

## **Episoden, Figuren - the concept of musical and instrumental theatre**

**Abstract:** The combination of scenic action and music, called "musical theatre", corresponds to a technique previously used in the History of Music by composers such as Satie and Debussy. In turn, the concept of "instrumental theatre" emerges as a concept where musicians assume the role of actors while playing. In this field, Mauricio Kagel assumes himself as one of the composers who most explored the aspects of staging allied to musical performance, attributing to the interpreter also actor functions, such as: adopting certain facial expressions while playing, entering the stage in a particular way, interact physically with other artists, among others.

Keywords: Episoden Figuren, Mauricio Kagel, Accordion, Contemporary Music.

*Yo compongo al mismo tiempo visual y musicalmente.*

Mauricio Kagel

### **Episoden, Figuren (1993) – Mauricio Kagel (1931-2008)**

#### **1. General notions about the composer and the work**

Fantasy, humour and originality are the main characteristics of the works of Mauricio Kagel (fig. 1), who became one of the most significant authors of instrumental theatre (Kagel, P., n.d.). Sadie (1980) refers that, in her concept of instrumental theatre, Kagel's music focuses on the equal importance of the sounds produced and the physical actions performed by the instrumentalists and observed by the audience.



Fig. 1: Mauricio Kagel

The theatrical spirit and humour of Mauricio Kagel are always underlying in his last works, particularly from 1990 onwards. The instrumental pieces and plays intersect in the exploration of unpublished sounds and music gestures (IrCam-Centre Pompidou, 2008).

Many of his later works contain specific theatrical instructions for performers, such as adopting certain facial expressions during performance. His work can even be compared to the Theatre of the Absurd (Oron, 2012).

In Kagel's works we can find elements of serialism, expressionism, concrete music, Dadaism or random music. Many of his works also use musical collage techniques. Kagel stated that "an essential aspect of my work is strict composition with elements which are not pure themselves" (Grimshaw, n.d.).

According to Laskewicz (1992), in each of the composer's works a 'systematic anti-systematic approach' is evident, influenced by an essential ambiguity: Kagel's connection with musical traditions and his dialectical reaction against musical traditions.

In the last years of Kagel's composition, his writing recognizes the concern with episodes of disconnected materials, the strong attention to sound colours and the need to give form to improvised music (Weiss, 2001).

The work *Episoden, Figuren*, lasting approximately 14', was premiered by accordionist Teodoro Anzellotti, with whom Mauricio Kagel collaborated intensively over several meetings. In the 1995 edition published by Peters, it runs for 308 bars.

According to Frisius (1997), the inspiration for the composition of the work derives from the pseudo-antiquity of the accordion, which despite its ancestors dating back several millennia only really existed a few centuries ago.

In this composition, Mauricio Kagel has many drawings (figures) that are found again in different contexts (Bochmann, personal communication, 2010).

*“Bewitched by the ancient charms of the accordion, it suited me to involve myself in the rhetoric of musical figures. So I struggled to compose with palpable sound-forms, and to weave them into episodes of various lengths. Since the accordion is an instrument that allows different*

*sound effects with the left and right hand buttons, the figures wander from one side to the other, being transformed according to their register and range. No one can contain a smile when they think of the accordion. It's as if all the pieces played on the accordion have their roots in either popular music or entertainment music. And I find this erroneous prejudice far from uninteresting: a new New Music could be made with many instruments of the genre” (Kagel, 1998).*

## 2. Interpretive analysis of the work

Observing the registers and the tessitura, whose combinations produce different sound environments throughout the work, we can identify 12 different episodes. Throughout these episodes, the figures cross the two keyboards constantly. The beginning of each episode is marked by a change of register(s) and is preceded by a more or less prolonged rest in notes, chords or rests. In this way, the episodes are interspersed with short phrases (interludes) preparing a new idea. Below is a schematic picture of the structure of the work (fig. 2).

1	Measure 1: In a medium register and in a calm tempo, the theme is started simultaneously in the upper and lower voices with small rhythmic formulas that constantly stop in prolonged sounds or pauses. The initial motif is repeated and decomposed into different rhythms and ranges, as well as registers/colors in the upper voice. It ends with the sound of a single note in the upper voice. Duration of 21 bars.
2	Bar 22: A fugitive motif performed in the left hand sets the tone for a Presto movement with ad libitum indication, where a continuous movement in both hands creates repetitive rhythms. It ends with a very fast trill in the upper voice. Duration of 10 bars.
3	Bar 32: Trills and tremulous, in continuous accelerated movement and increasing dynamics up to fff, give way to repetitive descending motifs in 2nd intervals in the upper voice accompanied by arpeggios in the lower voice. A single major 2nd break in the top row transitions into the next episode. Duration of 30 bars.
4	Measure 62: 3rd intervals are performed in accelerated tempo (Prestissimo). In a continuous and repetitive movement in two planes, triplets and sixteenth notes find a sharp rest at the end of this episode. Duration of 31 bars.
5	Measure 93: This episode returns to the idea of the previous one, where the sixteenth notes gain accentuated importance. In Prestissimo, a homophonic repetition is presented on both keyboards that is no longer limited to the 3rd interval. The material fades away rhythmically, becoming accentuated chords. I rest again at the end with chords and a single note linking to the next episode. Duration of 54 bars.

6	Measure 147: In a quiet tempo, ppp dynamics and homophonic and homorhythmic texture, several melodic phrases are presented that lead to an increasingly lower range. At the end there is a crossover of melodies between the two keyboards. Duration of 37 bars.
7	Bar 184: Episode marked by contrasts in articulation (legato – staccato) and dynamics, in some cases suddenly (ff - p). The rhythmic motifs in each of the keyboards are repeated cyclically, influenced by the material exposed in episode 5. At the end, the homophony in chords is added and the maximum sonority of the work is reached (ffff). Duration of 18 bars.
8	Bar 202: In Presto tempo, the right hand melody line from episode 7 is now exactly repeated in the left hand. The upper voice line is a variant of the one presented in episode 2. The dynamics are increased to fff and the tessitura is extended. At the end there is a resting chord and the sonority goes down to pp. Duration of 15 bars.
9	Measure 217: In an almost choral homophonic environment, pedal notes appear in the left hand and chords are developed that move smoothly between the two keyboards. Vibratos find new colors in this episode. Duration of 31 bars.
10	Bar 248/259: Episode with influences from episode 8, which starts with a kind of song in 3rd intervals (interlude ad libitum). This is followed by a polyphonic moment that becomes homophonic (quintines of sixteenth notes and trios of eighth notes). It ends with a resting chord in F crescendo. Duration of 23 bars.
11	Measure 271: It presents repeated motifs that, in fff dynamics, move in alternating dialogue between the keyboards. This is followed by a pedal chord in the lower voice and short chords in the upper voice. The sonority disappears until pp. Duration of 37 bars.
12	Bar 308: A pedal chord played in the sharp 8th in the right hand is transferred unchanged to the left hand. The top voice performs groups of notes at variable fast tempo and facial enactment appears. After exploring the high range, at the end the motifs descend and cross the two keyboards in a low range. Gradually, they become extinct. Duration of 1 measure (4 systems).

Fig. 2: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (schematic table)

Throughout the work, there is a predominance of episodes with counterpoint, where sixteenth notes play a prominent role. Episode 6, which corresponds to the middle of the piece, deliberately presents a moment of rest provided by the melody/chorus performed at a calm tempo. In

terms of relations between the various episodes, in terms of the material presented, there is a strong influence of episode 4 on episode 5 (counterpoint of sixteenth notes and triplets) and of episode 7 on episode 8 (counterpoint in which the same material is performed alternately between right hand and left hand).

In view of these similarities, and considering that episode 12 is actually a finale (without a defined measure or tempo), the remaining episodes can be grouped into sets 3+2+1+2+3 (fig. 3). That is, episodes 1 (melody), 2 (counterpoint) and 3 (trills and tremulous) present different material and are not related to each other, a situation that also happens with episodes 9 (melody), 10 (counterpoint) and 11 (dialogue). On the other hand, episodes 4 and 5 and episodes 7 and 8 show the strong relationship described above.

bar number:	1	22	32	62	93	147	184	202	217	248	271	308
episode:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		≠		=	rest	=		≠				shot

Fig. 3: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (sets 3+2+1+2+3)

Next, the structure of Episoden, Figuren is presented in more detail and the resources used with the accordion with converter system are highlighted.

The construction of the play is elaborated in several episodes. In episode 1, the initial thematic material consists of a small motif resting on a long note (fig. 4). This first motif appears in a complex way due to the rhythmic gap existing between the voices (horizontal texture) and will be exposed again, in the upper voice, in the second half of measure 5.



Fig. 4: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 1 - Initial exposition)

A melodic speech follows on the keyboard of the right hand, in the ascending direction, which is accompanied by the lower voice composed of a long note (chord) and groups of similar

and homogeneous triplets (fig. 5). In the final bars of the episode, there is a small interlude that then bridges to a change of roles (the melody passes to the lower voice and the repetitive accompaniment, now in groups of 2 eighth notes, is associated with the upper voice).



Fig. 5: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 1 – ascending speech)

After a long note of rest, in bar 22, **episode 2** appears with a fugitive motif performed in the left hand. The main voice starts on the left-hand keyboard and the top voice, composed of sequential groups, establishes the counterpoint (fig. 6). In this picture, there is an abrupt change in character and style, strongly characterized by the Presto tempo and the groups of fuses that set the tempo.



Fig. 6: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 2 –counterpoint)

In bar 32, we enter a different texture (episode 3) where the horizontal relationship plays a fundamental role. The prolonged trills (fig. 7) give way to insistent tremors, in accelerated movement and increasing dynamics up to fff.

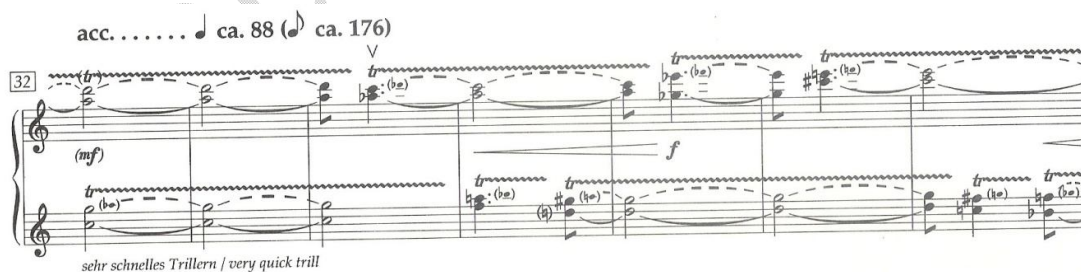


Fig. 7: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 3 - trills)

Then comes a moment strongly marked by the rhythmic game between the voices. The motif on the upper staff is made up of fast, sequential motifs in a major and minor 2nd, moving downwards and in opposite motion with the arpeggios of the lower voice (fig. 8). The episode concludes with an isolated major 2nd break in the top row.



Fig. 8: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 3 - rhythmic game between the voices)

In bar 62, we enter a new frame developed over the 3rd interval and in accelerated tempo (Prestissimo). In this **episode 4**, Mauricio Kagel contrasts sequential groups of four sixteenth notes, starting with the melodic design of the A minor chord, while the lower voice develops in sequential groups of triplets always supported by long notes (fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 4 – counterpoint and third intervals)

The constant activity exerted by the counterpoint and crossing of four by three figures suggests that these long notes constitute the main melodic phrase of this painting. The end of the episode is characterized by a sharp rest in a calm tempo, quarter note=60 (fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 4 – rest moment)

**Episode 5**, starting at measure 93, starts a new frame similar to the previous one in the same tempo Prestissimo. However, now the homophonic repetition on both keyboards is not constant in the 3rd interval (fig. 11).



Fig. 11: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 5 – counterpoint and third intervals)

This counterpoint with different melodic designs will culminate in blocks of accented chords (quarter notes), performed in dynamic *fff con tutta la forza*, in a strongly vertical relationship and repeated at the end of 8 bars (fig. 12). The end of the episode is marked by a smooth transition of registers over choral lines, in a calm and peaceful environment in *ppp* sonority, making the note A the transition to the next moment.



Fig. 12: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 5 - chord blocks)

**Episode 6**, which begins at bar 147 and is located in the middle of the piece, constitutes an extremely melodic moment of rest and in a speech completely different from those previously presented. In a kind of  $\frac{3}{4}$  waltz, the composer intended here to recall the traditional roots of the accordion (fig. 13).

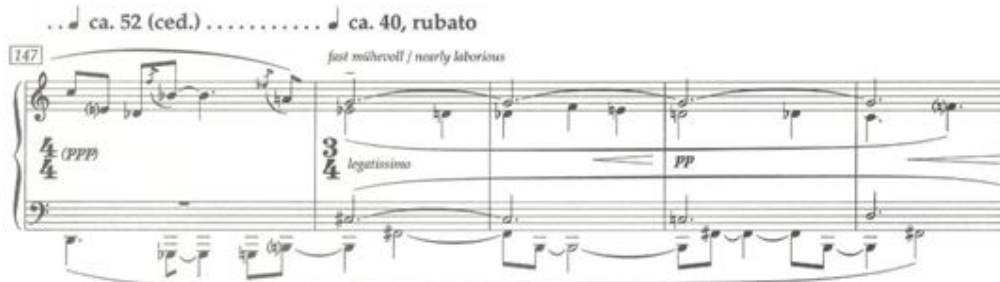


Fig. 13: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 6 – 'tradicional' melody)

In the final bars of this episode, we witness a small interlude where melodies cross between the two keyboards (fig. 14) and which will make the bridge to a new scene.



Fig. 14: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episódio 6 - interlude with melodies crossing)

Measure 184 corresponds to the beginning of **episode 7** characterized by contrasts in articulation and dynamics. In a rhythmic game, the upper voice will move in a constant opening of register and range and also in a cyclical structure (fig. 15). The rhythmic motifs are influenced by the material exposed in episode 5.



Fig. 15: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episódio 7 – counterpoint in rhythmic game)

In measure 198, another interlude appears, now in a structure of homorhythmic chords that will develop in accelerando and in crescendo until reaching the maximum sonority of the work (ffff), that is, the climax of the work (fig. 16).

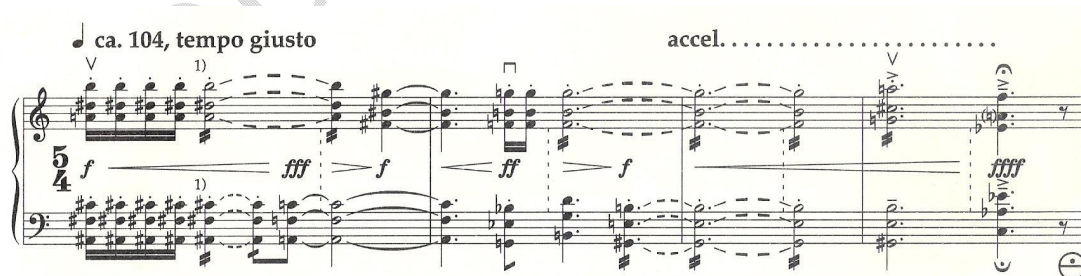


Fig. 16: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episódio 7 – climax of the work)

In the frame that begins at measure 202, we witness an exchange of voices in relation to the previous episode. In **episode 8**, the upper voice now presents a kind of improvisation, which develops in a fast tempo (variant of the one presented in episode 2). At the same time, the lower voice

presents groups of sixteenth notes from the upper voice of episode 7, composed of interval groups of second and sixth notes that develop sequentially (fig. 17).



Fig. 17: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 8 - counterpoint altered in rhythmic game)

The dynamics are increased to *fff* and the range is widened. From bar 214 onwards, a small choral interlude with decreasing pitch until *pp* (fig. 18) will bridge to the next frame.

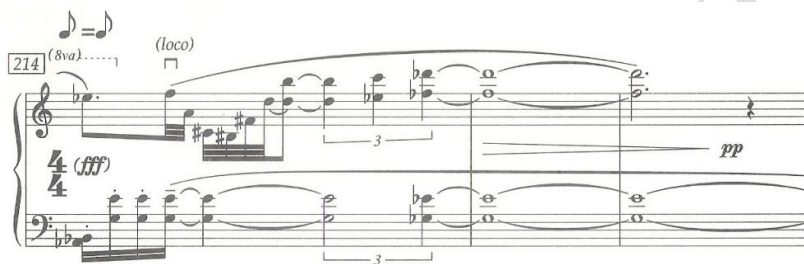


Fig. 18: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 8 - interlude)

From measure 217 onwards, an almost choral homophonic environment appears (**episode 9**), characterized by the homogeneous movement, but in opposite movement of the voices, in a calm (medium) register and in *p*, *pp* and *ppp* dynamics (fig. 19).



Fig. 19: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 9 – melodies with opposite voices movement)

A different phrasing follows, where groups of two notes played simultaneously in staccato are spaced out over a pedal chord in the left hand. This rhythmic speech will transition into chords that travel between the two keyboards. At this point, the change of chords from one keyboard to the other should be as imperceptible as possible, as if it were a speech to a voice. The passage of chords should be done in a careful way, creating the illusion of perfect legato. In this aspect, the composer sometimes asks for the realization of the vibrato effect (fig. 20), which can be performed by the op-

posite hand to the one playing the chord or by the oscillation of the instrumentalist's leg (heel elevation).

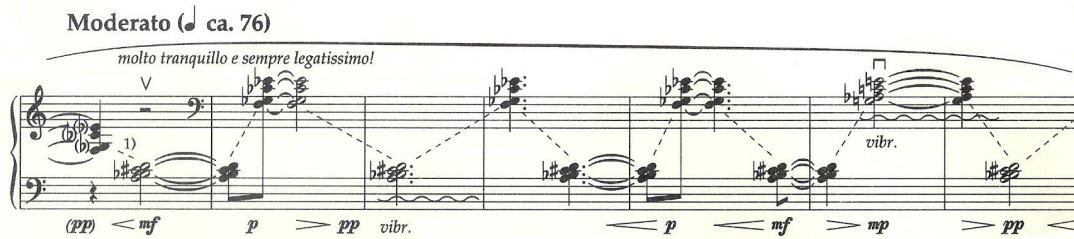


Fig. 20: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 9 – Chords and Vibratos)



Fig. 21: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 10 – counterpoint with out-of-phase regularity in the upper voice)

That interlude will culminate at bar 271 in a chord structure in the form of a testimonial passage (episode 11). The chords move in an alternating dialogue between the two keyboards (fig. 22).

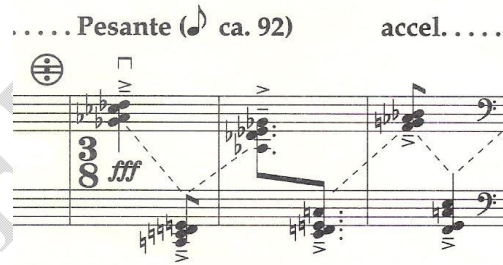


Fig. 22: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episódio 11 - chords passage)

A pedal chord follows in the lower voice and, in the upper voice, chords played in staccato with an irregular rhythm repeat the structure at the end of six measures (fig. 23). The sonority disappears until pp.



Fig. 23: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 11 - staccato chords exposition with irregular rhythm)

From bar 308 onwards, the composer asks the performer to perform from memory in order to be able to go through the staged part in the most natural way possible. Episode 12, which is actually a conclusion, is strongly marked by the motifs that move to an increasingly high range, supported by the chord created by D-E-C in an extremely high range (fig. 24).

Fig. 24: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 12 - final staging, high octave)

This high range will then contrast with the final part played in a single voice, although articulating the two keyboards in a low register in a *pp* sound (fig. 25), reaching the emptiness sustained by the moment of final silence (in which a fixed smile is staged to the audience).

Fig. 25: Mauricio Kagel, Episoden Figuren (episode 12 – final exposition, low octave)

In the last three systems, the composer indicates that the music must be played simultaneously with the dramatization through the performer's features, in this particular case the smile and the fixed gaze towards the audience. According to Anzellotti, there is a tension here between the sound and the scenic action, taking into account the extremely high, almost diabolical chord and the smile for the audience, which is contrary to the condition of the music. This staging is a characteristic of instrumental theatre and gives a humorous effect to the end of the play (Frisius, 1997).

Next, an analysis is presented of some aspects that stand out in the work *Episoden Figuren* in terms of the use of various resources available in the accordion with converter system.

### 3. Conclusion and the interpreter's point of view

From the point of view of the performer and the use of the accordion with converter, Mauricio Kagel only wrote for free bass (left hand keyboard). In terms of effects, he resorts to accentuations performed with the bellows and vibratos. It also uses echoes / resonances in both hands (imperceptible passage of the same musical text from one keyboard to the other).

The composer also explores the independence of hands and the equality of performance in technical terms on the two keyboards, by passing the same text sometimes on the keyboard of the right hand and sometimes on the keyboard of the left hand. The crossing of voices between the two keyboards also occasionally occurs in the piece.

The dynamics used are quite contrasting, with moments in *ffff* and moments in *ppp*. As for the registers, their use by Kagel is quite diversified as he uses 7 different ones on the right keyboard and 3 different ones on the left keyboard. Sometimes, in a more lyrical text, the composer resorts to medium registers (violin, clarinet). In *sforzando* chords or in moments of *ff* dynamics, the composer chooses the master register. And in other passages of a virtuosic nature, the choice of the organ register appears.

Regarding the tessiture, the composer often explores the most unexpected sounds on each of the keyboards, that is, the bassoon register in the right hand (fig. 26) and the high 8th register in the left hand. These moments are sometimes associated with changes in roles between the voices.



Fig. 26: Mauricio Kagel, *Episoden Figuren* (bassoon register in the right hand keyboard)

In Kagel, surprise, sudden excess, sudden change of speech, different articulations and different dynamics are important factors in his writing. Each episode portrays a different sound environment (descriptive music). In the end, the composer uses the theatrical representation associated with the performance as an effect.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the meticulous detail written in the work regarding all the intended interpretation conditions: dynamics, tempo oscillations, articulation, exact form of execution (fast trill, change of chords, vibratos). This detail clarifies any doubt that could arise for the inter-

preter, but on the other hand it also suggests that no freedom of execution is offered to him. In turn, theatricality emerges as an impulse attributed to the interpreter, challenging the listener's musical listening and reflection to a permanent questioning about the positioning of art, in this case, of music in a society in constant change.

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