477</sup> Regarding the status of music during this period, Jann Pasler explains that with the arrival of the Fifth Republic in 1958, the French government confronted “the erosion of private patronage of music,” and “decided to take charge of the situation and attributed to cultural concerns a ministry of its own under the leadership of André Malraux.” Malraux, she continues, maintained that culture “is not inherited but ‘conquered.’ It is an existential struggle to ‘protect the imaginary’ and ‘resurrect nobility’ in a world of imagery provided by machines,” and one might add, in a France pervaded by the American-style consumerism that had radically altered

---

film studies scholar, calls Wilson “an American director whom the French affectionately view as one of their own,” recalling that the *administrateur général* of the Comédie-Française Marcel Bozonnet so admired Wilson’s oeuvre that he initially asked him to restage *Deafman Glance* in 2005.

<sup>476</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 3–10, 13–20; Glass, *Words Without Music*, 115; Glass, interview by Mark Obenhaus, “Einstein-Philip Glass #93” (1985), 3, transcript, Hamm Archives. Since the 1970s, Glass has written and spoken admiringly of French progressive theater, New Wave film, and Surrealism, composed three experimental operas based on films by Jean Cocteau, and in his 2015 memoir, even revised his assessment of the *Domaine Musical* concerts, calling them “highlights of my years in Paris.” Indeed, Guy brought the PGE to the Festival d’automne to perform in *Similar Motion*, *Music with Changing Parts*, *Music in Twelve Parts*, and *Music in Fifths* at the Musée Galleria in Paris from 14–20 September 1973. This was the first festival performance in France by the Ensemble. See Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community,” 270.

<sup>477</sup> As Jane Fulcher has demonstrated, the French state has long understood the utility of fusing politics and aesthetics through music to try and forge a unified image of French cultural identity, especially during wartime. She complicates this narrative by showing that musicians during and between World Wars I and II “were well aware of the fact that musical signification was affected by this process, and many, far from being apolitical, responded as intellectuals, taking a public stand through symbolic means.” Although *Einstein* entered the French institutional arena three decades later, France’s imbrication of politics and the arts remained in force in the 1970s, as I will show in the discussion that follows. Jane F. Fulcher, *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 319.

the rhythms of French life in a single decade.<sup>478</sup> Indeed, in an essay on the postwar institutional cultural apparatus in France, Michel Beaujour concurs:

[T]he political-intellectual Left, . . . like the [rightwing] Gaullists in power, was concerned about the depoliticization of the masses and loathed the new family-centered privatization of life. The implicit consensus among intellectuals of all political orientations was that the new consumer culture was a monstrous breeder of social pathology and the nemesis of any sort of real culture, whether it be defined as a set of tastes and practices or as a spiritual transcendence. Such a consensus stemmed from a shared belief that Culture is not a consumer good, and that it must be approached only by dint of ascetic effort: a person's encounter with the masterpieces of art must be a serious and defining event.<sup>479</sup>

Beaujour goes on to explain that the selected vehicle for this "encounter with the masterpieces of art" would be popular theater and large drama centers called *maisons de la culture*. Their establishment throughout France would, its implementers hoped, enable residents of mid-sized cities to have access to "noncommercial theater, modern yet historically aware, performing the classics and a smattering of serious 'moderns'" by playwrights like Bertolt Brecht, intended to cultivate politically engaged citizens.<sup>480</sup>

The resulting cultural apparatus shares some traits with German Kultur and even the crusades of late nineteenth-century writers like Matthew Arnold, who helped shape conceptions of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" culture in the United States.<sup>481</sup> Importantly for new avant-garde works like *Einstein*, however, French Culture was uniquely driven by an unofficial policy of *cohabitation*, or collusion between the political right and left, that gave rise to a system in which the

---

<sup>478</sup> *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Paris," by Jann Pasler, accessed April 24, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>. See also Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>479</sup> Michel Beaujour, "Culture," *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman with Brian J. Reilly, French articles trans. M. B. DeBevoise (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 182.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, 183–84.

<sup>481</sup> Beaujour mentions the similarities between French Culture and German Kultur, primarily their emphasis on politically desirable audience engagement achieved through dramaturgical tools like Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. See also Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 171–242.



running of the *maisons de la culture*, “though lavishly supported by right-wing governments, was tacitly given over to the communist and fellow-traveling managers and artists” who had built their early careers during Vichy and the Fourth Republic.<sup>482</sup> It was this institutional collaboration between ideological enemies that enabled a leftwing cultural elite like Michel Guy to rise to the position of Minister of Culture in 1974 and administer a government-sponsored festival that embraced the avant-garde in spite of President Giscard d’Estaing’s centrism and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac’s conservatism during the mid-1970s. What this meant practically for downtown artists like Glass and Wilson was that France was a far more hospitable environment for building their reputations and making a living than the United States. Most performing arts institutions at home had access to comparatively paltry federal funding, and lacking that safety net, quailed at the thought of risking tens of thousands of dollars on a five-hour, downtown avant-garde music theater piece. The French government, on the other hand, had since the late 1950s explicitly made it its mission to provide just those sorts of challenging artistic experiences to its population in the interest of constructing a shared national identity around “a sense of being a political, social, and economic vanguard with long-term political goals and high social ideals.”<sup>483</sup>

From a musical perspective, Malraux’s initial overhaul of state and municipal institutions included not just commissioning new works by composers and funding almost a hundred festivals by 1974, but of greater relevance to musical theater projects like *Einstein on the Beach*, the state and the City of Paris jointly funded various new music initiatives. These included the Journées de Musique Contemporaine (1968), the research centre IRCAM (1975), and the Festival d’automne (1972), all of which, Gordon contends, were “part of a conscious effort

---

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 183–4. Beaujour’s eloquent description of the practical result of *cohabitation* also hints at why *Einstein on the Beach* was well-suited to the French cultural apparatus, as it its avant-garde theatrical aesthetic lineage coincided neatly with Culture’s Brechtian interest in making spectators active participants with respect to the drama, while its operatic trappings gave the impression of chic classicism: “Culture,” Beaujour writes, “was condemned to tread a narrow path between high-minded preaching and the messiness of a punk rebellion.”

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 183.

to recognize and support the city as a European, not merely a French, center of musical and artistic life.”<sup>484</sup> On the tenth anniversary of the Festival d’automne, Michel Guy provided a description of the event that confirms this state aim, as well as the *cohabitation* that wedded conservative state ideology to leftist institutional leadership:

In 1952, Nicolas Nabokov had conceived “L’Oeuvre du XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle,” which allowed the people of my generation to discover Schoenberg, Webern, and Balanchine, and to attend the first Parisian performance of *Wozzeck* (created in Berlin thirty years earlier . . .). By contrast, the major French cultural institutions seemed anachronistic, merely administering classical heritage. . . . In sum, the Autumn Festival was born in an ambient vacuum. For me, it was basically [meant] to fill a gap, at first with few key ideas to which I am still attached: national boundaries shall in no way be cultural boundaries; creation is meaningful only inasmuch as it feeds exchange, intermingling, and confrontation; Paris could become a place of cultural influence and, simultaneously, a place of welcome and circulation.<sup>485</sup>

While “anachronistic” French cultural institutions remained the dominant vehicles for administering Culture, Guy, like Pierre Boulez, traveled to New York City in pursuit of stimulating new work in the performing arts, particularly coming to admire the work of postmodern dancers like Merce Cunningham and Twyla Tharp.<sup>486</sup> When he took over the directorship of the Festival d’automne, then, he was eager to invite such downtown artists, adding fellow avant-garde New Yorkers like Philip Glass, Robert Wilson, Andrew de Groat, and Lucinda Childs as he discovered them. Eschewing the conservatism that had

---

<sup>484</sup> Pasler, “Paris.”

<sup>485</sup> Michel Guy, “Dix ans et la suite,” in Jean-Pierre Léonardini, Marie Collin, and Joséphine Markovits, *Festival d’automne à Paris* (Paris: Temps actuels, 1982), 13. The original French reads: “En 1952, Nicolas Nabokov avait conçu ‘L’oeuvre du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle,’ qui permit aux gens de ma génération de découvrir Schönberg, Webern, Balanchine, d’assister à la première représentation parisienne de *Wozzeck* (créé à Berlin trente ans plus tôt . . .). Par contraste, les grandes institutions culturelles françaises paraissaient anachroniques, se bornant à gérer l’héritage classique. . . . En somme, le Festival d’automne est né du vide ambiant. Il s’agissait pour moi, essentiellement, de colmater une brèche. Avec, au départ, ces quelques idées-forces, auxquelles je n’ai cessé d’être attaché : les frontières nationales ne sauraient en aucun cas être des limites culturelles ; la création n’a de sens qu’à se nourrir d’échanges, de brassages, de confrontations ; Paris ne pourrait redevenir un lieu de rayonnement culturel qu’à être, simultanément, un lieu d’accueil et de circulations.”

<sup>486</sup> I follow Beaujour in treating “Culture” as a proper noun to indicate its political and ideological overtones in the context of postwar France.

characterized Culture prior to the civil unrest of May 1968 and its attendant reforms, Guy “deliberately queered and gentrified Culture by building up French modern dance with American choreographers and favoring opera and performance art to the point where they elbowed aside the traditional face of popular theater,” rendering the *maisons de la culture* all but obsolete, and replacing a puritanical, elite Malrauxian vision of Culture with “‘the arts,’ in the American and quasi-gastronomical sense.”<sup>487</sup>

As a result, *Einstein*, like many other projects by Glass, Wilson, and their downtown colleagues, benefitted from the French postwar politicization of expressive culture, and especially so in the 1970s, by which point Malrauxian Culture was being eclipsed by the aesthetically adventurous, postmodern orientation of administrators like Guy and Paul Puaux, Jean Vilar’s successor at the famously freewheeling Festival d’Avignon. The non-commercial, community- and performance-oriented art that characterized the SoHo avant-garde corresponded neatly with the French cultural apparatus, which during the 1960s and 1970s, according to Pasler, “became a focal point in the debates about national identity and national heritage. When the socialists came to power in 1981,” she adds, “it became even more important. Because they doubled the Ministry of Culture’s budget, spending was increased on musical production, musical centers, and new music associations” like Bobigny’s *maison de la culture* and the Théâtre Musical de Paris at the Théâtre du Châtelet, the latter of which was “supported by the city as a public service to ‘inform, instruct, and elevate’ its citizens.”<sup>488</sup>

In 1976, *Einstein on the Beach* was presented in the Opéra-Comique, but when it returned in 1992 and again in 2012 and 2014, it was to the Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis à Bobigny (1972) in Paris’s outskirts, the Opera Berlioz in Le

---

<sup>487</sup> Beaujour, “Culture,” 185. Beaujour also notes that during Guy’s tenure, “the French system of support for culture became increasingly analogous—though much larger and more centralized—to the American system of endowments, state and federal subsidies, and grants from various sources. The word *sponsoriser* entered the French language. Private support for the arts became commonplace and tax exempt. The old system, somewhat monolithic and Soviet-like, gave way to diversity and competition between the private and the public sectors.” 183–4.

<sup>488</sup> Pasler, “Paris.”

Corum (1988) in Montpellier, and the Théâtre du Châtelet (remodeled 1980 and 1989) in Paris, respectively. By tracing the French production history of the opera, then, one simultaneously traces the history of the French state investment in Culture over half a century. Indeed, *Einstein's* presentation in four different French venues over the course of three international tours not only demonstrates the state's continuing investment in American avant-garde art. It also tracks the socialists' rise to power in 1981 and reveals the mutually beneficial relationship that Glass and Wilson have sustained with France: the artists accrued symbolic and economic capital, while *Einstein* played its part in establishing Paris as a cosmopolitan Mecca of the arts. That said, the transatlantic artistic relationships that formed between the downtown scene and the French cultural apparatus, however financially dependent they may have been on the French state, required mediators in the form of officials, festival organizers, impresarios, and agents. To understand how downtown artists gained a foothold in the European economy of symbolic goods, it is thus helpful to examine these individuals' negotiation between producer and state.

### 6.3.2 Festivals and Impresarios

Among *Einstein on the Beach's* venues in 1976, the Festival d'Avignon exerted by far the most influence on its initial success, for the festival gave the opera its premiere, enabled Glass's and Wilson's European agent to confirm tour dates outside of France and Italy, and attracted the interest of the Metropolitan Opera. It was Robert Wilson and the Festival d'automne director Michel Guy, however, and not Avignon festival director Paul Puaux, who advocated for its inclusion in the Provençal event. In fact, in an interview for a 1985 documentary film on the opera, Glass recalled that Guy was the catalyst whose commitment to fund and present the opera pushed the project from planning to execution, as well as the linchpin that brought Puaux into the fold:

It was during this period that we were talking [about a possible collaboration] that Michel Guy came to New York. He had just become the Minister of Culture. He had been with the Autumn Festival. And before, as the director of the Autumn Festival, he had invited me to Paris a couple of times. And also Bob [Wilson], independently. . . . He said to me, "I understand that you and Bob are doing a piece. And if you premiere it in Paris we would be prepared to start the funding that would make it

possible to rehearse it." . . . And so that was the first time that Bob and I had a producer.<sup>489</sup>

Guy, as both Minister of Culture and director of the Festival d'automne, held enviable sway in terms of routing funding toward projects of his choice. "No doubt my action as the head of Autumn Festival had something to do with my appointment to a government post," Guy wrote in the introduction to a 1982 book on the Festival d'automne:

In my passage to the rue de Valois [Le Ministère de la Culture], I held to the certainty that the state, in terms of creativity, must gear down policy centers to the maximum, that it must be wary of cumbersome institutions, centralized offices, and their guidelines, and must be at once generous, humble, and liberal. [There is] nothing more contrary to creation, in my opinion, than everything that resembles "official culture."<sup>490</sup>

To that end, when Guy founded the Festival d'automne in 1971, under the ministry of Jacques Duhamel and with the blessing of President Georges Pompidou, he sought not just to "complement the existing system and fill in the gaps," but also to build the festival's reputation as an alternative to the Theatre of Nations, reaching out to foreign artists without relying on other countries' embassies to decide on their nation's participation.<sup>491</sup> "When I was minister [from 1974 to 1976]," Guy explained to *Le Monde's* drama critic Colette Godard in 1980, "I couldn't be subjective. Still, I set up operations—the Ensemble Intercontemporain, appointments to drama centers—for my own pleasure."<sup>492</sup>

---

<sup>489</sup> Glass, interview by Mark Oberhaus, "Einstein-Philip Glass #93" (1985), 3, transcript, Hamm Archives. Edited by author.

<sup>490</sup> Guy, "Dix ans et la suite," *Festival d'automne à Paris*, 15. The original French reads: "Je garde de mon passage rue de Valois la certitude que l'État, en matière de création, doit démultiplier au maximum les centres de décision, qu'il doit se méfier des institutions pesantes, centralisées, des bureaux et de leurs directives, qu'il doit être tout à la fois généreux, humble et libéral. Rien de plus contraire à la création, à mon sens, que tout ce qui pourrait ressembler à de la 'culture officielle.'"

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Guy lists five primary missions of the Festival d'automne: to commission new works, to develop networks between French and foreign professionals, to support and present innovative or experimental works, to welcome significant unseen works to France, and to expose Western audiences to non-Western cultures.

<sup>492</sup> Colette Godard, "Entretien avec Michel Guy: l'entraînement des enthousiasmes," *Le Monde*, September 11, 1980, accessed September 16, 2015, [http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1980/09/11/entretien-avec-michel-guy-l-entrainement-des-enthousiasmes\\_3074476\\_1819218.html#jv6mzBhGrUoMKYzQ.99](http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1980/09/11/entretien-avec-michel-guy-l-entrainement-des-enthousiasmes_3074476_1819218.html#jv6mzBhGrUoMKYzQ.99). The

At the Festival d'automne, by contrast, he and his staff constructed programs based solely on their own tastes, with an eye to building international relationships, supporting and commissioning new, innovative work, and presenting significant works not otherwise available to French audiences. Guy's personal mission was "providing a means to patiently, stubbornly monitor the evolution of an artist," even if that monitoring took nine shows over sixteen years to produce a self-sustaining audience, as it did with Merce Cunningham.<sup>493</sup> Robert Wilson was another such artist that Guy claimed as one of "his foals," and the two developed a close personal as well as professional acquaintance.<sup>494</sup> "*Deafman Gance*, this wasn't mine, it was the Festival de Nancy's," he admitted. "But without us, the following shows by Bob Wilson, *A Letter for Queen Victoria*, *Einstein on the Beach*, *Edison*, would not have been able to go up."<sup>495</sup>

This claim was no boast. The contract the Byrd Hoffman Foundation agreed to with the Festival d'automne stipulated that the festival took responsibility for providing the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique and its staff, and giving the *Einstein* company twenty-seven hours over three days to light and rehearse the show. The festival also designed and printed programs, paid the staff, handled ticket sales and collection, covered advertising costs, and set aside seats for the festival press service. Importantly, the festival also paid the BHF 265,000 francs of the promised 372,000 francs in advance of the Paris performances, the first two

---

original French reads: "Quand j'étais ministre je devais ne pas être subjectif. Encore que j'ai mis sur pied des opérations - l'Ensemble intercontemporain, les nominations aux centres dramatiques - comme pour mon propre plaisir."

<sup>493</sup> Guy, "Dix ans et la suite," *Festival d'automne à Paris*, 14.

<sup>494</sup> Godard, "Entretien avec Michel Guy." Godard lightheartedly observes, "He speaks of 'his' foals, of 'his' programs, like a head of the household organizing a meal with relish: who next to whom, which wine with which dish." The original French reads: "Il parle de 'ses' poulains, de 'ses' programmes, comme un maître de maison organisant avec délectation un dîner: qui à côté de qui, quel vin avec quel plat." Robert Wilson, *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDENIA TERRACE* and *Ouverture* Programs (1972); Telegram (1973); 10 postcards (1985–1990), 4-COL-70(226) (cote), Département des Arts du Spectacle, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Also, a series of handwritten notes, telegrams, and postcards sent from Wilson to Guy between 1972 and 1990 chronicles their extended relationship. One 1973 telegram enthuses, "MANY MANY MANY THANKS FOR DROPS THEY AND MY SPIRITS ARE FLYING," and a 1988 postcard reads, "HAPPY NEW YEAR! It was great to see you in Paris – thank you thank you for your continued support – you are truly a loyal and great friend – lots of love / BOB."

<sup>495</sup> Godard, "Entretien avec Michel Guy."

installments arriving while the company was still in New York (February and June) and the third in between the two French festivals (September). This distribution of payment over several months would have helped to cover costs during the rehearsal period, as well as the expenses generated in between the late July Avignon premiere and the early September Venice performances.<sup>496</sup>

As important as the Festival d'automne's financial and material commitment to *Einstein on the Beach* was, Guy readily admitted that his festival was frequently obliged to seek out partners such as other European festivals and French institutions, for a "co-production system enables the presentation of shows to the public that a single institution could not fully fund, extending the life of these shows."<sup>497</sup> Colette Godard confirmed this financial reality: "The Festival d'automne is not rich; on the contrary, it is a lean, flexible structure that can adapt to the circumstances." Because Guy believed that "[t]he primary role of the festival is to raise awareness, to provide an opportunity to compare," rather than to protect the long-term financial stability of an established institution, he and his fellow festival directors established a mutually supportive European network that enabled them to produce large-scale works that no single venue could fund alone.<sup>498</sup>

Guy therefore endeavored to bring the Festival d'Avignon on board as a second French commissioner of *Einstein*. Bernard Dort, a French academic and the 1988–89 Directeur du théâtre et des spectacles at the Ministère de la Culture, recalled that initially:

Bob Wilson seemed foreign to Avignon. Paul Puaux felt it "a pity that his talent is perverted by snobbery, fashion, Parisianism," and was "not

---

<sup>496</sup> *Einstein on the Beach* Festival d'automne à Paris Contract, Series I, Box 114, Folder: "Einstein – Administrative – Misc.," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>497</sup> Guy, "Dix ans et la suite," *Festival d'automne à Paris*, 14. The original French reads: "Ce système de coproduction permet de présenter au public des spectacles qu'une institution isolée ne pourrait pas assumer complètement, et de prolonger la vie de ces spectacles."

<sup>498</sup> Godard, "Entretien avec Michel Guy." The original French reads: "Le Festival d'automne n'est pas riche, en revanche, c'est une structure légère, souple, qui peut s'adapter aux circonstances. . . . Le rôle premier du festival est de faire connaître, de donner l'occasion de comparer."

favorable,” fearing that the Festival audience would not understand it. But he was persuaded—by Michel Guy and Bob Wilson.<sup>499</sup>

In spite of Puaux’s initial objections, *Einstein on the Beach* turned out to be a mutually beneficial endeavor, for while Jean Vilar’s Provençal festival was well respected at home and abroad, until the 1970s, both Vilar and his successor had been resistant to programming foreign-language drama, largely restricting its theatrical impact to within French borders. “If dance and music are by definition international,” Laure Adler and Alain Veinstein explain, “drama is much less so,” and “to make Avignon a rendezvous point for foreign companies would have been to align it with the majority of festivals, in Venice [the Biennale] and the Festival d’automne.”<sup>500</sup> This alignment was undesirable for the small-town festival because it was the festival’s unique profile rather than the amenities of big cities like Venice, Paris, London, or Berlin that drew audiences to Avignon, and the more the Festival d’Avignon imitated other European festivals, its organizers felt, the more dependent it would become on them. “However,” Adler and Veinstein conclude, “the temptation persisted. The success of *Einstein on the Beach* helped to lift the ban” because “for Bob Wilson, words are merely sound materials.”<sup>501</sup>

*Einstein* thus presented an ideal foreign production, as its image-, music-, and dance-based drama downplayed spoken text. The actor Samuel M. Johnson even made a diplomatic gesture toward French audiences by delivering his speeches

---

<sup>499</sup> Laure Adler and Alain Veinstein, *Avignon: 40 ans de festival* [Avignon: 40 years of the festival], intro. Bernard Dort (France: Hachette/Festival d’Avignon, 1987), 17. The original French reads: “Paul Puaux trouvant ‘dommage que son talent soit perverti par le snobisme, la mode, le parisianisme’ ne lui était ‘guère favorable’ et craignait que le public du Festival ne comprenne pas. Mais il se laissa convaincre—par Michel Guy et par Bob Wilson.”

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid. The original French reads: “Si la danse et la musique sont, par définition, internationaux, le théâtre, lui, ne l’est que fort peu. De plus, faire d’Avignon un rendez-vous de troupes étrangères, c’eût été l’aligner sur la majorité des festivals, de Venise au Festival d’automne. Et menacer son identité, en le rendant tributaire de la ronde des festivals de l’été. Toutefois, la tentation perdurait. Le succès d’*Einstein on the Beach* contribua peut-être à lever l’interdit (mais chez Bob Wilson, les mots ne sont que des matériaux sonores).”



in their own language in Avignon.<sup>502</sup> In his *Le Progres* review, Jean-Jacques Lerrant captured both the profit to the festival and the artists and Guy's involvement, reporting, "With the creation of Robert Wilson's opera, Avignon has projected itself into international orbit. . . . A chartered plane from New York was bringing to the city of the Popes a hundred or so compatriots of the American showman—Michel Guy, Secretary of Cultural Affairs, was coming on a semi-official, semi-incognito basis."<sup>503</sup>

---

<sup>502</sup> Byrd Hoffman Foundation, Background Sheets, Portfolio: "Einstein on the Beach," Metropolitan Opera Archives. The Byrd Hoffman Foundation deliberately used *Einstein's* non-literary character as a selling point. On one document intended to provide the Met administration with background on the opera, the writer plays up the opera's dual accessibility in a section on "Einstein as Subject": "Wilson and Glass chose Albert Einstein as the central character or inspiration for the work because they wanted a personality whose name and achievements would be familiar to most of their audience, and whose celebrity was world-wide rather than national. This familiarity would make the opera more accessible, enabling the creators to dispense with lengthy expositions. It would also add the audiences' perceptions to the work, since they would each know something about Einstein, and in trying to make the opera's abstractions applicable to his life, would be more actively involved than if they were simply filled up with facts in the course of the work." See also Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 45; "Avignon 7/28," NCOV 3066, Theater on Film and Tape Archive, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In his first memoir, Glass recalls of Johnson's Avignon performance, "Mr. Johnson surprised us a second time when we premiered *Einstein* in Avignon. When his moment came in the first Trial, without warning of any kind to Bob or me, he delivered his speech in French! It was quaint French, meticulously learned from a textbook, and it stunned and delighted everyone in the theater." Archival footage supports this anecdote.

<sup>503</sup> Jean-Jacques Lerrant, "Le création de 'Einstein on the beach': Cinq heures de fascination et de rêve au festival d'Avignon," *Le Progres*, July 27, 1976, Series I, Box 124, Folder: "EOB – Artservice – Press," Robert Wilson Papers. The original French reads: "Avec la création de l'opéra de Robert Wilson, Avignon s'est projeté sur l'orbite internationale. La bonhomie d'un festival populaire a été rompue pour quelques heures. Un avion frété de New York dirigeait sur la cité des Papes une certaine de compatriotes de l'homme de théâtre américain. Le secrétaire d'Etat aux Affaires culturelles, M. Michel Guy, s'annonçait, mi-officiel, mi-incognito." See also *Dauphiné*, "'Einstein on the beach' au festival d'Avignon: Un opéra mathématique pour apprivoiser l'apocalypse," July 27, 1976, Einstein on the beach, mise en scène de Robert Wilson [Document d'archives] : dossier de presse, RPFA-1976 support: dossier de coupures de presse, Maison Jean Vilar. The reviewer from *Dauphiné* remarked, "A frantic rush through the open doors, the surge of a hundred Americans representing Bob Wilson's supporters, the Secretary of State for Culture's backdoor entry, and into the room where fever and ecstasy mixed: the creation of 'Einstein on the Beach' was every bit the event we expected." The original French reads: Une ruée éperdue à l'ouverture des portes, le déferlement d'une centaine d'Américains représentant le collectif subventionner de Bob Wilson, l'entrée du Secrétaire d'Etat à la Culture par une porte dérobée, et dans la salle la fièvre et l'extase mêlées: la création de 'Einstein on the Beach' a bien été l'événement qu'on attendait."

One can track Puaux's concession to *Einstein's* outsized material and rehearsal needs through correspondence between the opera company's representative Bénédicte Pesle, its agent Ninon Karlweiss, festival administrators Paul Puaux (Festival d'Avignon) and Paul Ruaud (Festival d'automne), and a cultural ministry official. From the promise of 10,000 francs each for five performances and one week of rehearsal at the Théâtre Municipal, Guy's pull at the cultural ministry enabled Puaux to supplement this fee with a grant of 60,000 francs from the Caisse des Monuments Historiques et des Sites, and another of 150,000 francs from the Direction du Théâtre au Secrétariat d'Etat à la Culture. He was also able to give Glass and Wilson access to the Théâtre Municipal, the city's traditional performing arts theater, for the entire month of July to rehearse, enabling the opera company to put finishing touches on the work and polish it so that it appeared to best advantage at its world premiere.<sup>504</sup> In his first memoir, Glass described how vital this on-site rehearsal period was to finalizing the opera:

We began in the morning, reviewing the work of the previous winter with the company while Bob [Wilson] and Beverly Emmons set lights in the theater. We began rehearsing in the theater in the evening and always stayed until 11:00 or 12:00 at night. There were costume fittings, and the crew had to learn the scenery changes. Julia Gillette, our stage manager, was learning to 'call' the show, i.e., learning the cues for the performers. We also were installing a complete sound system that included wireless mikes for the performers, a great novelty in those days but crucial if the speaking and singing parts were to be heard in the context of the amplified music performed by the Ensemble. . . . With this degree of technical innovation, it would take the full rehearsal period, and then some, to learn how to work it properly. Besides that, once on stage we

---

<sup>504</sup> See letters, Paul Puaux to Monsieur Lamberti, October 13, 1975; Paul Puaux to Ninon Tallon Karlweiss, n.d., Series I, Box 114, Folder: "Einstein – Administrative – Misc."; letter, Bénédicte Pesle to Ninon Tallon Karlweiss, November 28, 1975, Series I, Box 121, Folder 5B: "1976–1977–1978 Financial Problems, Einstein on the Beach," Robert Wilson Papers. See also Adler and Veinstein, *Avignon: 40 ans de festival*, 17. Because the Théâtre Municipal is Avignon's civic theater, with a fall/winter season, it remained empty during July. The Festival d'Avignon did not program events in the venue until 1969, and by 1976, it still held a reputation as "the rendezvous place for those who long held the festival in suspicion: the subscribers of the [Marcel] Karsenty galas or the 'aficionados' of the high C. . . . In July, it remained closed as a reproach, before the onslaught of the festival on the square." The original French reads: "Il était, en saison, le lieu de rendez-vous de ceux qui ont longtemps tenu le Festival en suspicion: les abonnés de Galas Karsenty ou les 'aficionados' du contre-ut. . . . En juillet, il demeurait clos, comme un reproche, devant le déferlement des festivaliers sur la place."

discovered any number of scenes that required additional music simply to cover the mechanics of scene changes.<sup>505</sup>

*Einstein* was not the only festival event to be offered a month to rehearse in Avignon—Merce Cunningham conducted open rehearsals of his *Events* across the Rhone in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon during the same period before headlining in the Coeur d'honneur of the Palais des Papes<sup>506</sup>—but its company's rigorous rehearsal schedule did draw attention. Critics frequently made a point of the fact that 1976 was the Festival d'Avignon's thirtieth anniversary year, and Guy Dumur of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, suggested that such an unusual music theater event as *Einstein* was a strategic programming decision:

One of the most bewildering things to watch during rehearsals was the meeting of the Avignon stage managers and stage hands, talkative, accustomed to setting up *Le fille du regiment* in the blink of an eye, a shirtless lot, and on the other hand this team of over thirty Americans, quiet, well-trained, and efficient specialists to the tips of their fingers. . . . After three months of work in downtown New York, rehearsals went on for days and days in the only enclosed area of the festival, far from the Provence sunshine, as if these very pale Yankees wanted, more than anything else, to erase a thirty-year tradition. But Vilar's successor, Paul Puaux, has only one motto for his festival: "Freedom or death."<sup>507</sup>

In fact, Puaux's inclusion of *Einstein* in the 1976 Festival d'Avignon had precedents in both his predecessor's attitude toward the arts and in the

---

<sup>505</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 48.

<sup>506</sup> Paul Puaux, "Paul Puaux," *Avignon: 40 ans de festival*, 127. Puaux recalled, "Merce and his company, prior to performing at the Cour d'honneur, spent one month at the monastery of Villeneuve-lès-Avignon. Every other day, people who had tickets to the show could attend rehearsals and thus learn about the universe of the choreographer." original French reads: "Merce et sa compagnie, avant les représentations à la Cour, résidèrent un mois à la chartreuse de Villeneuve-lès-Avignon. Un jour sur deux, les personnes munies de billets pour le spectacle pouvaient assister aux répétitions et, ainsi, s'initier à l'univers du chorégraphe."

<sup>507</sup> Guy Dumur, "Vilar est mort, vive Vilar!" *Le nouvel observateur*, July 26, 1976, Box: "1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "EOB Publicity," Hamm Archives. The original French reads: "Ce qu'il y avait de plus étonnant au cour des répétitions, c'était de voir se rencontrer les machinistes et régisseurs avignonnais, volubiles habitués à monter, torse nu et à la sauvette 'la Fille du tambour-major,' et cette équipe de plus de trente Américains silencieux, disciplinés, techniciens jusqu'au bout des ongles. . . . Après trois mois de travail en plein New York, on a répété des jours et des jours dans le seul lieu clos du festival, loin de la lumière provençale, comme si ces Yankees très pâles voulaient, eux plus que d'autres, nier une tradition de trente années. Mais le successeur de Vilar, Paul Puaux, n'a qu'une devise pour son festival: 'La liberté ou la mort.'"

expansion of music theater's possibilities. Jean Vilar founded the Festival d'Avignon in 1947 in a Fourth Republic atmosphere in which festivals were few and the province of the rich, theater festivals were nonexistent, and outdoor festivals were held in suspicion due to their association with Vichyism and what Bernard Dort describes as "a stale perfume of 'national revolution.'"<sup>508</sup> In spite of having made his career in Paris, Vilar was a regular at small theaters and, in 1941–42, had briefly traveled with a touring company, expressing his admiration of this form of theater: "We have, the one and the other," he claimed, "tapped the best of our forces," and while he initially balked at staging theater in the historically resonant courtyard of the Palais des Papes, the festival that grew out of that initial production eventually earned him a reputation as both French theater's "hero and its bad conscience."<sup>509</sup>

When Vilar died unexpectedly in 1971, Puaux agreed to take over long enough to establish the Maison Jean Vilar archive in his predecessor's honor, and along with the appearance of the fringe "Off" festival alongside the traditional "On" program in 1969, musical theater made its first appearance as part of Puaux's effort to continue Vilar's legacy by "restor[ing] to theater the full potential of its forms of expression, including music, which for a long time was lacking."<sup>510</sup> It was with this context in mind that Michel Guy and Robert Wilson approached Puaux about staging *Einstein on the Beach's* world premiere, and along with his wife Melly, he was engaged by the idea: "It was in seeing him, when he spoke with us, sketching each sequence, that Melly Tozoul conceived the idea of the program as a comic book," Puaux recalled. "Another key decision for both Bob Wilson and for us, was made: he was given the Théâtre Municipal for a month to rehearse. . . . With such performances," he felt, "we were far from Parisian

---

<sup>508</sup> Adler and Veinstein, *Avignon: 40 ans de festival*, 9. The original French phrase is: "un parfum évané de 'révolution nationale.'"

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 14.

<sup>510</sup> Puaux, "Paul Puaux," *Avignon: 40 ans de festival*, 134. The original French reads: "L'enjeu, estime-t-il, c'est de 'redonner en théâtre le potentiel total des formes d'expression, parmi lesquelles depuis longtemps la musique faisait défaut.'"

events," and the reputation of Festival d'Avignon, as distinct from *Einstein's* other festival commissioners, remained secure.<sup>511</sup>

Finally, two figures associated with the *Einstein* company played crucial behind-the-scenes roles courting and negotiating European contracts: Performing Artservices' representative Bénédicte Pesle, and the sixty-seven-year-old French agent Ninon Tallon Karlweiss. These women acted as intermediaries between Glass and Wilson and presenters like Guy and Puaux.<sup>512</sup> The latter woman, a successful impresario like Guy who worked as a freelancer rather than an institutional director or state official, was affectionately known by artists and presenters alike on both sides of the Atlantic as "Our Lady of the avant-garde" or "Our Lady of the festivals."<sup>513</sup> Indeed, as Karlweiss commented to Jack Gousseland of *Le Point* in 1975, "the literary theater is dead. . . . It is becoming what it was before the Renaissance: participation, a social, almost religious, experience. The Greeks didn't perform tragedies on festive occasions. Festivals are now recovering this notion of event: *la fête*," and she made it her mission to connect such experiences, of which *Einstein on the Beach* was a particularly monumental example, with those who had the space and money to present them to an otherwise inaccessible public.<sup>514</sup>

To that end, it was Karlweiss, a seasoned negotiator, who helped Wilson's reputation-making *Deafman Glance* reach the Festival de Nancy in 1971, and who secured the Biennale di la Venezia and the region of Lombardy as *Einstein's*

---

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 129–30. The original French reads: "C'est en le voyant, lorsqu'il en parlait avec nous, dessiner chaque séquence, que Melly Tozoul imagina de faire le programme en bande dessinée. Une autre décision essentielle, pour Bob Wilson comme pour nous, fut prise: le Théâtre municipal lui fut confié pendant un mois pour répéter. . . . Nous étions loin, avec de tels spectacles, des événements parisiens."

<sup>512</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 46. Of Bénédicte Pesle, Glass writes, "Benedicte had worked mainly with American dance companies in Paris such as those of Merce Cunningham, Twyla Tharp, and, later on, Lucinda Childs. She also had been a long-time supporter of Bob's work and was involved in his first appearances in Paris. Some years before she had been responsible for bringing Michel Guy to one of my rehearsals in Dickie Landry's studio in New York's Chinatown."

<sup>513</sup> Jack Gousseland, "Notre-Dame de l'Avant-Garde," *Le Point*, no. 160, October 13, 1975, Series I, Box 225, Folder: "Book #21 June 1975–October 1975," Robert Wilson Papers; "Ninon Tallon Karlweis Dies at 68; An International Theatrical Agent," *New York Times*, September 10, 1977, 24.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

primary non-French commissioner, folding the building of the opera's sets into the deal. According to Glass, Karlweiss also talked the opera's Belgian, Dutch, German, and Serbian programmers into investing in the work and negotiating the terms on which the opera would come to their venues.<sup>515</sup> While she did not have direct access to governmental grants and institutional or festival resources, her work as an impresario was thus every bit as vital as Guy's to constructing the European tour.<sup>516</sup> The critic Jack Gousseland explained her value to both administrators and artists: "Ninon Tallon is much more than the empress of theatrical import-export. For festival organizers, she is a bit of a secret agent, a pilot fish who unearths future geniuses. For artists, Ninon-Providence is the bringer of contracts."<sup>517</sup> The impact of her work, Gousseland continued, went well beyond individual shows:

The operation [of the international art market] relies entirely on personal relationships: the network of circulation and of production of this 'avant-garde' will put tomorrow's (Western) theater history in the hands of just fifteen people: . . . They alone can open the gates of the Valhalla of the obscure and make an unknown, poor troupe a glorious, almost as poor troupe.<sup>518</sup>

---

<sup>515</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 41; Glass, *Words Without Music*, 301.

<sup>516</sup> The impresario role Karlweiss filled continued to be vital to *Einstein's* international commissioning history. Jedediah Wheeler, while still working for Performing Artservices, Inc., took over that position in 1992, and having worked with Wheeler on the 1992 production, Linda Brumbach and her small production company Pomegranate Arts took up the mantle leading up to the 2012 tour.

<sup>517</sup> Jack Gousseland, "Notre-Dame de l'Avant-Garde," *Le Point*, no. 160, October 13, 1975, Series I, Box 225, Folder: "Book #21 June 1975–October 1975," Robert Wilson Papers. For Wilson, in particular, Gousseland claimed tongue-in-cheek, "she is manager, nanny, bodyguard, and the inspiration for his next show"; that is, *Einstein on the Beach*. The original French reads: "Ninon Tallon, c'est bien plus que l'impératrice de l'import-export théâtral. Pour les organisateurs de festivals, elle est un peu un agent secret, un poisson-pilote qui dénêche les génies à venir. Pour les artistes, Ninon-Providence devient celle par qui les contrats arrivent. . . . Pour Bob Wilson, qu'elle a découvert aux Etats-Unis huit mois avant sa révélation à Nancy, elle est à la fois manager, nounou, garde du corps, et inspiratrice de son prochain spectacle . . ."

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.* The fifteen people to whom Gousseland refers include Karlweiss, the festival artistic directors Thomas Erdos (Baalbek), Mira and Jovan Cirilov Trailovic (Belgrade), Dr. Eckardt (Berlin), Peter Diamand (Edimboug), Alain Crombecque (Paris), Farrok Gaffary (Shiraz), Luca Ronconi (Venice), Amsterdam's Mickery Theater manager Ritsaert Tenkate, US International Theatre Center official Maurice Mac Leland, the Paris-based Yugoslavian impresario Maria Rankov, and "five or six missi dominici of the Nancy Festival."

Needless to say, Gousseland considered Karlweiss one of these fifteen people, and his humorous reference to her knack for facilitating artists' acquisition of symbolic and cultural, rather than economic, capital is a point on which Glass has elaborated in more detail in his recent memoir.

Karlweiss, Glass indicates, was intimately familiar with the artistic politics governing commercial versus non-commercial art, and coming to *Einstein* at the end of her career—unlike many avant-garde art administrators, who tended to be around the same age as the artists they represented—she had a great deal of firsthand experience with reputation-building. She knew, as Pierre Bourdieu would later articulate, that, “For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation consists in making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate . . . and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation.”<sup>519</sup> Aware that economic capital was unlikely to be forthcoming at the outset of her young clients' careers, but believing in the work, she operated under the (correct) assumption that the intangible capital that Glass and Wilson would earn by presenting *Einstein* in major opera houses would ultimately outweigh the inevitable loss at which such institutions customarily operate.<sup>520</sup>

Recalling the moment when he and Wilson, supposedly oblivious to this cruel institutional reality, discovered that Karlweiss had allowed them to accrue tens of thousands of dollars of debt over the course of the 1976 tour, the composer paraphrased her response to their indignation: “You were both really unknown, and I knew that *Einstein* had to be seen. So I had no choice. I booked every performance below costs and you took a loss every night. . . . I knew you would be in debt at the end, but I also knew that it would make your careers.”<sup>521</sup> While the veracity of Glass's memory is neither absolute nor easily verifiable, as

---

<sup>519</sup> Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 75.

<sup>520</sup> “Ninon Tallon Karlweis Dies at 68; An International Theatrical Agent,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1977, 24.

<sup>521</sup> Glass, *Words Without Music*, 301.

Karlweiss unfortunately died less than a year after the 1976 tour ended, the agent's hand in getting *Einstein* into Europe's most prestigious opera venues is indisputable. Furthermore, as Glass's and Wilson's prolific operatic careers following *Einstein* have borne out, her aesthetic instincts and hard-won knowledge of the cultural field, in which she worked were first-rate. As Bourdieu perceptively commented, "However varied the structure of the relations among agents of preservation and consecration may be, the length of 'the process of canonization,' culminating in consecration, appears to vary in proportion to the degree that their authority is widely recognized and can be durably imposed" by critics, academies, and the education system.<sup>522</sup> That is to say, the authority that members of a particular art world (what Bourdieu terms "the social conditions underlying the production of the work") bring to bear on the reputation of an artist or a work comes not just with time.<sup>523</sup> It also requires a steady effort on the part of art world activists like Karlweiss to distill less tangible forms of capital into money; by investing in *Einstein on the Beach*, Karlweiss, like Guy, was playing the long game. With the American Bicentennial to bolster their efforts to get American art onto European stages in 1976, the opera thus benefitted from a fortuitous alignment of successful artistic collaboration, influential patrons and impresarios who believed in *Einstein's* value and appeal, and governments sensitive to opportunities for cultural diplomacy with the United States.

#### **6.4 Cultural Diplomacy and the American Bicentennial**

European presenters' interest in *Einstein on the Beach* stemmed in part from a desire to serve sophisticated urban audiences and to train them to appreciate art which critics and impresarios deemed worth supporting. Indeed, with four of Europe's major international arts festivals—the Festival d'Avignon, the Festival d'automne, the Biennale di la Venezia, and the Belgrade International Theater Festival—taking leadership roles as commissioners in advance of the opera's premiere, progressive venues like Belgium's Ópera Royale de la Monnaie were easier to recruit as presenters. A critical mass of funding was already guaranteed,

---

<sup>522</sup> Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993), 123.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.



and inclusion in *Einstein's* tour would help such institutions to cultivate domestic reputations on behalf of their cities and nations as participants in a network of trendsetting international cultural events.

Guy's early commitment to the project and involvement in bringing Paul Puaux into the fold, however, was calculated not only to support two artists whose work he admired and to sculpt the taste of French audiences to match his own. His investment also lent the financial weight of the French cultural apparatus to a major American avant-garde work during the United States Bicentennial year. This exercise of soft power constituted one among many acts of cultural diplomacy that the French government in particular undertook during 1976 to celebrate (and remind the American people of) France's historical sympathies with the United States culturally and politically. While American federal, state, and local governments sponsored a wide variety of activities to commemorate a shared national past and reflect on American national identity in the present, then, funding *Einstein* along with a number of smaller downtown works enabled European presenters to participate in defining what it meant to be American in the late twentieth century, letting their money communicate to their overseas counterparts in government agencies and institutions what kind of American art they felt was important.

#### **6.4.1 The Bicentennial as Funding Rationale**

In a September 1975 letter to Glass's and Wilson's European agent Ninon Karlweiss, the Festival d'automne administrative director Paul Ruaud summarized the festival's financial and performance commitment to the opera. Before closing the letter, however, Ruaud added one more request: "In addition, we would be very happy if this show could be integrated into events that celebrate the bicentennial of the United States."<sup>524</sup> The fact that the opera coincided with the American Bicentennial was a recurring theme in correspondence between *Einstein on the Beach's* administrators and potential and

---

<sup>524</sup> Letter, Paul Ruaud to Ninon Tallon Karlweiss, September 30, 1975, Series I, Box 114, Folder: "Einstein – Administrative – Misc.," Robert Wilson Papers. The original French reads: "De plus, nous serions très heureux que ce spectacle puisse être intégré aux manifestations qui célébreront le bi-centenaire [sic] des Etats-Unis."

committed presenters.<sup>525</sup> Indeed, one of Performing Artservices' early press kits advertising the project—which at that time was still in development—to prospective presenters claimed that *Einstein* would be “a presentation in honor of the American Bicentennial of the French Government, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris; of the Government of Iran; The Edinburg [sic] Festival, and the National Opera of The Netherlands.”<sup>526</sup> By the end of March 1976, when the *Einstein* company musicians presented the Knee Plays at the Museum of Modern Art, the BHF diplomatically included European festivals' investment in *Einstein* “in honor of the American Bicentennial” in the concert program.<sup>527</sup> This inclusion communicated to spectators, many of whom would have been Glass's and Wilson's colleagues, that a downtown opera had been embraced by European institutions (if not yet American venues) as a worthy contribution to the cultural landscape that the Bicentennial celebration was mapping.

Though the *Einstein* programs at the Festival d'Avignon and the Festival d'automne curiously omitted explicit reference to this significant act of cultural diplomacy, mention of the Bicentennial in the press suggests that presenters' promotion of the opera likely included the association as an added incentive to buy tickets. In an article on the 1976 Festival d'Avignon program, for instance, one *Le Soir* reviewer told Belgian readers, “The most commented-on show is clearly ‘Einstein on the beach,’” and, “Brussels discovered this spectacle in the great hall of T.R.M. [Le Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie] on September 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>525</sup> See, for example, Series I, Box 115, Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>526</sup> Performing Artservices, Inc., *Einstein on the Beach* press kit, Series I, Box 122, Folder: “EOB – ARTSERVICE – PRESS”; Series I, Box 115, Folder: “EOB – 1976 Iran” and “Iran – EOB Budget 1976 Tour,” Robert Wilson Papers. See also Glass and Childs, interview by Mark Swed, “Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs Discuss *Einstein on the Beach*.” The anticipated Shiraz Festival engagement fell through owing to a combination of financial limitations and social pressure from downtown artists to boycott the festival as a statement against political suppression of artists in Iran. The Edinburgh Festival likewise fell through, for reasons that are not evidenced in BHF records. In an interview shortly before the third revival tour, Glass told *LA Times* music critic Mark Swed that the National Theater in London was likewise interested in *Einstein*, but because they were already mounting a Martha Graham retrospective and an American Indian arts event, they could not justify spending \$75,000 on another American work in 1976.

<sup>527</sup> Museum of Modern Art Program, Knee Plays from *Einstein on the Beach*, March 31, 1976, Series I, Box 124, Folder: “EOB – Artservice – Press; EOB MOMA Knee Plays Program 3/31/76,” Robert Wilson Papers.

at eight o'clock, under the sign of the U.S. bicentennial."<sup>528</sup> The United States, for its part, did not link state and federal funding of projects like *Einstein* with the congressional allocation of money to the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission (ARBC), later renamed the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration (ARBA). The reasons for this were: first, the ARBC/ARBA was a temporary governmental body whose support lasted only from 1972 to 1976, and second, the Commission was created to fund *all* civic activities associated with the Bicentennial, which included the arts, but also projects ranging from historical building restorations and the creation of new parks to time capsules and traveling exhibits. While the ARBC/ARBA did not explicitly fund *Einstein*, however, it did ensure that the opera and the European countries that supported such American artworks received recognition for their cultural diplomacy.

#### 6.4.2 Une Alliance Historique

The U.S. Congress supported the ARBC/ARBA's early efforts to provide funding to the states in preparation for 1976. In its final report on the activities associated with the Bicentennial, on the other hand, the Administration readily admitted that "[t]here were few tangible benefits from ARBC/ARBA official recognition—a certificate of recognition, a presentation ceremony, a Bicentennial flag and permission to display that flag and use the Bicentennial symbol." For those activities that were not overseen by individual state offices, "There was no commitment of financial assistance. Relatively little was offered in return for what was freely given. This did not diminish the generous outpouring of spirit everywhere."<sup>529</sup> *Einstein and the Beach* secured a certificate of official recognition

---

<sup>528</sup> "Avignon '76: la cohue, le mistral, Einstein et deux fois William Shakespeare," *Le Soir*, August 17, 1976), Series I, Box 122, Folder: "1976 Einstein," Robert Wilson Papers. The original French reads: "Le spectacle le plus commenté est de toute évidence 'Einstein on the beach,' un long opéra (cinq heures) de Philip Glass et dirigé par Bob Wilson. . . . Ce spectacle, Bruxelles le découvrira dans la grande salle du T.R.M. les 28 et 29 septembre a 20 heures, place sous le signe du bicentenaire des États-Unis."

<sup>529</sup> American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: a final report to the people* (prepared and submitted to the Congress of the United States), vol. 1 (Washington: The Administration: for sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1977), 82, 88. With regard to federal funding, the report states, "In 1972, \$45,000 was appropriated for each state and \$30,000 for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the territories and the District of Columbia. That same amount was appropriated in 1973, except that the District of Columbia was given \$45,000. In 1974,

(Figure 6.2), but while its artists' collaborative ethos might be described as a "generous outpouring of spirit," it was instead the "intangible benefits" of American governmental recognition, rather than ARBC/ARBA funding, that was of the most use to the *Einstein* company and its presenters.



Figure 6.2 American Revolution Bicentennial 1776–1976 Certificate of Official Recognition.

Series I, Box 121, Folder: "EOB Press Pkg., May 1976," Robert Wilson Papers 1969–1995, Rare Book & Manuscript Collection, Columbia University in the City of New York. Reproduced with permission.

Considering the extraordinary cost of moving the opera and its company from city to city, and fortified by American funding from the NEA, NYSCA, five

---

1975 and 1976 Congress appropriated \$25,000 per entity for use toward the administrative costs of the official Bicentennial organizations that helped state and community programs operate. . . . [I]t is impressive to note that about \$25 million in state funds had been committed by mid-1976. . . . The cities surveyed were spending \$141.5 million on 546 Bicentennial projects, of which 69 percent came from local governments and private contributors."

corporate foundations, and a handful of private contributors, the pittance that ARBC/ARBA could offer the company would not have made a significant difference in its ability to tour either at home or abroad. Official state recognition of the opera's participation in the Bicentennial, however, was important to the Metropolitan Opera, which could and did use that recognition as a promotional tool to attract regular subscribers who were not keeping tabs on the downtown scene and its European festival circuit.<sup>530</sup> Similarly, ARBC/ARBA recognition mattered to European countries. While enhancing individual festivals' and institutions' reputations as cosmopolitan tastemakers and presenting patrons with chic, new theater fare was of benefit to cities and nations, a price tag in the tens of thousands of dollars was less off-putting to governments if it also bought a diplomatic gesture toward a powerful ally. ARBA tactfully acknowledged such gestures by over one hundred countries in a section entitled "Foreign Countries Take Part": "Official activities, coupled with countless efforts by individuals and private organizations in the United States and abroad," the report claims, "tell a Bicentennial story of international efforts as diverse as that of America's grassroots celebration itself."<sup>531</sup> The majority of these international efforts originated in France, so much so that the ARBA report devotes an entire subsection to the country's involvement, labeling it "Une Alliance Historique." Indeed, as Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet, French Ambassador to the United States, quipped for the report:

It's not hard to understand why we French have a special interest in this celebration since it marks not only the two hundred years of independence of the United States but also the two hundred years of friendship between France and America. There's never been a time when the United States has not been our friend and ally. At no time have our two countries been at war with each other. What is more, France played a

---

<sup>530</sup> Metropolitan Opera House *Einstein on the Beach* announcement, 1976, Series I, Box 117, Folder: "R. Wilson Papers: Einstein O.B. MET Announcement," Robert Wilson Papers. In an announcement the Metropolitan Opera mailed to its subscribers encouraging them to purchase tickets to the first (and at the time, sole) performance of *Einstein on the Beach* at the Met on November 21<sup>st</sup>, the Met boasted, "The Opera has received wide critical acclaim on the Continent, the official recognition of The American Revolution Bicentennial Administration and The Grand Prize of the Belgrade International Theater Festival."

<sup>531</sup> American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: a final report to the people*, 214.

part in the War of Independence and twice in this century Americans gave their lives for our liberation; this is something that the French people will never forget.<sup>532</sup>

French officials took part in commemorations in eleven U.S. cities, and the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and his wife made a weeklong state visit to the United States in May of 1976 to honor the Bicentennial. France further sent "an array of cultural and art exhibits and performing groups, to the delight of American audiences," and made an official Bicentennial gift of a sound and light spectacle called *The Father of Liberty*, which dramatized the meeting of George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette.<sup>533</sup>

In the context of this drawn-out diplomatic exchange between the U.S. and France, and the U.S. and Europe more generally, *Einstein on the Beach's* impressive 1976 European tour and invitation to the Met appear as more than just the product of a compelling work and expert administration. It can also be understood as an unconventional artistic participant in a nation-building event that both recognized *Einstein* (and the downtown scene by proxy) as a facet of America's late twentieth-century cultural identity, and that attracted the participation of European governments whose cultural officials (like Michel Guy) viewed such new works as an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak.<sup>534</sup> That is, they could support the avant-garde American art they and their patrons admired while simultaneously engaging in constructive cultural politics that might draw the art education and distribution networks of the U.S. and Europe closer together. In sum, then, the American government may not have

---

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 222–23.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 171. Adopting a serious tone, the ARBA report noted, "Bicentennial planners were faced with the task of designing a national observance for a nation in which natural resources were no longer deemed infinite and industrial expansion was no longer viewed as an unmixed blessing. The technology which had brought unprecedented material prosperity had also contributed heavily to the destruction of the environment and unleashed weapons capable of devastation previously unimaginable. The nation, and indeed the whole earth, had grown smaller through explosive transportation and communications advances." Given ARBA's acknowledgement that the rise of consumerism, the creation of nuclear weapons, and environmental concerns, among other issues, also formed a part of the Bicentennial discourse, it is possible that the Administration conferred official recognition on *Einstein* because it evokes many of these anxieties with its poetic references to science, popular culture, and law.

used the Bicentennial as a vehicle through which to fund its own avant-garde, but the conferral of a certificate on its most visible product that year suggests that U.S. officials may have been aware of the cultural politics intrinsic to Europe's support, and in any case, would have had no qualms about formally acknowledging a work that had already achieved critical consecration overseas.

### **6.5 Circulating Art and Prestige**

*Einstein on the Beach's* first production was heavily indebted to European impresarios' interest in New York's downtown scene, combined with the opportunity it afforded for cultural diplomacy on the occasion of the American Bicentennial. The opera's American premiere, too, was dependent on this support. As the WBAI New York radio show host Charles Ruas commented to Wilson in his interview with the director and composer in November 1976, "[T]hat's . . . been one of the clearest thrusts in your career: that you want to take your work to new audiences all the time, you know? So that, if I can use categories, you're one of the first 'downtown people' to take a production to Broadway."<sup>535</sup> Indeed, Wilson had first sought to bring his visually lush, monumental theater to uptown audiences in 1975 when he rented out the ANTA Theater on Broadway to present *A Letter for Queen Victoria*. The disappointing critical and financial impact of that approach eloquently demonstrated that moving between art worlds involves much more than just shifting from one type of performance venue to another. Any entrepreneurial artist with the money and the ambition could rent a Broadway theater, but what that rent could *not* buy was access to the cooperative social and professional networks that made the conventional art world of New York tick: the administrative and technical staff of established institutions, the state, corporate, and private patrons, and the critical apparatus that thrive in a symbiotic relationship rooted in the regular exchange of cultural, symbolic, and economic capital.

What European presenters offered Wilson and Glass, then, was both a series of institutions firmly integrated in the European cosmopolitan art world of new music, dance, and theater, and an alternate point of entry into New York's

---

<sup>535</sup> Glass and Wilson, interview by Charles Ruas, "Robert Wilson and Philip Glass—*Einstein on the Beach*."

conventional performing arts system. By taking the long way around, so to speak, the director, composer, and their collaborators thus traded modish American art for European critical prestige, enhancing the likelihood that their opera would circulate back to the U.S. and directly into the conventional opera world. This art world included a network of institutions like the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Pasadena Civic Center, and Philadelphia's Shubert Theater, each of which considered presenting *Einstein*, as well as the venue that ultimately offered its name and its human and (limited) financial resources, the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>536</sup> In bringing this chapter to a close, I consider this homecoming narrative in order to highlight, on one hand, how inextricably the cooperative links between the American and European performing arts worlds of the 1970s were bound up with one another. On the other hand, the behind-the-scenes activity that set in motion *Einstein's* Met premiere illustrates that artists' activity and aesthetic appeal go only part of the way toward explaining the success or failure of an artwork.

### 6.5.1 From the Festival d'Avignon to the Metropolitan Opera

As early as June 19, 1976, Robert Wilson contacted the Brooklyn Academy of Music executive director Harvey Lichtenstein to ask if the Academy would be interested in giving *Einstein* its U.S. premiere. Lichtenstein, like Guy, was an advocate of downtown music, theater, and dance, and had presented Wilson's *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* in 1973, the performance that Glass recalls in his first memoir as the spark that ignited his interest in collaborating with the director.<sup>537</sup> Scheduling *Einstein* at the Academy, however, proved problematic, as Wilson and Glass were at that time negotiating a short American tour—one that, to Wilson's bitter disappointment, never materialized—in January and February of 1977, leaving open only the months of November and December. Although this timeframe was further restricted to a single week by the Academy's busy schedule, Lichtenstein and Kathleen Norris persisted in trying to squeeze a handful of performances between November 26<sup>th</sup> and December 2<sup>nd</sup>. By the end

---

<sup>536</sup> Series I, Box 122, Folder: "1976 EINSTEIN" and Series I, Box 115, Folder: "EOB – West Coast"; Series 1, Box 114, Folder: "EOB Publicity – Press (Merlin) 1976," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>537</sup> Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, 27–8.



of September, the Byrd Hoffman Foundation had proactively secured November 21<sup>st</sup> at the Metropolitan Opera House, and owing to substantial cuts by NYSCA and a delay in reimbursement that threatened the Academy's ability to meet its own payroll, the institution all but rescinded its invitation, leaving the Met as *Einstein's* sole American presenter.<sup>538</sup>

The Met offered Glass and Wilson the prestige of having debuted at America's most famous opera house, plus one of the fastest and most capable technical crews in the world, and one whose chiefs were willing to deal with *Einstein's* use of pieces that crossed union lines between carpentry, electric, and sound. In return for the Met's stage and technical support, Glass and Wilson paid for the venue and stage crew labor, and provided the institution with a readymade show for which the Met was not obliged to risk a full commission. In terms of dipping its proverbial toes in avant-garde waters, then, *Einstein* was as safe a bet as the Met was likely to encounter. Indeed, the organization was later only too happy to exploit the opera's celebrity in its funding campaigns, emphasizing its willingness to present bold but culturally salient new theater.<sup>539</sup> Commission or no, however, the benefit was mutual, for in promoting *Einstein* as a European-approved collaboration between "two major contemporary artists," the Met simultaneously helped to consecrate it as the first downtown theater production considered worthy of America's preeminent opera house. Indeed, *Einstein's* two sold-out performances and the flurry of excitement they generated throughout New York not only set Glass on a course that would earn him a Met commission sixteen years later, and that set the precedent for further Lincoln Center investments in avant-garde performance like the Serious Fun Festival (1987–1991).

---

<sup>538</sup> Letters, Robert Wilson to Harvey Lichtenstein, June 19, 1976; Judith E. Daykin to Kathleen Norris, August 23, 1976; Kathleen Norris to Harvey Lichtenstein, September 7, 1976; Judith E. Daykin to Kathleen Norris and Robert Wilson, September 27, 1976; and Judith E. Daykin to Kathleen Norris, September 30, 1976, Series 1, Box 117, "Folder: Einstein – BAM 1976," Robert Wilson Papers.

<sup>539</sup> See, for example, *The Metropolitan Opera Centennial Fund*, 12, Series I, Box 125, Robert Wilson Papers. *Einstein* is discussed under the heading "The Metropolitan Opera as impresario," and listed along with Tom Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor*, as an instance of the Met having "pioneered in presenting unique theatrical productions."

Because the Metropolitan Opera was the most conservative and visible of *Einstein's* 1976 tour stops, as well as the *only* place the fully staged opera was shown in New York, it generated significant hype among the city's uptown and downtown literati, and as discussed in chapter 2 of this study, played a major role in establishing *Einstein's* public and academic reputation as an "important" work. Providing behind-the-scenes perspectives on this splashy return to New York, Ross Wetzsteon and Wallace Shawn detailed in *Village Voice* and *New Yorker* articles following the two Met performances how a handful of figures in the New York administrative art world, while not explicitly involved with *Einstein*, acted as vital intermediaries between the artists and the Met. Though these figures were neither agents nor festival organizers, they rode the critical momentum the opera had generated in Avignon in late July to close the circle of artistic and diplomatic exchange between the U.S. and Europe, transforming the opera from the European festival event of the season to *the* avant-garde event of the year, or what the Met special events director Jane Herman described on the day of the premiere as "a historic moment for the Met."<sup>540</sup> In his 1987 and 2015 memoirs, Glass recalled his and Wilson's experience getting *Einstein* into the Met on a night the theater was dark as a coup precipitated by the choreographer Jerome Robbins. Robbins, having seen performances at the Video Exchange Theater in New York and the Festival d'automne, supposedly urged Met special events director Jane Herman and freelance stage manager Gilbert Hemsley to travel to Hamburg to see it for themselves. "Up to that point," Glass reminisced, "the only concert hall north of Fourteenth Street I had played in was Town Hall in 1974. Mostly I had been downtown, in galleries and lofts, so the idea that we would go to the Met seemed a fantasy. . . . What was surprising to Bob and me was that there was no indication there had been such a huge swell of enthusiasm for either his work or mine. Neither of us had a big promotional team. There was no wind pushing the sails, as far as we knew."<sup>541</sup>

---

<sup>540</sup> Ross Wetzsteon, "There's No Business Like the Avant-Garde Business," *Village Voice*, December 6, 1976, 23–6, Series I, Box 123, Folder: "EOB Voice 12/6/76," Robert Wilson Papers; Wallace Shawn, "*Einstein* at the Met," *New Yorker*, December 6, 1976, 41–3.

<sup>541</sup> Glass, *Words Without Music*, 298, 300.

On the contrary, as Wetzsteon and Shawn reported, there was a great deal of wind pushing the sails, initially in the person of Jean Rigg, Merce Cunningham's erstwhile manager and an enthusiastic *Einstein* proponent. According to Wetzsteon, by the time Glass recalls Robbins calling the Met, Jean Rigg had beaten him to it by several months. She had then proceeded to send the BHF managing director Kathleen Norris—who was in the U.S. in August, glowing French reviews in hand, looking to secure a Manhattan venue—to speak to Jane Herman. Herman, upon learning the extraordinary technical demands of the work, in turn approached Met executive director Anthony Bliss about showing *Einstein* at the Met. Bliss had taken over directorship of the struggling opera company two years earlier, and in addition to implementing a series of administrative and fundraising reforms to increase the company's financial security and its impact outside New York, he also had the Met take over direct rental of the house during its offseason and during off nights.<sup>542</sup> As a result, when Herman asked Bliss about staging *Einstein*, the director had both the means and the incentive to take the suggestion seriously. Two phone calls later—to Met director of production John Dexter, who was in a Europe engulfed by *Einstein* hype, and conductor James Levine, who vouched for Glass's seriousness as a composer—the avant-garde opera was added to the Met's November schedule without anyone at the institution having seen it.<sup>543</sup>

In other words, the performances at the Met that helped secure *Einstein's* legendary status in its home city occurred through a well-oiled administrative network that extended across the porous boundaries between the downtown avant-garde and uptown institutional art worlds. Behind-the-scenes artistic networking and string-pulling over the better part of a year by a small cohort of unsung women—Jean Rigg, Jane Herman, Kathleen Norris, and stage manager

---

<sup>542</sup> John Rockwell, "Met Opera's Financial Outlook is Brightening," *New York Times*, September 18, 1976, 19.

<sup>543</sup> Ross Wetzsteon, "There's No Business Like the Avant-Garde Business," *Village Voice*, December 6, 1976, 23–6, Series I, Box 123, Folder: "EOB Voice 12/6/76," Robert Wilson Papers. In fact, according to Wetzsteon, Jane Herman's trip to see the opera in Hamburg with Gilbert Hemsley, a ringer brought in from the University of Wisconsin to troubleshoot the performances, was primarily to set Wilson's and Glass's minds at ease about their Met debut and to hammer out lingering concerns about time constraints.

Julia Gillett—brought *Einstein* to the Met’s attention and held it. Thanks to *Einstein*’s European champions—Michel Guy, Paul Puaux, Ninon Karlweiss, and Bénédicte Pesle—the opera returned to New York after its Avignon premiere crowned with the laurels of “gorgeous” French reviews, promising the Met the intangible yet alluring Continental prestige.<sup>544</sup> Though Norris administered *Einstein*’s operations rather than courting presenters, it was nonetheless she who, by dint of luck and a strong professional network, made the Metropolitan Opera performances possible. “Robert Glass and Phillip [sic] Wilson,” Met director of marketing Patrick Veitch jokingly wrote to Norris two weeks after *Einstein*’s final New York performance, “certainly owe you a big debt of thanks, for after all, you made their names household words—right along with Sacco and Vanzetti, Bonnie and Clyde and Smith and Wesson. . . . Best wishes for all future productions under the banner of ‘K. Norris presents . . .’”<sup>545</sup>

In summary, *Einstein on the Beach*’s two sold-out performances at the Metropolitan Opera in 1976 were significant not only for artistic reasons, but also because of what they reveal about the nature of the downtown scene and the importance non-creative art world actors play in “making” art. *Einstein*’s New York splash was the product of intensive offstage negotiation by administrators in Wilson’s foundation, interested institutions, and friends and colleagues like Jean Rigg and Jerome Robbins. Furthermore, it was the product of Michel Guy and the other European architects of the opera’s summer tour, including an Avignon premiere smoothed by generous French state funding, a full month of on-site rehearsal, and an audience that Jean Vilar and his successor Paul Puaux had cultivated over thirty years to take seriously and appreciate challenging theater like *Einstein*. In her reminiscence of the first tour, Marie Rice, an actor who performed in both the 1976 and 1984 productions, neatly captured the spirit of American and European exchange that *Einstein* exemplified:

It was going to be the art event of the year. And indeed it was. And the media coverage around that . . . I believe the title of the big article in the

---

<sup>544</sup> Wallace Shawn, “*Einstein* at the Met,” *New Yorker*, December 6, 1976, 41–3.

<sup>545</sup> Letter, Patrick L. Veitch to Kathleen Norris, December 13, 1976, Series I, Box 117, Folder: “EOB Met/General correspondence and business,” Robert Wilson Papers.

*Village Voice* was “The Making of a Legend.” And John [Rockwell] of *The New York Times* came with us to Avignon, stayed with us in Avignon, covered the work that we were doing there, covered the opening. And then there was tremendous attention. And, of course, when we came back and played the Met, we were all over the “Arts and Leisure” section of *The New York Times*, on the front page, in the middle of it, all sorts of things. . . . It was really considered to be the art event of the year. So it was exciting, very.<sup>546</sup>

From unstaged preview performances at the Museum of Modern Art and the Video Exchange Theater to the Théâtre Municipal, Teatro la Fenice, Théâtre des Nations, Opéra-Comique, Hamburger Schauspielhaus, Rotterdamse Schouwburg, and Theater Carré, and finally back home to the Metropolitan Opera House, *Einstein* followed the same round-trip transatlantic path that many of its fellow downtown artists, companies, and collectives regularly traversed. In 1976 alone, Steve Reich traveled with his ensemble and the new opus *Music for 18 Musicians*, Merce Cunningham staged his *Events*, Richard Foreman’s Ontological-Hysterical Theater played *Le Livre des Splendeurs*, and Robert Ashley presented his *Music With Roots in the Aether* on the European festival circuit. The following spring, the journal *Theatre Crafts* published an article urging young downtown performing artists to embrace European festivals, offering pointers on technical differences between American and European venues.<sup>547</sup> In this milieu, what set *Einstein on the Beach* apart was not the nature of the work, nor the modes of distribution that brought it to an international audience. Rather, it was the strength of its claim to the genre of opera and the power of European prestige that allowed it to cross the invisible boundary from a downtown “opera” like

---

<sup>546</sup> Marie Rice, interview by Mark Obenhaus, “Einstein on the Beach: Interview with Marie Rice,” 7, transcript, Hamm Archives; Philippa C. Wehle, “Travel Letters: Music in Avignon,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1976, Series 1, Box 123, Folder: “The New York Times, 5/23/76 To the Editor, Travel Letters,” Robert Wilson Papers. Rockwell was not the only New Yorker to seek to bring *Einstein on the Beach*’s Avignon premiere to the attention of its home audience. In a letter to the editor in *The New York Times*, a patron complained that an article on music festivals in Europe in May 1976 overlooked the Festival d’Avignon: “Granted that Avignon is not principally a music festival,” she admitted, “but this year it is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an unprecedented number of new works in theater, dance, art and music. The seven productions being premiered under the heading of ‘Musical Theater’ represent a common search for new ways to integrate music and theater beyond traditional opera. Robert Wilson, the American director, will be premiering his new ‘opera,’ ‘Einstein on the Beach’; other new works include ‘The Troubadours,’ with music by Antoine Duhamel.”

<sup>547</sup> MacKay, “Americans Abroad: Europe in Search of the Avant-garde,” 12–15, 40–5.

Meredith Monk's *Quarry* to an uptown opera sandwiched between canonic works by Richard Wagner (*Lohengrin* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) on November 21<sup>st</sup> and Giuseppe Verdi (*La Forza del Destino* and *Aida*) on November 28<sup>th</sup> at New York's premier opera house.

## 6.6 Playing American

Pierre Bourdieu, in a 1984 essay on the market of symbolic goods, provocatively but aptly claimed, "The semiologist, who claims to reveal the structure of a literary or artistic work through so-called strictly internal analysis, exposes him or herself to a theoretical error by disregarding the social conditions underlying the production of the work and those determining its functioning."<sup>548</sup> Indeed, as I have endeavored to show over the course of this chapter, *Einstein on the Beach*'s historical relevance is rooted in a vibrant international cooperative network whose social interactions revolved around principles of artistic, economic, cultural, and political exchange. Like many of their downtown avant-garde peers, Glass, Wilson, and their collaborators produced art that reflected a specific social formation in lower Manhattan in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Without a cultural state funding apparatus like France's Ministère de la Culture, American institutions had access to less (and less reliable) federal funding, as the Brooklyn Academy of Music's inability to fund *Einstein on the Beach* in 1976 eloquently attests. Such organizations thus sought to minimize their financial risk by programming works with which their audiences were already familiar, or that were conventional enough to raise no eyebrows. New York's avant-garde artists thus lacked the institutional support necessary to reach a broad U.S. public outside lower Manhattan.

Instead, these artists collectively relied upon festivals and progressive venues in Europe to build their reputations and, as Glass and fellow minimalist composer Steve Reich explained in this chapter's epigraph, to augment their income. "Time was when all the art and culture came from the east and went to the west," Patricia McKay wrote in *Theatre Crafts* in 1977. "A European actor or company would tour America—but Americans seldom, if ever, reversed the trend. In

---

<sup>548</sup> Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 140.

recent decades all that has changed.”<sup>549</sup> McKay went on to claim that respected dance companies led by Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, and Alvin Ailey toured frequently and “in some cases, appear[ed] abroad more often than on Broadway,” and that both dance and experimental theater troupes had become regulars at several international festivals. In 1976 alone, an experimental theater festival in Florence invited the La MaMa Company, the Ridiculous Theatre Company, Mabou Mines, and Meredith Monk, and the Berlin Festwochen constructed its program around “SoHo, Downtown Manhattan.”<sup>550</sup> In this context, *Einstein on the Beach* was the Metropolitan Opera-bound exception that proved the rule of European support for New York’s avant-garde. The behind-the-scenes network peopled by impresarios and administrative and technical support groups like Michel Guy, Ninon Tallon Karlweiss, Performing Artservices, Inc., and TAG thus played a crucial role in building the symbolic capital not just of *Einstein*, but also of the downtown scene generally.

*Einstein on the Beach*’s dimensions and technical requirements necessitated the proscenium theaters of institutions built for conventional opera, and Guy and Karlweiss ensured that the downtown work secured such venues and the performance fees needed to get it to each city. Furthermore, with Paul Puaux involved, the Festival d’Avignon attracted moderate and left-leaning French critics sympathetic to Wilson’s work since his lionization by Surrealist Louis Aragon in 1971. As we saw in the first chapter of this study, their reception of *Einstein* as a major music theater work of Wagnerian stature initiated the European consecration of the opera, a trend that extended to New York, both uptown and downtown. The administrative narrative surrounding *Einstein*’s invitation to the Metropolitan Opera confirms that this prestige served both Glass and Wilson and their European backers well. On one hand, the festivals that commissioned the opera enhanced their reputations as cosmopolitan cultural centers while engaging in cultural diplomacy during a historically

---

<sup>549</sup> MacKay, “Americans Abroad: Europe in Search of the Avant-Garde,” 13.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

important year for the U.S.<sup>551</sup> On the other hand, the director and composer secured the symbolic capital necessary to circumvent the aesthetic and economic barriers between uptown and downtown art worlds by passing their opera through the crucible of the European press. When the Brooklyn Academy of Music director Harvey Lichtenstein remounted *Einstein on the Beach* in 1984, he reflected, “Wilson was more appreciated in Europe than he was in this country in the ’70s. The kind of work he does is artists’ theater, and the artists’ theater is basically more European,” where institutions “are heavily subsidized by the state.” By contrast, “the American opera houses and theaters simply do not have the ability to spend that kind of money on the productions. Also there wasn’t the audience for it and I think most opera houses and theaters didn’t have the slightest idea what Wilson was up to.”<sup>552</sup>

Because Wilson was so much better known in Europe than in the U.S., Lichtenstein felt that “it was important to bring *Einstein* back so as to see that source of this kind of theatrical approach to opera, as well as to bring Wilson back to the United States.”<sup>553</sup> In spite of Lichtenstein’s commitment to enhancing the director’s (and his downtown colleagues’) reputations in his own country, a commitment he demonstrated by again commissioning the opera during both its 1992 and 2012–15 revivals, it was not until the latter international tour that

---

<sup>551</sup> The French cultural apparatus in particular has remained strongly invested in *Einstein on the Beach*’s long-term production and reception. The 2012 tour’s world premiere in Montpellier’s Maison de la Culture, for instance, took place amid a veritable *Einstein* festival: a photography exhibition, films and workshops attended and led by the *Einstein* artists, a concert of music by American minimalist composers, and roundtable discussions on the opera, science, and culture. The program, moreover, was an astonishing 126 pages long, including: quotes by Wilson, Glass, and Childs alongside photos of them from 1976 and 2012; Louis Aragon’s “Open Letter to André Breton”; an essay by the musicologist Jérémie Szpirglas entitled “Einstein on the Beach: Opéra mythique et mythe opératique”; an extract from a November 2011 interview by Margery Arent Safir with Glass and Wilson; the complete speeches by Knowles, Childs, and Johnson in French and English; a two-page summary of Albert Einstein’s major achievements; a world event timeline from the inauguration of the Festival d’Avignon in 1947 to the death of Maria Callas in 1977; an interview by the musicologist Charlotte Ginot-Slacik with Montpellier director Jean-Paul Montanari; and a reproduction of the 1976 Avignon program. See Folder: “Recueil Einstein on the B,” Maison Jean Vilar.

<sup>552</sup> Harvey Lichtenstein, interview by Mark Obenhaus, Obenhaus Films, Inc., transcript by Chrisann Verges, 5–6, Box: “1984 Einstein on the Beach Material (Moldy),” Hamm Archives. Edited by author.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



American institutions outside New York—the University of California Cal Performances and the Los Angeles Opera—presented *Einstein* for the first time. Meanwhile, European countries, with France in the lead, have continued to power the opera’s consecration as a landmark work, preserving the transatlantic circulation of art, artists, and capital between New York and Europe that sustained the downtown avant-garde at its height and enhanced its prestige at home.<sup>554</sup>

---

<sup>554</sup> Turk, *French Theatre Today*, xi–xii. Artistic exchange between New York and France continues unabated in the twenty-first century. As Edward Turk related, in 2005, “ACT FRENCH: A Season of New Theatre from France was a bold effort to enhance American contact with the contemporary French stage. It was the brainchild of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York and the Association française d’action artistique (AFAA, or French Association for Artistic Development), a division within France’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs that since its founding in 1922 has promoted the French arts worldwide. . . . ACT FRENCH came on the heels of two New York projects that AFAA and the Cultural Services had also spawned: French Moves, a showcase for contemporary dance, in 2001, and Sounds French, a platform for new music, in 2003. . . . “Between July and mid-December 2005 nearly thirty performance events took place in venues ranging from mainstream locales like Lincoln Center and the Brooklyn Academy of Music to such downtown sites as Performance Space 122, The Kitchen, and the Ohio Theatre. . . . In addition to these thirty shows, ACT FRENCH cosponsored frequent roundtables with French artists and their U.S. peers, readings by prominent French and American playwrights, and scholarly lectures and panels.”

## Chapter 7

### Playing On: *Einstein on the Beach* Now and in the Future

MARK SWED: [T]he *Einstein on the Beach* that is a collaboration between Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, without the two of you, can that be done?

PHILIP GLASS: How that will play itself out in productions when we're no longer around to cheer it on or to complain, I have no idea. . . . Traditionally the work of the composer would be the work of the opera. If anyone wanted to do any work of Verdi, they would take the score and make up everything else. Here we're talking about authorship that is based in a broader way. We're talking about authorship that really emerges from a collaborative process. That was not how opera was ever done. So then the question is, how does a work that is collaborative in nature, how does *that* become transferred? And that I can't say."

— Philip Glass to Mark Swed, Cal Performances, Zellerbach Hall, University of California, Berkeley, April 29, 2011.

#### 7.1 "Made not twice, but a hundred times"

In his essay "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," Pierre Bourdieu contends that discourse about art is not ancillary to the work, but rather "a stage in the production of the work, of its meaning and value."<sup>555</sup> Implicit in this argument is the conviction that underlies this entire study: that cultural expression is not autonomous, but rather is fundamentally social, cooperative, mutable, and perceptual. Art, that is, cannot exist *as art* without someone to perceive it as such, and typically a number of other people to argue the point. Bourdieu goes on:

The ideology of the inexhaustible work of art, or of "reading" as recreation masks—through the quasi-exposure which is often seen in matters of faith—the fact that the work is indeed made not twice, but a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it.<sup>556</sup>

---

<sup>555</sup> Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 110.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Over the course of the preceding chapters, I have traced the activities and motivations of some of the central players of the downtown avant-garde art world, from artists to attorneys and governmental agencies to critics, who “made” *Einstein on the Beach* during its formative years; that is, between its creative conception in 1974 and the establishment of the legal framework that set the groundwork for its future production and reproduction history in 1979. While remounts in 1984, 1992, and 2012 were crucial to the opera’s recognition as what the American music journalist and scholar K. Robert Schwarz called “a turning point in the history of American theater,” thanks to a number of interrelated artistic, economic, political, and cultural factors, the stage for this canonization was set long before the downtown opera famously sold out the Met.<sup>557</sup>

Within this framework, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that I am hardly an objective bystander to the opera’s history, for I too have gleaned “a material or symbolic profit” from my engagement with *Einstein*. As a musicologist, my activity unavoidably implicates me in the opera’s art world. Indeed, the conventionalized exchange of symbolic capital that induces archivists to make their institutions’ collections available to scholars in turn obliges me to honor that exchange by offering copies my work to the same archives whose evidence informed it. This acknowledgement is not meant to diminish the validity of such institutions, nor the scholarship that depends upon them, but rather recognizes the reality that no historian can escape the milieu, whether conceived as a field, art world, or network, that he or she studies. By doing no

---

<sup>557</sup> See Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 128. The opera’s cultural accreditation, particularly as a grand opera, is widespread and well documented; for example, Whittall, “Glass, Philip,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 427; Grout and Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 877–8. The opera’s proponents have also invested in its consecration by publishing books containing professional reproductions of archival scores, drawings, and typographical autograph texts by Wilson, Glass, de Groat, Childs, and Knowles. See, for instance, Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, with Andrew de Groat, *Einstein on the Beach: An Opera in Four Acts* (New York: EOS Enterprises, Inc., 1976); Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach* (Paris: Éditions Dilecta and New York: Dissident Industries, 2012). Performing arts institutions, especially in France, have likewise invested in the myth of Einstein as a groundbreaking opera because of the symbolic capital such association with the still trendy American avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s carries.

more than reading, deciphering, or knowing a work, we become active participants in the production of that work's meaning and value, and therefore the work itself as art.

In fact, it was my varied interactions with the opera over the span of a decade that impacted this study's topic and methodology. When I first encountered the opera as a college sophomore, it was in the form of a musical recording that, due to format and financial considerations in 1978, condensed nearly five hours of music to less than three.<sup>558</sup> As of 2016, two documentary films about the opera exist, but there are still no commercially available audiovisual recordings of a complete live performance.<sup>559</sup> As a result, my first encounter with the opera as a sound recording rather than a staged work was and continues to be typical of *Einstein's* public reception, and this limited accessibility is one reason why musicological studies of the work have generally concentrated on Glass's score. Seven years after my casual encounter with the music, however, my perspective on *Einstein* shifted radically when a newly assembled company under the leadership of Glass, Wilson, and Childs arrived in Ann Arbor in the midst of my graduate studies at the University of Michigan. Throughout January 2012, Glass, Wilson, Childs, and their performers prepared a third revival production and participated in local promotional and educational events under the auspices of the University Musical Society (one of seven commissioning organizations). This month-long residence afforded me opportunities to view Wilson direct, to don whiteface makeup and light walk—i.e., act as a body double for an actor while the director sets the lights—for the first Trial scene, to speak with the Philip Glass Ensemble member who would perform the contested Building solo in Act IV, scene 1A, and to attend two of the preview performances that concluded the rehearsal period. These experiences gave me enviable insight into the

---

<sup>558</sup> Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach*, with the Philip Glass Ensemble, conducted by Michael Riesman, recorded 1978, Tomato Records Tom 2901, 1979, Stereo LP.

<sup>559</sup> *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, directed by Mark Obenhaus (1987; Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, 2007), DVD; *The Earth Moves*, directed by John Walter (2015), DVD forthcoming; *Einstein on the Beach*, directed by Don Kent (2014; Paris, France: Telmondis, 2014), HD CAM, Digibeta 16/9, accessed February 15, 2016, [http://www.telmondis.fr/productions/opera/330\\_\\_Einstein-on-the-beach-2014.htm](http://www.telmondis.fr/productions/opera/330__Einstein-on-the-beach-2014.htm).

postmodern aesthetics of the opera and access to the intensive cooperative (and, at times, uncooperative) efforts that went into reviving it. More importantly, though, my encounters with the opera backstage and as an audience member revealed the problem inherent in speaking about *Einstein* as either music or theater (or, for that matter, dance).

When, in 1976, Philippe Gavi of *Libération* proclaimed, "'Einstein on the Beach' is a far more important event than the Olympic games or Giscard's last speech," by way of stressing "that something very important, very marvelous was taking place in the domain of cultural creation," his response was driven by the cumulative emotional and intellectual effect of its music, drama, and dance, as well as a great deal of behind-the-scenes labor on the part of its company and advocates.<sup>560</sup> Glass has alluded to this largely unseen and unheard labor force, but academic accounts of the opera have treated its actors and their contributions to the opera's reception only superficially. This scholarly lacuna invites a number of questions about the social construction of artistic value, questions that the critic Clive Barnes raised provocatively in a scathing review of the opera's first remount in 1984 (a production that generated a lively critical discussion about the durability of *Einstein's* celebrity). As the first chapter of this dissertation demonstrated, the opera's critical proponents played a crucial role in the process that led to the work's acceptance as an operatic landmark. Nevertheless, Barnes's cynical but thoughtful perspective on the consecration of the postwar avant-garde gave the clearest indication that *Einstein's* cultural relevance is not only more than the sum of its disciplinary parts, but that it is also inextricably bound

---

<sup>560</sup> Philippe Gavi, "Bob Wilson, Architecte de l'instant: Cinq heures de travail sur le temps, l'espace et les images, sur tout," *Libération* (August 3, 1976), 10, Box: "1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance," Folder: "EOB Publicity," Hamm Archives. The original French reads: "'Einstein on the beach' est un événement, plus important que les jeux olympiques out la dernière déclaration de Giscard. Nous avons voulu marquer le coup indiquer que quelque chose de très important, de très merveilleux était en train de se passer dans le domaine de la création culturelle."

up with the activities of an art world outside of which it cannot be fully understood historically or aesthetically.<sup>561</sup> Barnes wrote:

I recall years ago—more than two decades—when I was in London making my living largely as a music critic. Among my duties was to go along to various electronic excursions of the musical avant-garde, which seemed to be attended exclusively by a back-scratching community of avant-garde musicians and critics. The public was not excluded, you understand, it just failed to turn up. I found this largely sociological experiment interesting but tedious. Today the situation is slightly different. Some would doubtless claim that it has improved, because nowadays audiences do turn up. People attended *Einstein* in their thousands, and the work's antagonists must take this into account. Were they being blindfolded by fashion, and then told to jump, lemming-fashion, off the cliff of their own good taste? Did they really enjoy, or enjoy the thought that they were enjoying? Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The experience or, if you like, the experience of the experience?<sup>562</sup>

This rumination encouraged a scholarly approach to *Einstein* concerned less with its aesthetic value than with the *process* by which the opera accrued value. Who facilitated this marked shift from audiences composed primarily of a “back-scratching community” of avant-garde sympathizers to spectators numbering in the thousands? What motivated them to do so, and how did they manage it? If approached with an eye to the medial exchanges that constituted the work as a discourse, I found that *Einstein* could be used to probe the conventional activity of the downtown avant-garde social formation at its peak. It could also, I found, be used as a sort of litmus test to gauge that community's popular reception during the years in which SoHo transitioned from an artist colony to a gentrified neighborhood where only the most critically and financially successful of its artists could afford to continue living and working. In other words, while *Einstein* may not have changed conventional American performing arts

---

<sup>561</sup> Bourdieu articulates this perspective more pointedly: “The semiologist, who claims to reveal the structure of a literary or artistic work through so-called strictly internal analysis, exposes him or herself to a theoretical error by disregarding the social conditions underlying the production of the work and those determining its functioning.” Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 140.

<sup>562</sup> Clive Barnes, “‘Einstein’: the relativity of rubbish,” *The New York Post*, December 29, 1984, 11, 15, Box: “1984 Next Wave Festival: Einstein on the Beach, Desert Music by Performance,” Folder: “EOB Publicity,” Hamm Archives.

institutions' relationship to New York's avant-garde overnight, it offers a particularly well-documented instance of the kinds of downtown art whose increasing cultural accreditation would, at the time of *Einstein's* first revival, enable the *New York Times* music critic Stephen Holden to proclaim, "The Avant-Garde Is Big Box Office."<sup>563</sup>

## 7.2 Contributions of this Study

This dissertation employs a single work as a lens to explore the multifaceted ways in which people cooperate to produce art and to confer reputational value upon that art and its artists. Rather than make and defend claims about *Einstein's* artistic merit, I instead step away from the work itself to analyze the discourse that surrounds and threads its way through it. This discourse includes the opera's artistic manifestations (score, sound recording, sketches, etc.), archival documentation related to the opera and its four major productions, secondary documentation that provides a gloss on the primary documentation, and oral histories conducted with several performers and administrators, animating the opera's production and reception history. Bypassing the subjective task of proving or disproving *Einstein's* worth through aesthetic claims, I instead use this evidence to expose the social, discursive process by which it achieved canonical status among critics and scholars.

While this study is historical rather than sociological in method, Pierre Bourdieu's insights about the social negotiation of power and value in the cultural field and Howard Becker's plainspoken descriptions of the cooperative human networks (or worlds) through which art occurs present valuable ways of exploring the history of cultural expression without passing judgment on the object(s) of one's inquiry.<sup>564</sup> In focusing on social rather than aesthetic dimensions of art, their work on cultural production also provides a resource that can help us

---

<sup>563</sup> Stephen Holden, "The Avant-Garde Is Big Box Office," *New York Times*, December 16, 1984, 23, Box: "1984 Einstein on the Beach Material (Moldy)," Folder: "TOUR – EOB Press," Hamm Archives.

<sup>564</sup> See Becker's *Art Worlds* and Bourdieu's essays in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. See also Bourdieu's discussions of habitus, the dynamics of fields, and how the modes of appropriation of works of art are tied to questions of social and class status in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

to recover voices consigned to the historical margins by disciplinary conventions, and to push back against the idealized conception of art (and music in particular) as somehow resistant to the impact of its immediate social, institutional, and discursive framework. They do so, as I have, by emphasizing art's dependence on social and material cooperation, competition, negotiation, and exchange.

This study, then, offers case studies in various methods by which music and theater historians might approach canonical works like *Einstein on the Beach* with a focus on the process of consecration. My treatment of the term "opera" discursively, for instance, demonstrates how promotion, reception, and conventions associated with the framing of art conspire to shape the symbolic, aesthetic, cultural, and economic value ascribed to a particular work or performance. By investigating the negotiation of terms like "opera" around artworks that play on the fringes of such ontological categories, we can gain useful insight into the purposes such categories serve, and for whom, in any one time and place.

Similarly, the exploration of artistic influences offers more than just an interpretive textual strategy based on artist biography or psychology. When considered in light of an artist's immediate social, professional, and institutional context, such an examination can also reveal how artists deploy and promote aesthetic alliances strategically in order to amass reputational value. We have seen how Glass and Wilson, by emphasizing the impact on *Einstein* of a modernist avant-garde lineage extending back to Marcel Duchamp, succeeded in promoting the opera as representative of the art community in which they lived and worked. Further, by emphasizing the role of the spectator in "completing the work" and the undemanding nature of *Einstein's* non-narrative, neo-surrealist drama, they conversely used its avant-garde pedigree as a marketing tactic. That is to say, by framing the opera as a poetic portrait of an almost universally known figure, Glass and Wilson sought to convince spectators that they brought with them all they needed to know about the opera, appealing to scene outsiders and conventional opera aficionados who presumably lacked the cultural knowledge (i.e., the learned competency) of avant-garde theater.



In homing in on the social and cooperative activity of the creative process, I join musicologists like Carolyn Abbate and Lydia Goehr in challenging the still common tendency to locate artistic value in tangible, reproducible texts rather than in contextually situated performances, and therefore erroneously to ascribe authority over the meaning of an opera—or any interdisciplinary musical endeavor—first and foremost to its composer.<sup>565</sup> Because *Einstein* grew out of joint authorship between a director-*auteur* and a composer, with substantial contributions by several company members, the opera presents us with an opportunity to reexamine such disciplinary assumptions about creative authority. In describing *Einstein's* authorship using a collective model, I invite readers to reconsider not just the specific details of one unusually collaborative work's construction and attribution, but also the cooperative nature of more conventional works, which almost invariably rely on a combination of artists and support personnel working in concert with one another.

To emphasize the mobility and manipulability of the boundaries between artists and support personnel, this study offers three instances in which the negotiation of creative and legal control substantially affected the production history and reception of *Einstein*. Each of these narratives—the 1976–79 legal dispute over debt and reproduction rights between Glass and Wilson; the recovery of Andrew de Groat's and Lucinda Childs's choreographic contributions; and the important improvisational role of several PGE musicians—examines another layer of the collaborative process, revealing Glass and Wilson as only two agents among many who have shaped *Einstein*. These case studies also showcase newly exposed archival evidence and oral history, filling in the missing pieces of an origin story whose simplified, sanitized version as told by Glass and Wilson has long gone unchallenged by critics and scholars.

Lastly, by tracking *Einstein's* story for the first time through archives in both New York and France, this study reveals the opera as a particularly vibrant creative organism in an avant-garde ecosystem, one that maintained a history of

---

<sup>565</sup> See Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, vii-xvi; Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), particularly her discussion of the limits of musical analysis and the need for history.

transatlantic modernist art exchange between New York and Europe—particularly Paris—extending back at least as far as the First World War. By bringing financial records, correspondence, and secondary documentation into dialogue, I demonstrate that although administrative evidence may not offer direct insight into the aesthetic value of art, it has a great deal to tell us about the life of the work: the audiences it reaches, the diplomatic purposes it might serve (on occasions like the American Bicentennial), and material considerations like scale, performance forces, rehearsal space and time, and marketing resources. No matter how well crafted a work of art may be, if it does not reach the right audiences or critics at the right time, or if its artists do not have access to resources adequate to their needs, the work has a low likelihood of making the impact necessary to achieve fame and/or canonicity. In other words, patronage is one vital, if often overlooked, factor in understanding how certain artworks come to be considered culturally significant. *Einstein's* history in particular presents us with a complex web of American and European philanthropists, administrators, agents, impresarios, and government officials whose labor undergirded not just the opera's successful 1976 tour, but also much of the Lower Manhattan performing-arts scene in the 1960s and 1970s.

The cooperative activity that this study examines is hardly unique to *Einstein*. The 1976 opera is simply a particularly well-documented example of how successful art gets made, as it brought together a group of mature, well-connected artists and presenters who were unusually conscious of the project's potential to make an avant-garde mark on establishment institutions. This network of creative, technical, administrative, and philanthropic participants brought their collective skills and resources to bear on the opera, enhancing its ability to make a splashy entrance into the cultural field and hastening the process of its mythologization as a revolutionary opera. In spite of musicologists' increasing openness to contextual and cultural studies-oriented approaches, the inclination persists to take the symbolic and cultural capital of our objects of study for granted, particularly objects whose canonicity shields them from serious challenges to their cultural and historical value. Bearing in mind that few artworks, like *Einstein*, carry with them such ample evidence of the construction

of their own myths, the 1976 opera's archival story offers a particularly productive model for getting under the skin of our most cherished works in order to better understand the canons that shape our field, research interests, and pedagogy. That is, *Einstein's* story suggests that if we set aside the question of whether or not a particular "masterwork" is worthy of our respect, we can instead investigate the discursive process through which the work came to be so cherished, enabling us to observe the social construction of value rather than engaging in that construction ourselves.

### 7.3 The 2012 Revival and Beyond

Because art's value is socially negotiated, and therefore subject to change over time, *Einstein on the Beach* will no doubt continue to be a rich site of academic inquiry in the future. Indeed, thanks to a collaborative authorial model combining downtown theater practices with traditional operatic conventions, *Einstein's* production history after the retirement or deaths of its director, composer, and choreographer remains unclear. In that sense, the 2012 production is perhaps the most significant since the 1976 tour in terms of its artists' investment in the opera as part of their professional legacies, as well as performing arts institutions' investments in the work's reputational value. Because it took producer Linda Brumbach and her Pomegranate Arts company a full decade to muster enough committed commissioning organizations to set the revival in motion, Glass, Wilson, and Childs were all in their seventies during the 2011–2015 rehearsal period and tour. Recognizing the likelihood that this revival will be the last with which those artists will be directly involved, the composer, director, and choreographer approached the production as a sort of last will and testament of the work, employing the best equipment, assembling a young company whose members were well-schooled in Glass' and Wilson's aesthetic language (and its technical demands) thanks to a generational shift between the 1992 and 2012 productions, and participating in promotional interviews, workshops, and roundtables with alacrity.<sup>566</sup> Presenters likewise made a point of

---

<sup>566</sup> University Musical Society, "UMS Presents: Producing *Einstein on the Beach*," UMSVideos, YouTube video, accessed February 15, 2016, last modified January 10, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHcj6tLTH\\_w#t=215](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHcj6tLTH_w#t=215).

including such special events around performances, both to prepare audiences for an unusual operatic experience and to convince them that, even if they had never seen or heard of *Einstein*, they should seize the opportunity to experience it live.

The Opéra National de Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon, which gave the 2012 revival tour its official world premiere, was exemplary in this regard. In addition to three performances, the opera company and Montpellier Danse feted *Einstein* with: a photography exhibition; screenings of films about the opera, its primary artists, and their major projects following *Einstein*; a dance workshop led by Childs; a concert of American minimalist music by La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass; and two roundtable discussions whose participants included, among others, an astronomer, art and theater critics and scholars, and *Einstein's* first European representative Bénédicte Pesle. The program, moreover, was equal parts information booklet and commemorative item. Among 126 pages (in both French and English) of background and commentary on the opera was an essay on the opera's mythic reputation, the complete open letter from Louis Aragon to André Breton in 1971 that ignited Wilson's French celebrity, and a reproduction of the 1976 Festival d'Avignon program.<sup>567</sup> As these efforts indicate, the Opéra National de Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon sought to raise its public profile by advertising the opera as a legendary but rarely seen work with which France had been associated since its beginning. In doing so, both the Montpellier venue and the opera's other international presenters simultaneously marketed their own institutions and contributed meaningfully to the ongoing cultural consecration of the opera. This effort was so successful that over the course of the 2012 tour, an additional four institutions in the United States (LA Opera), France (Théâtre du Châtelet), Germany (Berliner Festspiele), and South Korea (Asia Culture Center) included the opera in their 2013, 2014, and 2015 seasons, extending the tour over almost four years (see Table 2.1).

---

<sup>567</sup> Program and list of events, Opéra National de Montpellier and Montpellier Danse, Folder: "Recueil Einstein on the B," Maison Jean Vilar.

If the 2012 production is, as its artists and presenters have assumed, the Glass and Wilson version's farewell tour, what might a production history without the composer and director at the helm look and sound like? In the epigraph with which this concluding chapter began, Glass told the *Los Angeles Times* music critic Mark Swed:

Traditionally the work of the composer would be the work of the opera. If anyone wanted to do any work of Verdi, they would take the score and make up everything else. Here we're talking about authorship that is based in a broader way. We're talking about authorship that really emerges from a collaborative process. That was not how opera was ever done. So then the question is, how does a work that is collaborative in nature, how does *that* become transferred? And that I can't say.<sup>568</sup>

While Glass's uncertainty might suggest that the end of *Einstein* as a live performance is nigh, a parallel production history extending back to the 1980s suggests otherwise. In fact, in their 1979 contract, Glass and Wilson agreed that a "new or abridged production of EOB may (but need not) be undertaken by either of us (or by a third party)," and that while such a production could only take place "with the written consent of both of us," they also agreed that they "w[ould] not unreasonably withhold our consent."<sup>569</sup> Several directors and choreographers have taken advantage of this creative flexibility, and the operas, ballets, and other spectacles that they have produced based on the original opera provides insight into the shapes the opera's future production history might take.

As an opera, *Einstein* has been presented on at least two occasions as one installment in Glass's Portrait Trilogy, which also includes his next two operas, *Satyagraha* (1979) and *Akhmaten* (1983). The latter two works, commissioned by the Netherlands Opera and Stuttgart State Opera, respectively, retained some unconventional elements; for instance, both operas' librettos were written in exotic languages that spectators were not intended to understand. These operas, however, were more traditional in that Glass was their primary author and they employed conventional operatic musical forces, direction, and design. In his

---

<sup>568</sup> Glass and Childs, interview by Mark Swed, "Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs Discuss *Einstein on the Beach*."

<sup>569</sup> Letter, Robert Wilson to Philip Glass (April 24, 1979), 1, Series 1, Box 113, Folder: "EOB Phil Glass Contract and papers relating to it," Robert Wilson Papers (my italics).

general history of minimalist music, K. Robert Schwarz recounts that in 1981 the Stuttgart State Opera staged *Satyagraha* under the musical direction of Dennis Russell Davies and stage direction of Achim Freyer, prompting the company to commission *Akhmaten*. “The idea,” Schwarz explains, “was to bring together all three operas, in three new productions by Freyer, as a sort of Glassian ‘Ring’ cycle.”<sup>570</sup> According to Schwarz, the October 1988 performances of *Einstein*, with Glass’s music and Freyer’s direction, were popular at the box office, but as Rockwell opined in an article on the 2012 production, “Other directors have staged Mr. Glass’s score, but the results, if Achim Freyer’s 1988 production in Stuttgart, Germany, was any indication, have been abysmal.”<sup>571</sup> Rockwell’s skepticism aside, productions like Freyer’s, as well as a recent, well-received staging of the Portrait Trilogy by the State Opera of South Australia, suggests that future operatic productions of *Einstein* will likely force the downtown opera to conform to a more conventional composer-centric model, especially when it is presented as part of a set alongside *Satyagraha* and *Akhmaten*.<sup>572</sup>

The 2014 Australian company’s approach to *Einstein* also points toward a second future for the opera that replaces Wilson’s direction with dance instead of drama. The Australian production employed choreographer Leigh Warren to reinterpret Wilson’s imagery using the bodies of a full company of dancers, and several years earlier in 2006, the choreographer and New York City Ballet soloist Benjamin Millepied had reinterpreted the opera’s music in the Trial, Trial/Prison, Bed, and Knee Play 4 scenes as a ballet entitled *Amoveo* at the Paris Opera Ballet. “For me, music is inexhaustible source of inspiration,” Millepied

---

<sup>570</sup> Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 145.

<sup>571</sup> John Rockwell, “‘Einstein’ Seeks the Old Relativity,” *New York Times*, August 31, 2012.

<sup>572</sup> A representative review of the 2014 Australian production of *Einstein* suggests that, like Freyer’s attempt in the 1980s, director Leigh Warren’s *Einstein* interpretation was only partially successful. “Its stark choreographic saturation wipes out much of the bold, exaggerated theatricalism of Robert Wilson’s original staging,” Ben Brooker wrote for the online arts periodical *Daily Review*. “Beyond a number of mysterious floating objects such as a black slab and a series of neon tubes, there is little in the way of stage decoration. This is Glass as filtered through Grotowskian poor theatre. It is not completely successful. . . . The opera is at its most enjoyable when the virtuosity of the dancers and chorus is at the fore.” Ben Brooker, “Review: Philip Glass Trilogy (Her Majesty’s Theatre, Adelaide),” *Daily Review*, 2016, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://dailyreview.com.au/philip-glass-trilogy-her-majestys-theatre-adelaide/10100>.

explained in his notes on the ballet. “It was in rediscovering Philip Glass’s and Bob Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach* that ideas came to me. I was seized by the force emanating from this opera, and seduced by the strange, double dimension that runs from end to end.” While *Amoveo* was not based on the original three themes of the opera, Millepied explained, “[Glass’s] artistic world, like that of Bob Wilson, were very present in my imagination.”<sup>573</sup>

The operatic and dance versions of *Einstein* presented in Stuttgart, Adelaide, and Paris suggest one likely future for the opera: a traditional approach to operatic production based solely or primarily on the composer’s score. Wilson himself initiated a second possible future for the opera in 2012, one that was more amenable to small theater and performance art troupes than opera companies. In honor of the third revival, he invited artists in residence at his Watermill Center on Long Island to produce original performances based on excerpts from the Glass/Wilson production.<sup>574</sup> While Wilson’s creative oversight of this reimagining inevitably impacted the outcome, the strategy of reusing and engaging with many facets of the opera (music, dance, gestural vocabulary, design, lighting, spoken text) avoids the conventional restrictions imposed by the work’s original genre. This theatrical approach therefore may signal a future for the work that valorizes Wilson’s (and perhaps other authors’) contributions along with or even instead of Glass’s music.

---

<sup>573</sup> Program notes on *Amoveo*, *Réliques*, and *Genus*, Catalogue of the Opéra National de Paris: Opéra National de Paris, Ballet de l’Opéra: Millepied/Paul/McGregor, Palais Garnier, 7, 10–11, 13–15, 19–22 November 2009, VMC 14792 (199), Département de Musique, Bibliothèque nationale de France. The original French reads: “La musique est pour moi une source d’inspiration intarissable. C’est en redécouvrant *Einstein on the Beach* de Philip Glass et Bob Wilson que les idées me sont venues. J’ai été saisi par la force qui se dégageait de cet opéra et séduit par l’étrange et double dimension qui le traverse de part en part. . . . Son univers artistique, comme celui de Bob Wilson, sont très présents dans mon imaginaire.”

<sup>574</sup> Allan Kozinn, “On the Odder End of the Space-Time Continuum: ‘On the Beach’ at Baryshnikov Arts Center,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2012, New York edition, C5. Kozinn reported, “To celebrate the work’s 35th anniversary, Mr. Wilson brought together several choreographers, visual designers, directors and performing ensembles and worked with them at the Watermill Center, in Water Mill, N.Y., on a reinterpretation of ‘Einstein.’ They created ‘On the Beach,’ essentially a remix of the opera: a new piece that draws freely on the musical, textual and (after a fashion) staging elements of the original but slices them up, reorders them and weaves new material around them.” See also Baryshnikov Arts Center, “Past Performance: On the Beach,” accessed February 15, 2016, last modified 2012, <http://bacnyc.org/performances/performance/on-the-beach>.

These operatic and theatrical trajectories offer two formal possibilities for presenting the downtown theater/opera hybrid: one based in its early operatic reception that primarily valorizes Glass's contribution, and one that acknowledges *Einstein's* downtown theater roots by valorizing Wilson's direction and design. Less formally, thanks to the wide distribution of the 1978 sound recording and the pedagogical impact of the 1985 documentary film, as well as a respectable Internet presence in the twenty-first century, the opera also has a varied and colorful presence in popular culture. Its music and spoken text have, for instance, been arranged for marching band, remixed and mashed up, referenced and parodied, and recruited to sell Pepsi.<sup>575</sup> Along with Glass's music, Wilson's repetitive, geometrical Bauhaus-inspired design elements have, furthermore, found their way into such media as a 2015 advertisement for the sportswear brand Under Armour and the Marc Jacob's runway show for Louis Vuitton during Paris Fashion Week in 2013.<sup>576</sup>

*Einstein on the Beach's* future, like its past, is thus fertile terrain with insights yet to be uncovered and stories yet to be told. The narrative that this study conveys remains relatively restricted temporally, inviting further consideration of the opera's robust revival history from a social and/or intermedial perspective. Over

---

<sup>575</sup> Carolina Crown, "2013 Carolina Crown encore performance, August 10, 2013," YouTube video, accessed February 15, 2016, last modified August 29, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1Hjr1mgW04>; Nosaj Thing, "Knee 1 Remix" and Dan Deacon, "A Light Spiral Ship," *Rework: Philip Glass Remixed*, recorded 2012, Orange Mountain Music omm 0082, compact discs; Bob Cronin (dj BC), "Einstein on the Beast" and "Glass Prison," *Glassbreaks: Philip Glass vs. Hip Hop*, YouTube playlist, accessed February 15, 2016, last modified June 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTUITwlsdlFQ3Rz2negdJ6mViaqtq-WAd>; P.D.Q. Bach, "Prelude to Einstein on the Fritz,  $S. e=mt^2$ ," *1712 Overture and Other Musical Assaults*, recorded January 10–11, 1989, Telarc Records CD-80210, compact disc; Counting Crows, "Einstein on the Beach (For an Eggman)," recorded 1990–94, Geffen Records DGCD-24704, compact disc; Pepsi Cola, "Pepsi Cola 'No Brainer Einstein,'" YouTube video, accessed February 15, 2016, last modified October 1, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wtWuaTVmeg>.

<sup>576</sup> Under Armour, "Under Armour: Rule Yourself," YouTube video, accessed February 15, 2016, last modified August 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikmd-vtRCqo>; "Louis Vuitton Spring Summer 2013," YouTube video, accessed February 15, 2016, last modified October 3, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2PMj64zemM>; Nicole Phelps, *Vogue* (October 2, 2012), Condé Nast 2012, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2013-ready-to-wear/louis-vuitton>.



the course of the preceding chapters, I have used Glass's and Wilson's first collaborative endeavor as a lens through which to explore the history of an opera that, over the course of forty years and four major productions, has been culturally consecrated as a twentieth-century music theater landmark. The foregoing chapters have also employed *Einstein's* early production and reception as a snapshot of the influential downtown avant-garde art world of which it was one of the proudest products. Finally, this project demonstrates the value of a sociologically informed approach to interdisciplinary scholarship on the performing arts. Such an approach reveals the ways in which we produce expressive culture and endow it with meaning through an ongoing process of discursive negotiation that frequently tells us much about ourselves as the art that we care about.

If *Einstein's* reception history apart from Glass/Wilson staging is any indication, the 2012–15 tour likely marks the end of not just a unique production history, but also of the opera as the “seminal,” “mythic,” and “legendary” work that John Rockwell claimed defined “the extraordinary Lower Manhattan performing-arts scene in the 1970s.”<sup>577</sup> This scene has exhibited extraordinary staying power over the last half century, but no work is fixed in stone, let alone on paper. As Bourdieu rightly claimed, an art work is made not just once by its creator(s), but “by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it.”<sup>578</sup> From that point of view, there can be little doubt that *Einstein on the Beach* has a long and vibrant future ahead of it, within the ivory tower and without.

---

<sup>577</sup> Rockwell, “‘Einstein’ Seeks the Old Relativity,” *New York Times*, August 31, 2012.

<sup>578</sup> Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 111.

## Bibliography

### *Primary Sources: Archives*

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France

Event Files, 1976 and 2012

Correspondence between Robert Wilson and Michel Guy, 1972–1990

Maison Jean Vilar, Avignon, France

Event clippings, photographs, programs, Festival d'Avignon  
correspondence

Brooklyn Academy of Music Hamm Archives

Artist and Event Files

Audio/Video recordings

Interview transcripts, *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*

Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Collection, New York, N.Y.

Robert Wilson Papers, 1969–1995

Metropolitan Opera Archives

Artist and Event Files

New York Library, Performing Arts, New York, N.Y.

Theater on Film and Tape Archive

New York University, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York, N.Y.

Mabou Mines Archive

Stefan Brecht Papers

*Soho Weekly News*

### *Books, Dissertations, Journal Articles, and Essays*

Adler, Laure and Alain Veinstein. *Avignon: 40 ans de festival* [Avignon: 40 Years of the Festival]. Introduction by Bernard Dort. France: Hachette / Festival d'Avignon, 1987.

- American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: a final report to the people. Prepared and submitted to the Congress of the United States*. Vol. 1. Washington: The Administration: for sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1977.
- Aragon, Louis. "Lettre ouverte a André Breton sur Le Regard du Sourd l'art, la science et la liberté." *Les lettres françaises* (June 2, 1971): 2–3, 15.
- Aragon, Louis. "An Open Letter to André Breton from Louis Aragon on Robert Wilson's Deafman Glance." Translated by Linda Moses, Jean-Paul Lavergne, and George Ashley. *Performing Arts Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 4–6.
- Aronson, Arnold. *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theater and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958.
- Artaud, Antonin. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol. 4. France: Éditions Gallimard, 1964.
- Abbate, Carolyn. *In Search of Opera*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Abbate, Carolyn and Roger Parker. *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years*. London: Allen Lane, 2012.
- Babbitt, Milton. "Who Cares If You Listen?" *High Fidelity* (February 1958): 1–5.
- Banes, Sally. *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983.
- Banes, Sally. *Subversive Expectations: Performance Art and Paratheater in New York, 1976–85*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- Baracks, Barbara. "Einstein on the Beach." *Artforum* (March 1977): 30–6.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image–Music–Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Barzel, Tamar. *New York Noise: Radical Jewish Music and the Downtown Scene*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.
- Beaujour, Michel. "Culture." In *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, edited by Lawrence Kritzman with Brian J. Reilly, French articles translated by M. B. DeBevoise, 181–5. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Becker, Howard S. *Art Worlds*. 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. 1982. Reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited and introduced by Randal Johnson. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Edited and translated by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.
- Brecht, Stefan. *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson*. 1978. Reprint, London: Methuen Publishing, Ltd., 1982.
- Broadhurst, Susan. "Einstein on the Beach: A Study in Temporality." *Performance Research* 17, no. 5 (October 2012): 34–40.
- Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961.
- Cage, John. *John Cage*. Edited by Richard Kostelanetz. London: Allen Lane, 1974.
- Chapman, David Allen. "Collaboration, Presence, and Community: The Philip Glass Ensemble in Downtown New York, 1966–1976." PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2013.
- Chapple, Freda and Chiel Kattenbelt, eds. *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.
- Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Crane, Diana. *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Constable, Rosalind. "New York's Avant Garde, And How It Got There." *New York Herald Tribune* (May 17, 1964): 7–11.
- Cooke, Mervyn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Dister, Alain. "Les Palais de Glass." *Rock & Folk* no. 117 (October 1976): 62–4.
- Dizikes, John. *Opera in America: A Cultural History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Drott, Eric. *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968–1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

- Duchamp, Marcel. *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. Edited by M. Sanouillet and E. Peterson. New York: Da Capo Press, 1989.
- Ebright, Ryan Scott. "Echoes of the Avant-garde in American Minimalist Opera." PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014. ProQuest (AAT 3622344).
- Elleström, Lars, ed. *Media Borders, Multimodality, and Intermediality*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Fink, Robert. *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Fischer, Iris Smith. *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s*. Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 2011.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Essential Foucault*. Edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose. New York: The New Press, 2003.
- Fox, Christopher. "Après Einstein: La succession minimaliste." Translated by Armin Czysz and Vincent Barras. *Contrechamps: Revue semestrielle* 6 (April 1986): 172–85.
- Fulcher, Jane F. *The Composer as Intellectual: Music and Ideology in France, 1914–1940*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Gann, Kyle. *American Music in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.
- Gann, Kyle. "Intuition and Algorithm in Einstein on the Beach." *NewMusicBox* (March 6, 2013). Last modified 2016. <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/intuition-and-algorithm-in-einstein-on-the-beach/>.
- Garland, David. "Philip Glass: Theater of Glass." *Downbeat* (December 1983): 16–18.
- Gaut, Berys. "Film Authorship and Collaboration." In *Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Richard Allen and Murray Smith, 149–72. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Glass, Philip and Robert Wilson, with Andrew de Groat. *Einstein on the Beach: An Opera in Four Acts*. New York: EOS Enterprises, Inc., 1976.
- Glass, Philip. "Notes on Einstein on the Beach." *Performing Arts Journal* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 63–70.
- Glass, Philip. *Music by Philip Glass*. Edited by Robert T. Jones. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

- Glass, Philip. *Words Without Music*. New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 2015.
- Glass, Philip and Robert Wilson. *Einstein on the Beach*. Paris: Éditions Dilecta and New York: Dissident Industries, 2012.
- Goehr, Lydia. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Goldberg, Jeff. "Interview/Report: Robert Wilson and 'Einstein on the Beach.'" *New York Arts Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 15–18.
- Gopnik, Adam. "The Outside Game." *The New Yorker* (January 12, 2015): 26–31.
- Gottlieb, Robert. *George Balanchine: The Ballet Maker*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2004.
- Guilbaut, Serge. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." *Partisan Review* (1939): 34–49.
- Griffiths, Paul. "System (ii)." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by Stanley Sadie. Vol. 18 (New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980): 481.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theater*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.
- Grout, Donald Jay and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988.
- Haskins, Robert. "The Music of Philip Glass, 1965–1975: An Analysis of Two Selected Early Works and *Einstein on the Beach*." Master's thesis, University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, 1996.
- Holmberg, Arthur. *The Theatre of Robert Wilson*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Hudson, James R. *Unanticipated City: Loft Conversions in Lower Manhattan*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.
- Jannarone, Kimberly. *Artaud and His Doubles*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Johnson, Tom. *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982*. Eindhoven: Het Apollonhuis, 1989.

- Kattenbelt, Chiel. "Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions, and Medial Relationships." *Culture, Language and Representation* 6 (2008): 19–29.
- Kerman, Joseph. *Opera as Drama*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Kirk, Elise K. *American Opera*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Knapp, Bettina L. *Antonin Artaud: Man of Vision*. Chicago: Swallow, 1980.
- Kostelanetz, Richard, ed. *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.
- Kostelanetz, Richard. *SoHo: The Rise and Fall of An Artists' Colony*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Kris, Ernst and Otto Kurz. *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*. Translated by Alastair Laing and Lottie M. Newman. Preface by E. H. Gombrich. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Translated by Karen Jürs-Munby. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Léonardini, Jean-Pierre, Marie Collin, and Joséphine Markovits. *Festival d'automne à Paris* [The Paris Autumn Festival]. Paris: Temps actuels, 1982.
- Lerner, Neil, Joseph N. Straus, eds. *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lindblade, Thomas W. "Tactical Measures: The Interaction of Drama with Music." PhD diss., Stanford University, 1995.
- MacKay, Patricia. "Americans Abroad: Europe in Search of the Avant-Garde." *Theatre Crafts* 11, no. 2 (March/April 1977): 12–13, 41–5.
- MacKay, Patricia. "The Festive Face: Opera, Theatre, and Dance in Celebration." *Theatre Crafts* 11, no. 2 (March/April 1977): 9, 45–8.
- Marranca, Bonnie. *The Theatre of Images*. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977.
- Marranca, Bonnie. "Robert Wilson, the Avant-Garde and the Audience." *New York Arts Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 19–20.
- Maycock, Robert. *Glass: A Portrait*. London: Sanctuary Publishing Ltd., 2002.

- Mertens, Wim. *American Minimal Music*. Translated by J. Hautekiet. 1983. Reprint, London: Kahn & Averill, 1991.
- Metcalf, Sasha. "Institutions and Patrons in American Opera: The Reception of Philip Glass, 1976–1992." PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2015. ProQuest (AAT 3733595).
- Morey, Miguel and Carmen Pardo. *Robert Wilson*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2003.
- Nickelson, Patrick. "Transcription, Recording, and Authority in 'Classic' Minimalism." Paper presented at the Eighty-first Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Louisville, KY, November 12–15, 2015.
- Novak, Jelena. *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body*. Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2015.
- Nyman, Michael. *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. 2nd ed. 1974. Reprint, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Ovadija, Mladen. *Dramaturgy of Sound in the Avant-garde and Postdramatic Theatre*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.
- Owens, Craig. "Einstein on the Beach: The Primacy of Metaphor." *October* 4 (Fall 1977): 21–32.
- Page, Tim. "Einstein on the Beach." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 2, 27–8. New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1992.
- Palmer, Robert. "Liner Notes for Einstein on the Beach by Philip Glass." In *Blues and Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer*. Edited by Anthony DeCurtis, 409–16. New York: Scribner, 2009.
- Petrus, Stephen. "From Gritty to Chic; the Transformation of New York City's SoHo, 1962– 1976." *New York History* 84 (2003): 50–87.
- Piekut, Benjamin. *Experimentalism Otherwise: the New York Avant-garde and its Limits*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- Pleasants, Henry. *Opera in Crisis: Tradition, Present, Future*. Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1989.
- Plocher, Joshua David Jurkovskis. "Presenting the New: Battles around New Music in New York in the Seventies." PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2012. ProQuest (AAT 3549320).
- Potter, Keith. *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.



- Quadri, Franco, Franco Bertoni, and Robert Stearns. *Robert Wilson*. Edited by Ranco Cantini. Firenze, Italy: Octavo, 1997.
- Raickovich, Milos. "Einstein on the Beach by Philip Glass: A Musical Analysis." PhD diss., The City University of New York, 1994.
- Reich, Steve. *Writings on Music: 1965–2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Ross, Alex. *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- Richardson, John. *Singing Archaeology: Philip Glass's Akhnaten*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999.
- Rigolli, Alessandro. "Einstein on the Beach di Philip Glass e Bob Wilson: caratteri de una 'non-opera.'" *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 36, no. 2 (January 2001): 351–73.
- Rockwell, John. *Outsider: John Rockwell on the Arts, 1967–2006*. Limelight Editions: Pompton Plains, NJ, 2006.
- Rockwell, John. "Robert Wilson's Stage Works: Originality and Influence." In *Robert Wilson: The Theater of Images*, 2nd ed., 10–31. New York: Harper and Row, 1984.
- Ross, Kristin. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.
- Ruf, Frederick J. *Entangled Voices: Genre and the Religious Construction of the Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Salino, Brigitte, with Emmanuelle Klausner and Claire Baldewyns. *Avignon 88: histoire d'une génération: les metteurs en scène vingt ans après* [Avignon 88: story of a generation: the directors twenty years later]. Paris: Actes Sud-Papiers, 1988.
- Sanio, Sabine. "Ein unverhoffter Ausweg – Einstein on the Beach von Philip Glass als postdramatisches Musiktheater." In *Experimentelles Musik- und Tanztheater* [Experimental Music- and Dance-theater], edited by Frieder Reininghaus and Katja Schneider, 192–5. Germany: Laaber Verlag, 2004.
- Salzman, Eric and Thomas Desi. *The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Schwarz, K. Robert. *Minimalists*. 1996. Reprint, London: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 2008.

- Sellors, C. Paul. "Collective Authorship in Film." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 263–71.
- Shevtsova, Maria. *Robert Wilson*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Shyer, Lawrence. *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989.
- Simonson, Mary. *Body Knowledge: Performance, Intermediality, and American Entertainment at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Simpson, Charles. *SoHo: The Artist in the City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Small, Christopher. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998.
- Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.
- Staples, Donald E. "The Auteur Theory Reexamined." *Cinema Journal* 6 (1966–67): 1–7.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Four Saints in Three Acts: An Opera to be Sung*. Introduction by Carl Van Vechte. New York: Random House, 1934.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Four Lectures on Narration*. Introduction by Thornton Wilde. Foreword by Liesl M. Olson. 1935. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Strickland, Edward. *Minimalism: Origins*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Sun, Cecilia Jian-Xuan. "Experiments in Musical Performance: Historiography, Politics, and the Post-Cageian Avant-Garde." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004.
- Suzuki, Dean. "Minimal Music: Its Evolution as Seen in the Works of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young, and Its Relation to the Visual Arts." PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1991.
- Symonds, Dominic and Pamela Karantonis, eds. *The Legacy of Opera: Reading Music Theatre as Experience and Performance*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2013.
- Taylor, Marvin J. *The Downtown Book: The New York Art Scene, 1974–1984*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

- Thomson, Virgil. *Virgil Thomson*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1966.
- Turk, Edward Baron. *French Theatre Today: A View from New York, Paris, and Avignon*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011.
- Whitall, Arnold. "Glass, Philip." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 7, 427. New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980.
- Zukin, Sharon. *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

*Published Interviews*

- Emmons, Beverly. "In Conversation with Beverly Emmons." By Monica Snellings. *Culturebot*, September 26, 2013. Last modified 2016. <http://www.culturebot.org/2013/09/19149/in-conversation-with-beverly-emmons/>.
- Glass, Philip and Robert Wilson. "Robert Wilson and Philip Glass—Einstein on the Beach." By Charles Ruas. *Charles Ruas's Audio Experimental Theater*, 99.5 WBAI FM, November 12, 1976. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyuNtYi4i6o>. Video removed from site.
- Glass, Philip. "Phil Glass: Interview." By Sylvère Lotringer and Bill Hellermann. *Semiotexte* 3, no. 2 (1978): 178–90.
- Glass, Philip and Lucinda Childs. "Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs Discuss Einstein on the Beach." By Mark Swed. UC Berkeley Events, April 29, 2011. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8Cx7XOYj\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8Cx7XOYj_w).
- Glass, Philip and Robert Wilson. "The Power of 2." By Anne Bogart. Penny W. Stamps Distinguished Speaker Series, University of Michigan Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design, January 15, 2012, Ann Arbor, Michigan. [http://playgallery.org/video/the\\_power\\_of\\_2/](http://playgallery.org/video/the_power_of_2/).
- Guy, Michel. "Entretien avec Michel Guy: l'entraînement des enthousiasmes." By Colette Godard. *Le Monde* (September 11, 1980). [http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1980/09/11/entretien-avec-michel-guy-l-entrainement-des-enthousiasmes\\_3074476\\_1819218.html#jv6mzBhGrUoMKYzQ.99](http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1980/09/11/entretien-avec-michel-guy-l-entrainement-des-enthousiasmes_3074476_1819218.html#jv6mzBhGrUoMKYzQ.99).
- Landry, Richard. "The Legendary Dickie Landry." By Alex V. Cook. *Country Roads Magazine* (October 2009). Last modified 2013. <http://www.countryroadsmagazine.com/culture/visual-performing-arts/the-legendary-dickie-landry>.

Wilson, Robert. "Scenario: A Talk with Robert Wilson." By Frances Alenikoff. *Dance Scope* 10, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1975–1976): 11–21.

Wilson, Robert. "Robert Wilson." By John Rockwell. American Theatre Wing and Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation Masters of the Stage. Podcast, 74:00. March 20, 1997. Last modified April 1, 2014. <http://sdcfoundation.org/conversations-community/masters-of-the-stage/>.

Wilson, Robert, Philip Glass, and Lucinda Childs. "Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, and Lucinda Childs discuss Einstein on the Beach." By Matias Tarnopolsky. Cal Performances, Zellerbach Playhouse, University of California, Berkeley, October 28, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8iLOGPm7AY>.

#### *Published Music Scores*

Glass, Philip and Robert Wilson. *Einstein on the Beach*. New York: Dunvagen, 1976.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Einstein on the Beach*. London: Chester Music, 2003.

Glass, Philip. "Knee Plays 1–5": from *Einstein on the Beach*. Study score. London: Chester Music, 2012.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Trilogy" Sonata for Piano. London: Chester Music, 2001.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Knee Play 2": from *Einstein on the Beach* (for violin and organ). London: Chester Music, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Knee Play 3": from *Einstein on the Beach* (for unaccompanied SATB chorus). London: Chester Music, 1976.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Knee Play 4": from *Einstein on the Beach* (for TTBB chorus and violin). London: Chester Music, 2005.

#### *Audio Recordings*

Glass, Philip and Robert Wilson. *Einstein on the Beach*. Tomato Records Tom 2901, 1979. Stereo LP.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Einstein on the Beach*. CBS Masterworks M4K 38875, 1985. Compact discs.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Einstein on the Beach*. Elektra Nonesuch 79323-2, 1993. Compact discs.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Einstein on the Beach: highlights*. Orange Mountain Music 0083, 1984.  
Compact discs.

Glass, Philip, et al. *Rework: Philip Glass Remixed*. Orange Mountain Music 0082,  
2012. Compact discs.

*Documentary Films*

*Absolute Wilson*. Directed by Katharina Otto-Bernstein. 105 min. Film  
Manufacturers, Inc., 2007.

*Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*. Directed by Mark Obenhaus. 58  
min. Direct Cinema, 2007.

*Einstein on the Beach*. Directed by Don Kent. 270 min. Telmondis, 2014.

*Glass: A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts*. Directed by Scott Hicks. 119 min. Koch  
Lorber Films, 2009.