Instrumentation

Actor/Actress I

Actor/Actress II (can double as celesta player)

Violin

Bassoon

Percussion

- Drum kit (4-5 Tom-Toms, pedal Bass Drum)
- 3 suspended Cymbals (1 Sizzle, 1 Hi-Hat), 1 Hand-held Cymbals
- 3 Temple Blocks, 3 Cow Bells, 3 Motor Horns
- Side Drum, Timpani, Glockenspiel

Percussion II

- Drum kit (4-5 Tom-Toms, pedal Bass Drum, Cymbals)
- 2 Congos, 3 Motor Horns, I Tam-Tam
- 3 Timpani, 1 Xylophone

Loud Whistle (to be played by Actor 1)

Whip (to be played by Celesta player or Actor 2)

Celesta (notated at ideal sounding pitch)

Piano

Tape

Staging Requirements

- 1 Slide Projector with Screen. Ideally both slide projector and screen should be centrally placed. The slide projector may have to be operated from the front row of the audience. Slides are available upon request from the composer.
- 1 Podium for the bassoonist. It should be placed behind the screen, approximately 2 metres high. From the audience's perspective the bassoonist should appear to be "on" the screen.
- 1 Podium for the conductor. The conductor stands on the podium in the audience. The podium should be high and central enough for his movements to be seen both by the players on-stage, and the violin and piano.
- 3 Spotlights (minimum). Two spotlights should be aimed from behind the audience to form a single point on the screen (see staging instructions). A third is to be shone on the bassoonist from behind his back. The staging instructions are devised for performances with three spots.

Stands with lamps for all musicians

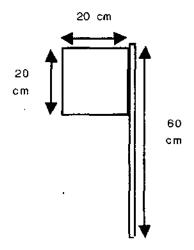
- 4 Torches/lights for percussion I, percussion II, bassoon and celesta.
- 2 Flags for actor 1 with short handles and wooden painted squares instead of flag cloth. The squares should be made out of wood to avoid the cloth flapping. The squares should be made out of a light wood (ie venear) so that they are light enough for the actor to wave them without undue effort. A Pair of flags is available upon request from the composer.

2 pairs of white gloves for Actors 1 and 2

A pair of dark glasses with reflecting lenses for Actor 1

2 referee's cards (1 red, 1 yellow) for Actor 1

Both Actors 1 and 2 should be dressed neutrally in black.



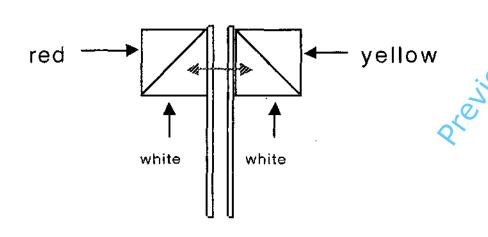
Suggested Dimensions for the Flags

The recommended length of the flags is 60 cm.

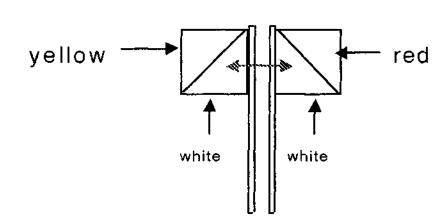
Recommended length of the squares is 20 cm.

If the flags are to be smaller they must respect the same proportions between square and handle.

RIGHT FLAG



LEFT FLAG



Suggested Colouring for the Flags

Each flag should have a red side and a yellow side.

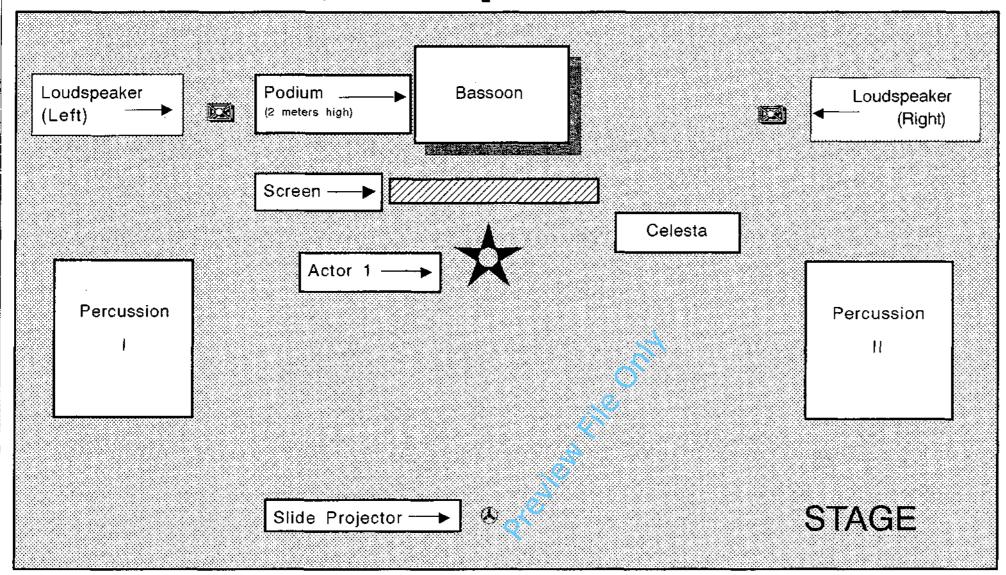
The Right flag should have an inverse colour relationship to the Left flag (ie if both flags are pointing in the same direction, one flag will be red and the other yellow). In the opening position of the piece (bar 1) both flags should show their respective yellow sides.

The colours of the flags should be bright.

The patterns of the flags are left to the discretion of the producer but should be abstract and simple. The patterns shown here were used for the first performances of *Signal Failure*.

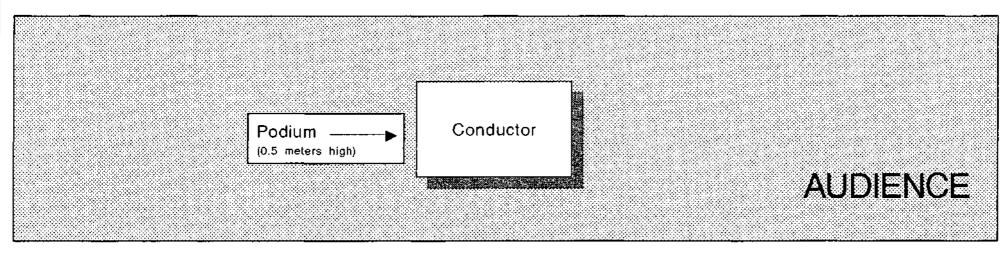
Signal Failure - Overall Plan





Piano

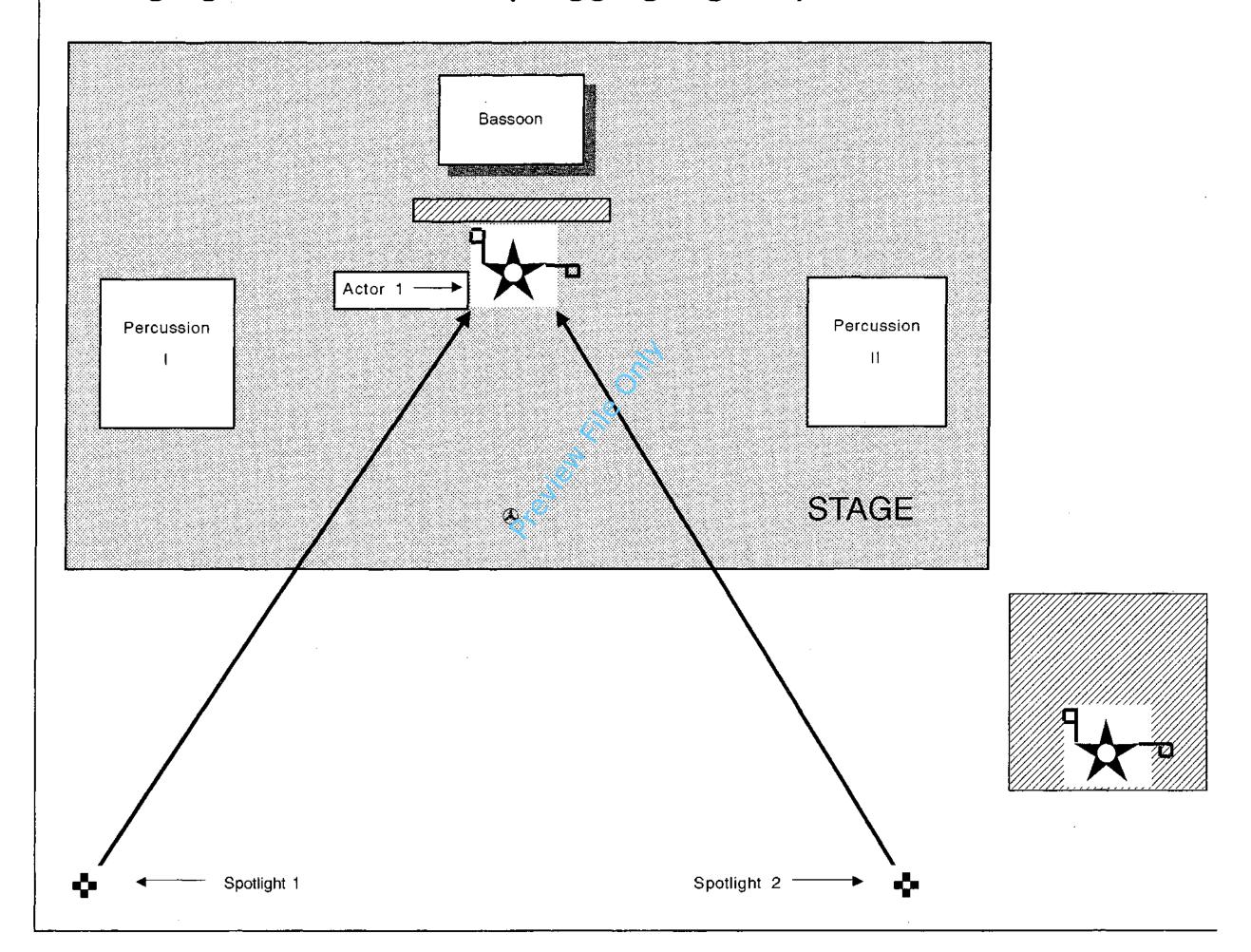
Violin



Spotlight 1

Spotlight 2 ──►

Staging for movement 1 (Flagging Signals)



1. Flagging Signals

The first movement of Signal Failure, Flagging Signals, opens with a dialogue between Actor 1 flag signals and the rest of the ensemble. At first the musicians on stage answer with flashing lights. From bar 87 onwards, however, they respond to Actor 1's signals with music. The lighting for Flagging Signals reflects this dialogue by alternating between darkness and moments when Actor 1 is lit by spotlights 1 and 2. In bars 31-44 and 60-80 there must be complete darkness punctuated only by torch lights. This means the musicians on stage should only turn on their stand lights shortly before bar 81 when they start playing.

Bars	Lighting	
1-30 31-44 45-60 60-80 81-96 97-103 104 105-107 108-133	Actor 1 (lights at 60% strength) Darkness (Torches) Actor 1 (60%) Darkness (Torches) Actor 1 (60%, stage music stand lights on) Spotlights off (Music) Actor 1 (60%) Spotlights off (Music) Actor 1 (gradual increase from 60 to 100%)	oreview tile only

Performing the Flag Signals

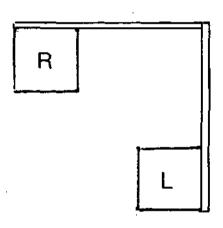
- 1) Actor 1 should be dressed in black and wear dark glasses with reflecting lenses so that his eyes cannot be seen.
- 2) The Actor's flag movements should be precise and rhythmical (ie landing on the beat). No gesture he makes should distract the audience from the flag signals.
- 3) The Actor should leave the movement to the next signal to the last possible moment. He should therefore find the most direct way of going from one position to the next.
- 4) It is important that the Actor does not "act" performing the movements. The intrinsic difficulties of carrying out the instructions precisely are part of the idea of the piece.
- 5) The actor should take up the position for bar one in darkness before the music starts. The piece therefore starts with the spotlights coming on simultaneously with the opening bar of the music.
- 6) When the spotlights are no longer on, the actor can relax his position. He should prepare the next signal in his own time before the spotlights come back on.

The Actor should also note the following points about the notation of the flag signals:

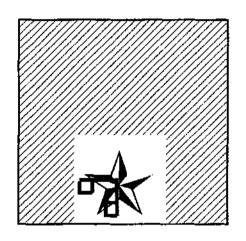
- 1) They are notated from the audience's point of view (and not his!)
- The notation is an exact representation of the relationship between the flags except when "EXTENDED" is marked.

 "Right EXTENDED" means that the Right flag should be held at arms' length in the direction of the flag as drawn. When there is no "EXTENDED" marking, the actor should hold the flags centrally with the arms slightly bent in front of his body.

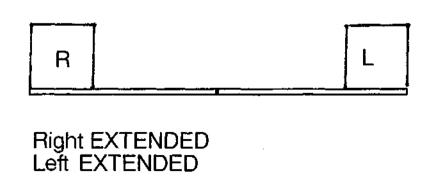
Example A: Flags held in front of the body (bar 4)

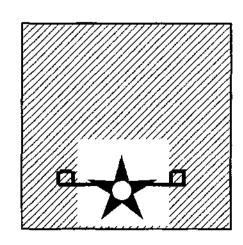






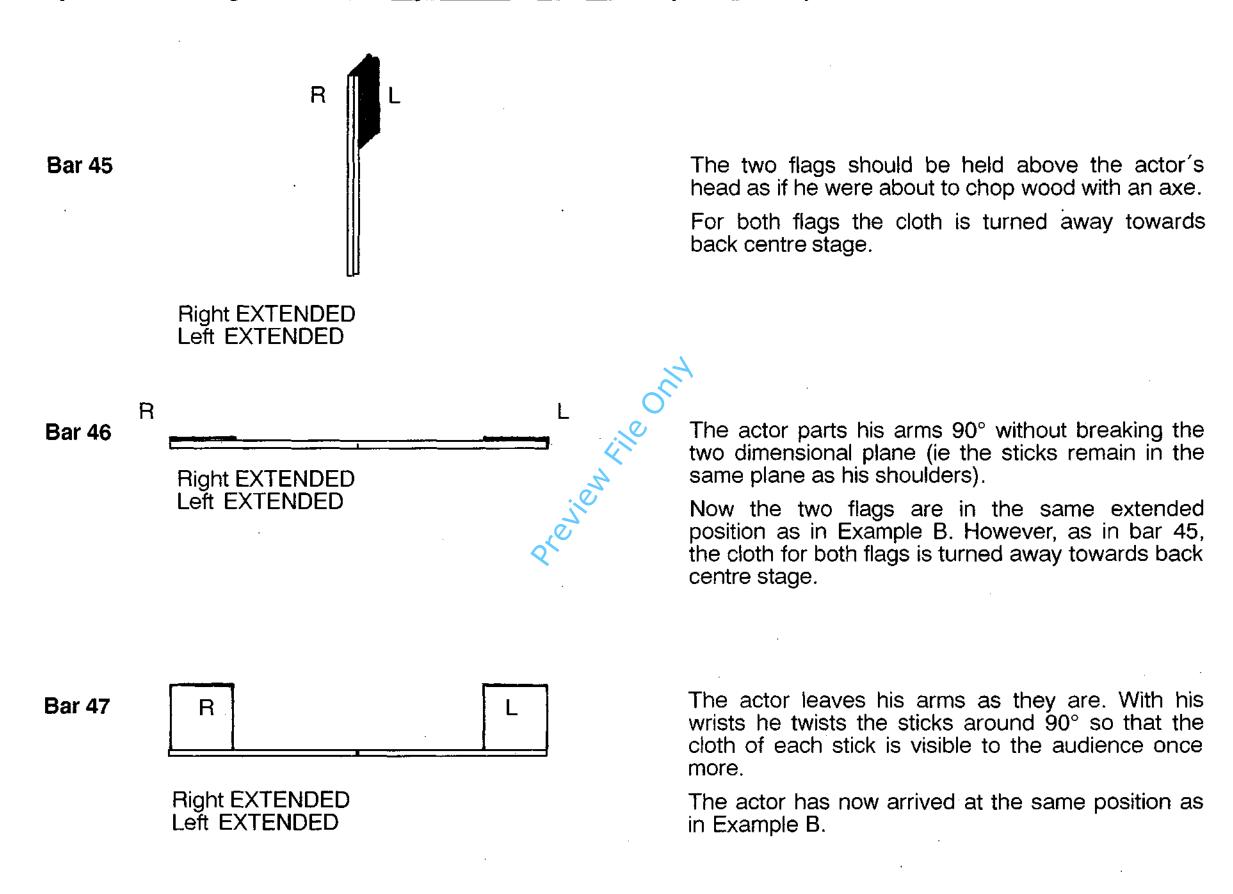
Example B: Flags held in "EXTENDED" position (bar 47)



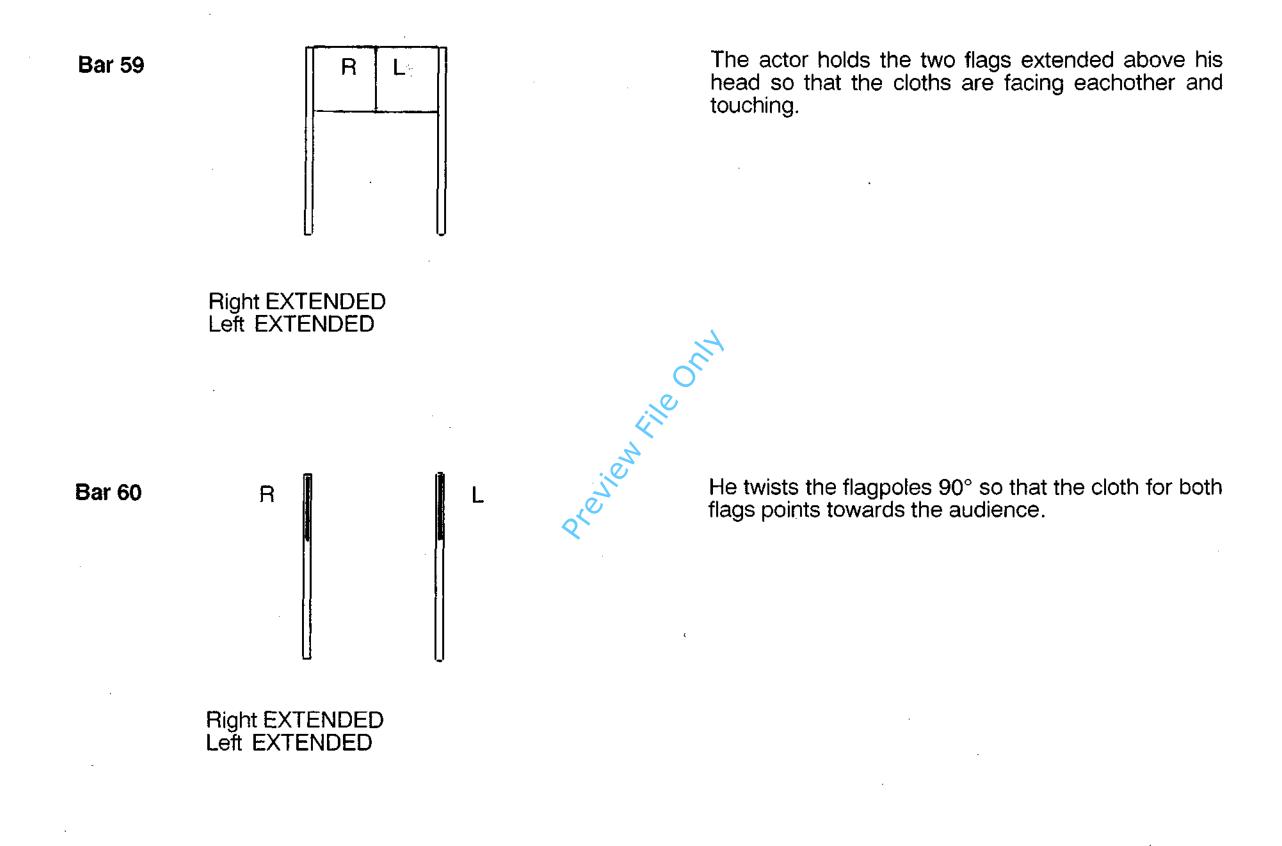


3) impo	Ther essible	re are also movements in which the flags break out of e to read from a distance. This can happen in two ways:	the two dimensional plane, making the semaphore signals				
	a)	The actor turns the flag "cloth" (i) towards the audience distance by the flag stick.	or (ii) away from it. From head on the cloth is hidden from a				
		(i) (ii)					
	b)	The actor turns the flag sticks towards the audience. Fro	om head on you can only see the end of the pole and the				
		• •	ori ¹⁴				
<u>Exa</u>	Example C: One flag hidden behind another (bars 28-30)						
		Qreile de la company de la					
	Bar	28 L	The actor has rested the two flag poles against eachother.				
		R					
	Bar	30 R	He flips the left flag down behind the right flag so that it is completely covered.				

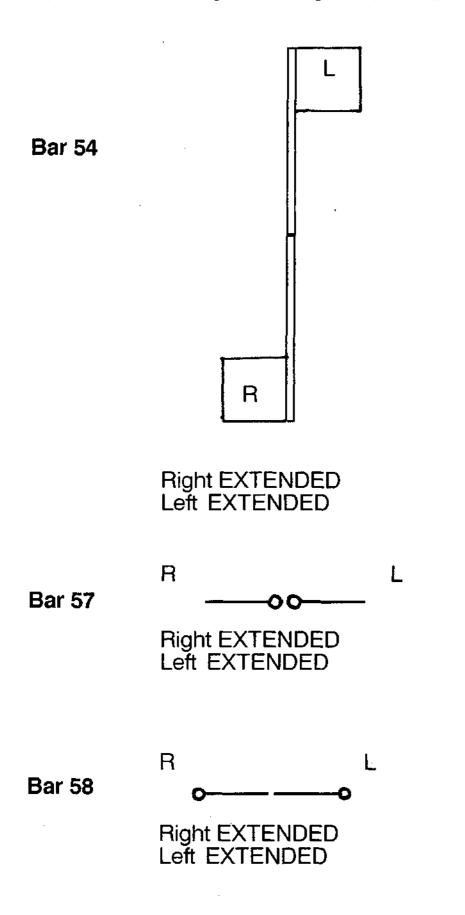
Example D: Pointing the cloth away from the audience (bars 45-46)



Example E: Pointing the cloth towards the audience (bars 59-60)



Example F: Pointing the flag sticks towards the audience (bars 54-58)

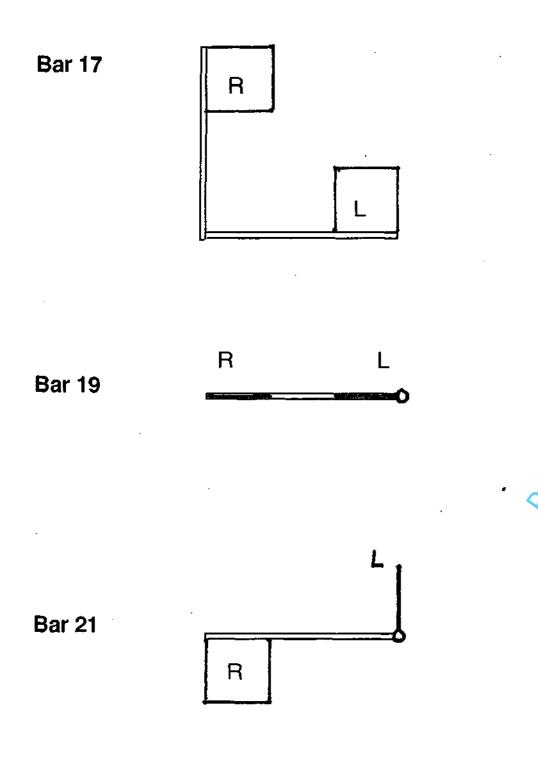


The actor holds the left flag as high as he can above his head and the right flag as low he can. Both flags respect the two dimensional plane.

The actor brings the two flags together roughly at chest level. He does this by by lowering the left flag 90° and forward, and raising the right flag 90° and forward until they are both pointing straight ahead at the audience. He arrives at a finishing position with the two flagpoles resting alongside eachother and the cloth of each flag pointing horizontally outwards.

With his wrists the actors flips the poles around so that they are on the "outside" and the cloth on the inside. The flag sticks remain at chest level pointing in the direction of the audience.

Example G: Combining different dimensions (bars 17-21)



The two flags are held by the actor as shown in the diagram with the sticks meeting in the middle.

He makes a 90° twist forward with both flags remaining in the same position with respect to each other.

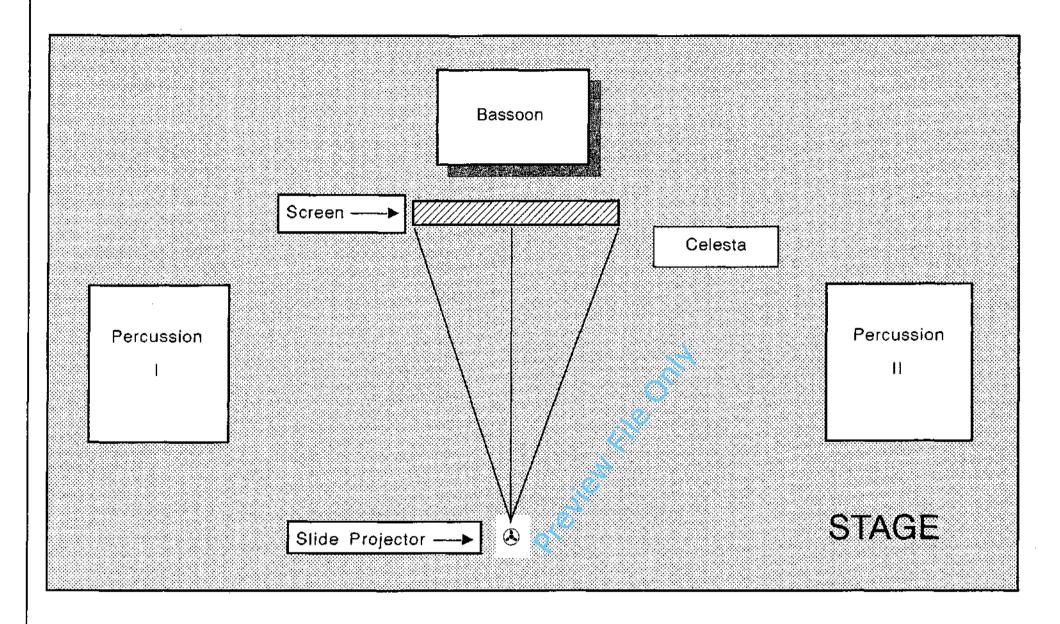
The right flag moves forward across the actor's body. It ends up with the flagpole pointing to the actor's right and the cloth tilted towards the audience (as in Example D).

The left flag moves to a position where the flagpole is pointing forward in the direction of the audience.

The flagpoles remain where they are. The actor lets the cloth of the right flag fall 90° with his wrist until it points downwards.

He turns the left pole upwards until the cloth of the left flag points vertically upwards.

Staging for movements 2-3



Movements nos. 2 and 3 are for slides alone.

In the second movement, however, the audience should also be able to see the bassoonist, whose music is very much identified with Dr. Livingston. In performances it has been found that the light of the music stand was sufficient. However, if it is not, spotlight 3 could be turned on for the bassoon's solos (bars 159-165; 180-222).

2. Dr. Livingston interprets the music of the savages

In the second movement slides punctuate the course of the movement. It is important that they arrive as near as possible to the first beat of the bar they are assigned to. Here are the English and German (original) texts for each slide:

1 Dr. Livingston interprets the music of the savages

Dr. Livingston dechiffriert die Musik der Wilden

At a time when Great Britain still graced her colonies with the trappings of imperial life ...

.

Als Groß Britannien seine Kolonien noch mit den Errungenschaften imperialer Lebensart beglücken durfte, ...

3 ... Society at large found African culture frightening, subversive

... sahen weite Kreise die Eingeborenenkultur als etwas Beängstigends, Subversives an ...

4 ... or at best ...

... - bestenfalls ...

5 ... something of a freak show.

... als eine Art Grusical.

But according to the British aristocracy, all the shy African drummers needed to get them going was ...

Immer hielten britische Aristokraten für die schüchternen afrikanischen Trommler...

[Whip]

[Peitsche]

7 ... a little encouragement.

... einige aufwärmende Ermutigungen bereit.

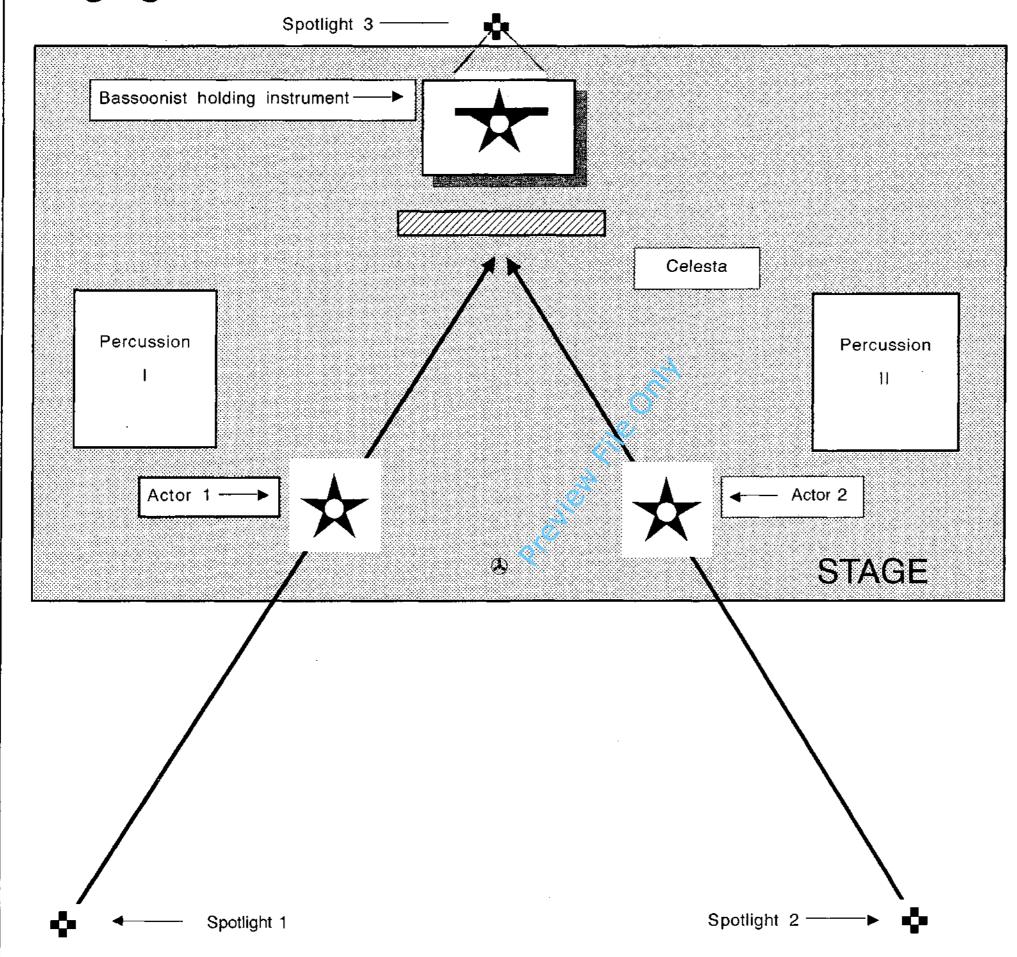
8	Dr. Livingston, on the other hand, opted for a more hands-on approach.	Dr. Livingston dagegen unternahm einen menschlicheren Annäherungsversuch.
9	His trailblazing field work on signals coming out of the bush	Er war der erste, der den Signalen aus dem Busch systematisch auf den Grund ging
10	yielded an elaborate network of relationships:	und er entdeckte ein verzwicktes Netz von Beziehungen:
. 11	an interactive conglomerate of music, dancing and communal rites.	Ein interaktives Konglomerat aus Musik, Tanz und gemeinschaftlichen Verkehr.
12	Livingston promptly got an offer: the chance to host the next "Multi-ethnic Culture Show".	Prompt bekam Livingston ein Angebot: ein Exklusiv- Vertrag als Moderator für die nächste "Multi-Ethno- Culture-Show".
13		Er widerstand
14	but when he was offered a kind of incentive he could not refuse	bis gewisse Argumente, denen er nicht verschliessen konnte,
	[Whip]	[Peitsche]
15	he soon changed his tune. [Bassoon melody]	die Wende einleiteten. [Fagottmelodien]
16	Livingston talked and talked	Livingston redete und redete

17	and talked	und redete
18	But here and there the drummers could provide "authentic" music examples to his monologue.	Aber zwischendurch durften die Trommler seinem Monolog authentische Musikbeispiele beisteuern.
	[Whip followed by drum music]	[Peitsche und Trommelmusik]
19	The result of the musicians' increased exposure:	Ein wahrhaft multikulturelles Ereignis:
20	English culture was enriched.	Die Engländer fühlten sich bereichert
21	The emigrated drummers became millionaires	die inzwischen ausgewanderten Trommler wurden reich
22	and OBEs.	und geadelt.
23	Only Livingston mourned the fact that the delicate fabric of music, dance and communal rites	Allein der arme Livingston jammerte, weil das delikate Netz aus Musik, Tanz und gemeinschaftlichem Verkehr
24	had been ripped apart for ever.	für immer zerissen war.

3. Signal Traffic

The third movement features slides of traffic signals. They are available upon request from the composer.

Staging for movement 4



4. Traffic Signals

"Traffic Signals" consists of a duel to the death between two traffic policemen. Until bar 307 the traffic signals are improvised by Actor 1. From this point onwards the movements of both Actors 1 and 2 are stylised and "set" to the music. There are 2 basic movements (beckoning the traffic to come and signaling for it to stop) for traffic coming at the policeman in four directions (North, South, East, West). For the actor North is straight ahead (the direction of the audience).

The 8 possible signals are:

W (set up West-East flow): beckon with left hand from left to right

E (set up East-West flow): beckon with right hand from right to left

N (set up North-South flow): beckon with left hand from front to back

S (set up South-North flow): beckon with right hand from back to front

Stop W (halt the traffic flowing from the West): raise left hand to the left

Stop E (halt the traffic flowing from the East): raise right hand to the right

Stop N (halt the traffic flowing from the North): raise right hand to the front

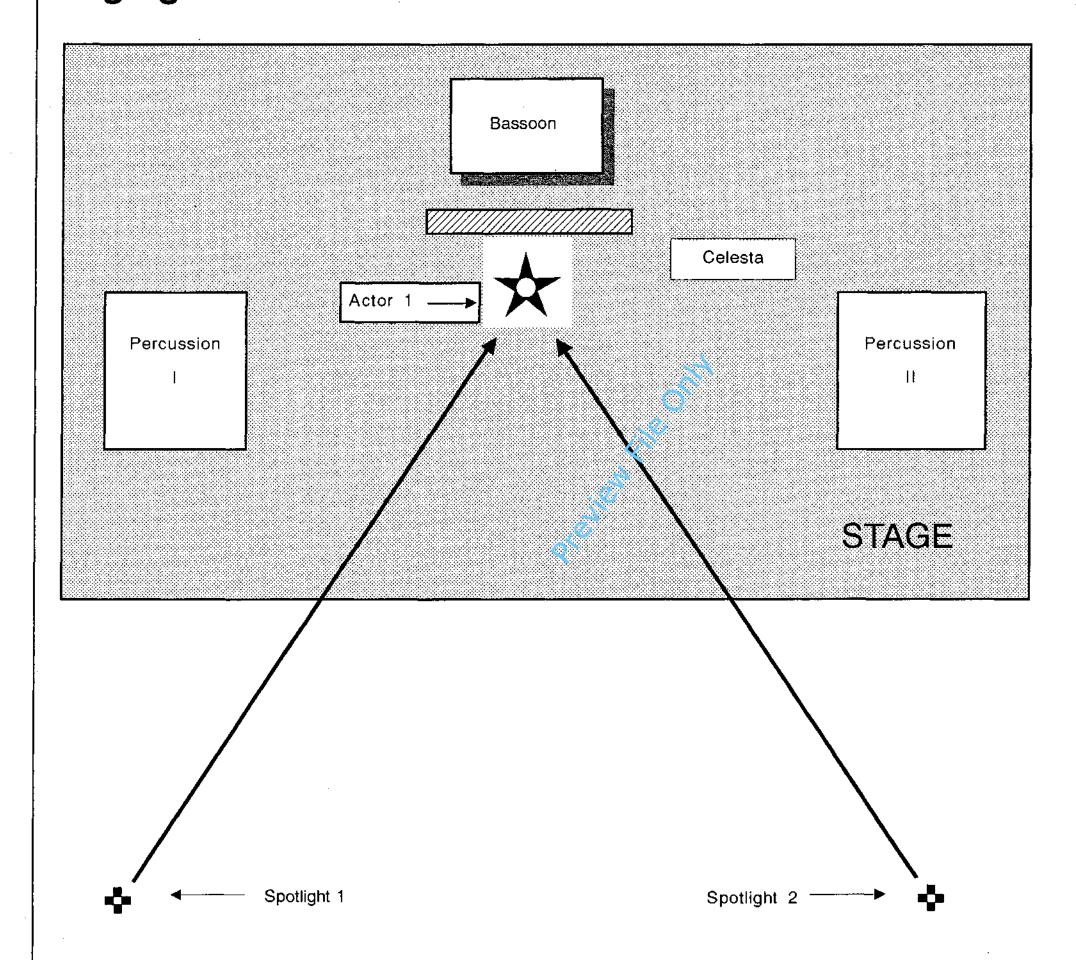
Stop S (halt the traffic flowing from the South) stretch out the left arm to the left

The movements of Actor 1 and Actor 2 should be executed precisely with the music. In particular the "Stop" movements should land on the beat. Note that the routine of signals normally feature an alternation between the hands, such as in bars 308-310:

W Stop N Stop S E Stop W S N Stop E left right left right left right

Whereas Actor 1's signals change at a frenetic pace, Actor 2's signals suggest a man at ease with the situation. Often he uses both at hands at once to control the traffic. It is this that gives Actor 2 the edge when the battle ensues. This reaches its climax in bars 379-394, where Actor 1 slows down and collapses.

Staging for movement 5



Bars 396-406 should be staged like a judgement scene where the bassoon condemns Actor 1 to death. The bassoonist stands for the first time, holding the bassoon horizontally in the air (see Staging for movement 4) and then, with majesty, turns his instrument 90° until it is vertical, a movement akin to the hand movement of a Roman emperor. Actor 1 leaves the stage after the spotlights have gone out on him in bar 405.

In bars 405-413 Actor 2 celebrates his victory by a cadenza in which he is gradually transformed into a Boulez-like conductor. The third beats of bars 405, 406, 407 should look like a hybrid between a traffic signals and conducting beats.

The symbols ① ② ③ ④ are used to represent clear beats which, however, should never completely lose their provenance as traffic signals.

By the third and fourth beats of bar 413, the Actor has become a fully-fledged conductor. It is at this point that he takes over conducting the ensemble from the "real" conductor until bar 425. Bars 425-428 are led by the pianist and the conductor only takes over again with the upbeat to bar 429.

5. Talkshow

Actor 1 is a talkshow host. He hosts a chat show purely by body language. He is answered by the musicians on stage, each of which have distinct musical personalities. In bar 485, the show runs out of the actor's control when all players try to butt in at the same time. The brutal way percussion I interrupts the celesta's cadenza leads to the actor showing the player the yellow card. When percussion I carries on as before, the actor finds he has no alternative but to send him off.

General Comments

Signal Failure is of all my pieces the *enfant terrible*. It consists of a series of provocatively short-breathed events which come together to form a new kind of whole. The world of Signal Failure is best understood by analysing the title. It refers not only to "signals that fail to communicate" but hints at the possibility of a "signal failure" – a complete disaster.

The first meaning suggests the way semaphore flags and morse code signals in movement 1, drum signals and silent movie insert cards in movement 2, traffic lights in movement 3, traffic signals and conducting in movement 4, body language and the "sending off" in movement 5 are taken out of their normal contexts, and found new meanings and associations. The fabric of the music is also broken up by pseudo-quotations and episodes where rhetorical conventions are turned on their head. My intention has been to create a form where musical and theatrical signals mingle and interract with eachother on equal terms.

The piece should always feel dangerous – as if it is on the verge of an imminent disaster. Yet this feeling is intimately bound up with the timing of the piece. A performance best serves it by avoiding straining for effects and by aiming for precision.

for Actors and Small Ensemble

