

Brandon Farnsworth

# CURATING CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FESTIVALS

A New Perspective on Music's Mediation



[transcript] Music and Sound Culture

Brandon Farnsworth  
Curating Contemporary Music Festivals

*For C.*

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Special thanks to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Jörn-Peter Hiekel, as well as Prof. Dr. Dieter Mersch, Prof. Dr. Christa Brüstle, and Prof. Dr. Florian Dombos. This work would not have been possible without the support of Dr. Fabian Goppelsröder, Dr. Ines Kleesattel, Prof. Isabel Mundry, Michael Schindhelm, Prof. Patrick Müller, or Silvia Berchtold. I would also like to thank Gender Relations in New Music, the entire team of the Munich Biennale, and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin for their support.

This work is an adaptation of the dissertation “Curating Festivals for Contemporary Music” submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber Dresden.

With support from the Zurich University of the Arts, Institute for Theory.

### **Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>



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Cover layout: Maria Arndt, Bielefeld

Cover illustration: *Tonhalle* (2018) by Ruedi Häusermann, installation view in front of the Bayerische Staatsoper. Photo copyright Armin Smailovic.

Proofread by Brandon Farnsworth

Printed by Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, Wetzlar

Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-5243-7

PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-5243-1

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839452431>

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

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## Image and Figure Rights

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**Image 1:** SC 1950.82.28. Dickinson Brothers, The Transept, from Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, 1854, published, lithograph printed in colour on paper, sheet: 16 x 19 in., Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Establishing the Field

This book is an attempt to establish a theoretical basis for curatorial practice in the field of contemporary classical music (CCM).<sup>1</sup> As organizers and artists alike are experimenting with new forms of mediating and presenting musical work, CCM's relation to its audiences is becoming a key area of concern both for scholars and for practitioners. There thus exists an urgency for reflecting on these approaches from a scholarly perspective informed by practice, one that can reflect on the interrelationships between forms of music's administration, mediation, and performance. In order to do this, this work will lay out a new way of understanding the mediation of contemporary musical practice, one that is both informed by curatorial practices in neighbouring artistic disciplines, but also developed out of the unique and specific challenges that exist in relation to such practices in CCM.

Central to this project will be the argument that music curatorial practice is not synonymous with interdisciplinary concert dramaturgy: composing concerts, integrating sound installations, performances that feature visual elements, or “expanding” the definition of musical material does not necessarily mean success in achieving social relevance, or creating new paradigms of musical production, rather, such initiatives often represent remixes or superficial changes to a robust underlying ideology. In contrast, music curatorial methodologies should be understood as symptomatic of a new and different kind of approach to musical leadership, one with an increased attention to the effect of mediation and contextualization on the perception of musical practice.

A variety of relevant sources drawn from curatorial studies in both the visual arts, and in the performing arts of dance and theatre, will allow for connections to concepts and ideas about the mediation of art from a broader array of practitioners. In this way, curatorial practice in music is not the “importation” of something from

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1 Throughout this work, the term the term “contemporary classical music” (abbreviated CCM) will be referred to when discussing the field in general, while the term “New Music” will be used when discussing specifically the German context, where the relationship to *Neue Musik* is an important historical reference.

a foreign discipline, but rather constitutes specific kind of approach to thinking about mediation, one that is informed by music history, but also takes advantage of an abundance of interesting practices and ideas also from other disciplines. These examples and arguments are used in order to enrich discussion of the mediation of CCM festivals, and to provide additional perspectives on how to interpret the formats being analyzed.

Curatorial practices in music are thus argued to be ones that understand the setting of a specific frame for a musical event as itself an expressive and often critical act. In developing a framework for examining such practices, which this volume attempts in the first two chapters, the goal is to create more nuanced understandings of music curatorial practice that will in turn spur and inform future music curatorial initiatives.

Although important developments are occurring in many different kinds of musical institutions, the focus of this work is specifically on the leadership of festivals, in particular focusing on two complementary case studies of curatorial practice in CCM. While it is not just festivals that are beginning to engage with these challenges—important developments are happening also in the programming of concert series and seasons, in the leadership of permanent cultural institutions, and in education—both their central role in the sustaining of European musical life, and their being the site of several significant attempts at addressing these issues make them an ideal starting point for investigating the mediation of musical practice.

Even just focusing on Germany, a short survey of some of its best-known festivals reveals how many of them are currently undergoing fundamental changes that can be viewed through the lens of a curatorial perspective. For instance, its oldest festival for New Music, and one of few entirely for new commissions, the Donaueschinger Musiktage has over many editions now tried to reflect on how forms of musical presentation must be updated for a changing society.<sup>2</sup> The Darmstadt Summer Course, which despite ostensibly being a summer school is also a major “festival” in its own sense, has also been embracing change, creating so-called “open spaces” as of 2010 that give a platform for participants in the course to self-organize and show their work, and is expanding the (sub)genres of musical programming it offers. The Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik, another important commissioning festival, has been attempting new approaches and concert formats, such as music theatre. The ECLAT festival in Stuttgart has also been embracing music theatre, performance installations, and concerts that address their multi-media dimensions. The Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, which will be studied here, has been creating idiosyncratic new forms of music theatre that are experimenting with the limits of the genre. The Maerzmusik festival, another

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2 On the festival in Donaueschingen, see Köhler 2006, 87–93.

case study, has been engaging in deep theoretical reflection about its role and the composers it programs. A view just over Germany's borders reveals similarly large-scale and important festivals experimenting with their formats, such as Oslo's Ultima festival, Vienna's Wien Modern, the Festival Rümelingen near Basel, or Archipel in Geneva, to name just a few examples close at hand.

While certainly worthwhile, a detailed study of all major German New Music festivals would be beyond the scope of the current volume. Instead, the focus will be on two case studies, the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater (Chapter 4), and the annual Maerzmusik Festival at the Berliner Festspiele (Chapter 5), each of which for its own unique reasons can be considered as exemplarily of certain changes and challenges that are currently occurring in this field. While both are also examined historically, the primary concern here is with some of their most recent editions: the 2016 and 2018 editions of the Munich Biennale, as well as the 2017 and 2018 editions of Maerzmusik.<sup>3</sup> These festivals are argued to exhibit important symptoms of a new kind of leadership of music festivals, one that closely combines administrative and artistic considerations together into what will be argued to be a curatorial practice.

A study of the more august Donaueschinger Musiktage and Darmstadt Summer Course was decided against. This is because the two case studies that have been chosen here are argued to exhibit under their current leadership unique and exemplary forms of musical mediation not seen to the same extent at the two other festivals. This in turn makes them more significant case studies than their two better-known counterparts.

Examining the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater in Chapter 4 allows for the opportunity to explore New Music's relation to music theatre in depth. The focus in this chapter lies on an examination of the relationship between the artistic practices of both Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris, the current co-directors, and in particular the platforms that they have run in the lead up to their two biennales so far. Both composers' focus on the composition of heterogeneous elements in their compositional practices, a trait that appears again in how they constitute the conditions of production for biennale compositions, establishes an integration of their artistic and administrative practices that is mirrored in their approach to the biennale. This is argued to relate to curatorial practice in its blending of organizational and creative aspects, and resembles the skillset required for the contemporary knowledge worker. By in turn encouraging young practitioners to take charge of the mediation of their works as an extension of their artistic practice, they mirror

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3 For both the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, as well as the Maerzmusik festival at the Berliner Festspiele, the festivals were examined both historically since their founding, and through first-person methods (with the author visiting the festival editions that are discussed in-depth in this volume).

the transformation of their own artistic practices into curatorial ones. This creates a kind of nesting-doll situation that allows for an examination of both new educational practices (and their challenges) in music theatre, as well as the manner in which their commissioned productions are mediated to the festival public.

The book then complements the focus on music theatre by examining the Maerzmusik festival and its processes of commissioning that puts emphasis on the experience of the festival event itself as the objective of the curatorial practice of the festival curator, Berno Odo Polzer. The selection of individual works, and the specific ways in which they are programmed, presented, and combined in various formats are understood as a form of artistic expression by the director, achieved through the careful composition of festival concerts. These concerts weave CCM together with related artistic presentations into situated combinations that function through thematic or formal similarity.

Developing out of this, Polzer's music curatorial approach is focused on the specific "composition" and *mise en scène* of musical and other works in order to investigate various concepts and ideas related to music, its history, and its relationship to issues of time and perception. As Polzer's position as artistic director of this festival concentrates definitional power in one individual, the festival becomes a realization of his vision. This relationship between artistic director and the works he programs has been readily established in curatorial discourse. Using the history of exhibition-making as a guide, this approach is forecast to come into tension with musical practitioners taking charge of their own processes of mediation, as explored with the Munich Biennale.<sup>4</sup> While this contradiction exists between emancipated values at the centre of the festival and the establishment of the curator at its authorial centre, the festival is nevertheless regarded as a successful instance of using musical means to create a festival that explicitly positions itself towards major societal debates such as decolonization, gender issues, ecological crises, capitalism and neoliberalism, etc.

In examining these two case studies, it is argued that they are touching on and beginning to experiment with curatorial concepts, however that there still remains avenues of improvement when it comes to the realization of music curatorial

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4 Throughout this volume, the term "musical practitioner" will be used to refer to a person who is participating somehow in the act of music-making. This term is used because of its ambiguity as to the exact nature of the role being played, and allows for description of musical performance without assigning discrete, pre-codified roles at the same time. This is particularly relevant in those cases where established roles and responsibilities in the music-making process are being subverted, or new combinations of responsibilities are being formed. These new forms are then allowed to emerge through their description rather than through recourse to reified categories. Its ambiguity also allows for an openness to exist in regards to the disciplinary or genre affiliation of the music maker—allowing also this to be something defined in the situated event of performance.

practices. Through the close examination of these two exemplary cases, as well as through the laying of a theoretical groundwork for music-curatorial thinking, this volume begins to span the gap between artistic and administrative practices in CCM and those of the larger performing arts field.

## 1.2 The State of the Art

### 1.2.1 Scholarly Literature

While several fields touch on issues also related to curating in music, a significant scholarly treatment of the subject has yet to be found. While some prominent scholarly projects relate to the intermixing of artistic and organizational considerations in musical practice, this project will be argued to differ from earlier research in significant ways.

A first position in this area is Martin Tröndle, with his scholarly project to establish a theory of the concert as a basis for the field of *concert studies*. This approach has been outlined by Tröndle across two edited compilations, *Das Konzert* (2011) and *Das Konzert II* (2018). He is clear throughout both his texts and the articles collected in his compilations that the object of his research is the concert for classical music in both its historical development, and as it exists today, a field that he claims has received very little academic treatment historically, which also supports the position maintained here (2018, 25). While his chief concern is the classical music concert, and thus slightly different to this project, it nevertheless takes a similar perspective on contemporary musical practice, examining the constitution of its frame.

Tröndle argues that the classical concert as it exists today, with its separation of the participants in a concert event into a collective of silent, passive listeners and active musicians, is no longer relevant for a society where individuality is highly prized (Tröndle 2018, 42). In other words, the classical concert format is no longer adapted to the contemporary public, and must evolve to suit their interests. As a remedy to this problem, Tröndle suggests a broad program of experimentation with the various elements of the concert situation, all with the goal of finding various new ways of presentation that will catch the attention of a contemporary public.<sup>5</sup>

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5 As Patrick Hahn suggests, the metric of success that Tröndle uses in this part of his argument quickly reveals itself to be the market. His essay also supports the criticism that Tröndle defines his project extremely narrowly in terms of the traditional classical concert as it has persisted over time (see Hahn 2018, 18–19).



Tröndle's approach to defining the basis for a domain of concert studies is problematic in its framing of the field of concert studies using a *structuralist* methodology: distinct musical communities are understood as homogenous and self-same, and the relationships between them (i.e. what makes for a successful concert experience in pop music, or techno, or hip-hop, etc.) is established through an equivalency of relations (a is to b as c is to d). Therefore, neither the form of audience subjectivity constituted through characteristics of the concert event, nor the content being programmed are permitted to be called into question outside of a relativist understanding of community values. The diagnosed irrelevancy of the classical concert then places an impossible burden on solely the issue of concert setup and staging to solve, while unquestioningly upholding core aspects of *Werktreue* and the classical canon as seemingly faultless and beyond criticism.

Added to the methodological problems with this approach, Tröndle's project is, because of his underextension of the classical concert, dealing with the established canonical classical music repertoire and the implications for it of new and different kinds of stagings. The material is pre-assumed, and seemingly cannot be called into question, rather, only its "framing" is in need of further reflection for him, in a schema that thus implies that these can be freely separated from each other. This volume seeks to establish a more dynamic relationships between artistic practices, their mediation, and their reception. The focus is on understanding the situated assemblages of contemporary music festivals, rather than on application of presumed values. It is furthermore focused more on the dissolution of homogenous, container-based conceptions of cultural production (not a chief concern for Tröndle). For these reasons, the work of Tröndle does not establish a significant forerunner to the following project.

Jonas Becker's *Konzertdramaturgie und Marketing: Zur Analyse der Programmgestaltung von Symphonieorchestern* (Concert dramaturgy and marketing: an analysis of the program design of symphony orchestras) is subject to similar criticisms. Leaving aside that the work deals mainly with three symphony orchestras in Duisburg, Essen, and Bochum, rather than with festivals, the work would conceivably be relevant to this volume through its titular examination of the relationships between concert design and marketing. This connection is a fundamentally curatorial consideration, in its focus on the ways in which managerial and economic concerns can be reconciled with artistic ones (see section 2.4.2). Furthermore, the term curating is often implicitly understood as somehow synonymous with a form of program design by many who use it in writing about CCM, as will be shown in the next section.

Becker's conclusion seems to sketch the outlines of some important curatorial problems that would need to be solved in order to better realize non-normative concert dramaturgies, audience outreach, and more diverse programming at the three institutions analyzed. However his project is clearly one of description and not of

engagement or theoretical action. He states that due to certain resistances among programmers, musicians, and the audience, only modest amounts of change are possible (2015, 199–202). A balance is called for between “convention and innovation,” forming a synthesis that is already heavily weighted towards stasis, and is not further expanded upon (202). Unwillingness to thoroughly explore the constitution of the categories he describes means that he does not succeed in developing any useful theoretical tools for transforming the status quo. For instance, the dualism between “music-internal” and “music-external” (*inner- and aussermusikalische Themen*) is steadfastly maintained throughout, along with once again the untouchability and immutability of the concept of the musical work, preventing more fundamental analysis of the issues that are diagnosed to be pursued.

In contrast to the previous two positions, Christa Brüstle’s *Konzert-Szenen* (2013) has been a useful reference, in that the work follows musical practices over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that understand the moment of their performance as not a moment of reproduction, but as an event happening in the moment. Through this shift, she is able to write an history of alternative concerts, ones that acknowledges that all senses of perception make up the concert experience, not just the ear, and that so-called “musical autonomy” should perhaps not always be the sole focus of the concert (Brüstle 2013, 9–10). She furthermore astutely points out that the separation into aspects “internal” and “external” to music, crucial to both positions above, may be better understood as “external to musicology” instead (*ibid.*).

The scope of Brüstle’s work does not however include approaches to festival leadership; her concern is with artistic practices. Her work is nonetheless significant in its portrayal of artists who see the mediation of their works as integral to their musical expression. Thus, while not explicitly positioning itself in regards to issues of arts administration, as with Tröndle or Beckert, Brüstle ends up deriving an approach to concert mediation out of artistic experiments with it. The trajectory of her work provides an important account of the historical factors in contemporary musical practice that have led to many of the mediational strategies employed by musicians discussed here. Because as a matter of course it does not focus on institutional questions, or questions of the festival event, the work is then nevertheless not a significant forerunner to this volume.

While no major scholarly projects may currently exist in this regard, there have been attempts particularly within the realm of journals and publications about CCM that have begun to explore the implications of curating in the field of music. A recent notable example was the May 2018 issue of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, focusing on the theme of curating and its potential meaning in New Music practice. Among the articles was an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist (by the director of Wien Modern, Bernhard Günther), underscoring the importance of that star curator as the symbol of curatorial practice par excellence in New Music’s imag-

ination of curatorial practice (Obrist and Günther 2018). This was complemented by an article by Jörn-Peter Hiekel contextualizing the field's interest in curating with music historical examples of earlier attempts at rethinking the concert format (Hiekel 2018a). This author also published an essay, situating the interest in curating by other fields within a history of curating's emergence as an independent field (Farnsworth 2018).

Also of note is a significant article in the *New Music* publication *MusikTexte* that asked a series of questions about festival leadership to the leaders of major European festivals themselves (Eclat, *Wien Modern*, *Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik*, etc.). The article is noteworthy in its premise that festival directors themselves can and should be a source of discourse about their festivals themselves (Nonnenmann 2017).

Perhaps the most ambitious project so far has been the initiative *Defragmentation: Curating Contemporary Music*, a cooperation between the Darmstadt Summer Course, the *Maerzmusik* Festival in Berlin, and the *Donaueschinger Musiktage*, in cooperation with the former director of the *Ultima* Festival in Oslo. The initiative describes itself as a

research project aimed at enduringly establishing the debates currently ongoing in many disciplines on gender & diversity, decolonization and technological change in institutions of New Music, as well as discussing curatorial practices in this field. (*Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt*, n.d.)

The project consisted of internal meetings between festival directors and expert advisors in the fields they wished to address, as well as a final conference at the Darmstadt Summer Course in 2018. Whether the initiative will have any long-lasting effects remains to be seen, but so far has seemed to only act as a fig-leaf, addressing these issues superficially rather than show any fundamental willingness for change in either programming or festival infrastructure.

In their response to the *Defragmentation* conference in Darmstadt, the curatorial collective *Gender Relations in New Music* characterized the initiative as such:

The “Defragmentation” initiative—responding to our initial call to action [at the 2016 Darmstadt Summer Course]—is a long overdue opening into institutional acknowledgement of these issues; an important and laudable start. That being said, “Defragmentation” has yet to make any specific public commitments to serious structural change. Instead, the primary outcome of the overall initiative seems to be this week’s “convention”—an outcome that threatens to do little more than pay lip service to and tokenize the issues without tackling them head on. (*Gender Relations in New Music* n.d.-a)<sup>6</sup>

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6 Note that the author was involved in the drafting of this statement.

These issues remain unaddressed by the organizers. In other words, it seems as if, though there is gradually an acknowledgement of the importance of curating CCM—understood here as a cypher for critical knowledge production, an interest in issues of social justice, and a willingness on the part of organizers to reflect on how they are framing musical practices in their festivals—there still remains a lack of serious commitment to these issues on the part of festival leaders.

A further aspect that can be studied is how CCM practitioners use the words “curating” and “curator.” Examining the occurrences of these terms and the contexts in which they are used allows for an insight into how curatorial practices have been perceived implicitly by music practitioners. In order to do this, an opportunity sample ( $n = 16$  individual selected sources) of instances where the term has been used specifically by prominent figures in New Music and concert studies in recent years has been made, and its discursive context analyzed.<sup>7</sup> These consisted mainly of texts by musicologists, introductions to festivals and projects, essays in specialized magazines, and one interview. While this sample is small and statistically non-representative, it allows for a small survey of the use of the term across important figures in the German New Music community. The result shows both a range of meanings, and a general consensus about specifically two key characteristics of the term’s definition as it is currently being used.

The first finding is that the use of the term curating often seems to be used as a rhetorical marker to flag that the approach to organizing is based on some kind of theme, and therefore rather than operating within one single artistic tradition, is willing to engage with any related artistic discipline. It is also commonly associated with references to the visual and performing arts in this respect, and to practices that engage or navigate through multiple fields. An observed emphasis on experiments with concert staging, creating alternatives to established forms, relationships between various forms of knowledge, and by extension often also political considerations, means that curating is connotated with a renewed emphasis on the relationship between contemporary music and society, and a break in some form with the status quo.

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7 The following sources are significant instances of discussing New Music in regards to curating, curators, something being curated, or “curated by” (NB many sources are in German, where “Kurator, Kuratieren, kuratiert, kuratiert von” were searched for): Walker 2018, 405, 406, 409; Tröndle 2018, 11, 13; Wimmer 2018, 197; Lescène and Kreuser 2018, 28; Eckhardt 2018, 27; Roesner 2016, 10; Freydank et al. 2016, 95, 99; Freydank et al. 2018, 153, 156, 160, 161, 237; Gottstein, Skoruppa, and Neupert 2017, 8, 132; Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Donaueschingen e.V. 2018, 73; Berliner Festspiele n.d.–b; Daniel Ott in discussion with the author, 28 October 2017; Knipper 2018, 1; Hiekel 2018a, 22–23; Zimmermann 2018, 32; Osterwold n.d. NB this author’s published statements on curating have been deliberately omitted, but see here again Farnsworth 2018.

A second finding is that an implicit understanding of the curator as a person who experiments with the design of the concert setting and format, similar to the concept of concert dramaturgy, emerges frequently. Interesting about this aspect of the understanding of curating in music is that it is related to a very specific profile of the curator in the visual arts, whereby a star curator turns the organization of the exhibition and its mediation into a quasi-artistic practice and as a form of authorship.

This in turn is connected to a less frequent connotation regarding curating standing for a subjective form of administrative control over a concert, festival, or venue. This is an acknowledgement of the potential for curatorial practice to turn into a new form of hierarchical control, where only the artistic vision at the top of the pyramid is permitted to realize their, as one put it, “megalomaniacal” vision (Gottstein, Skoruppa, and Neupert 2017, 132).

## 1.2.2 Literature on Curating Performance

The previous section having been necessary because of the lack of substantive scholarly reflections on the concept of curating in musical practice, in the neighbouring areas of dance, theatre, and performance, significant reflection on the role of the performance curator has existed for several years from multiple practitioners, and can help shed further light on the current understanding of curatorial practice in the performing arts.

Notable publications in this field include the body of work about theatre and performance curating that Joanna Warsza and Florian Malzacher have been writing, editing, and publishing over the past several years. These include the four-part “Performing Urgency” series with Alexander Verlag (Malzacher 2015; Campenhout and Mestre 2016; Burzynska 2016; Malzacher and Warsza 2017), Malzacher’s documentation of his *Truth is Concrete* project (see Malzacher 2014b), and Warsza’s catalogue for Public Art Munich 2018 (Warsza and Reed 2019). These compilations feature a mix of scholarly reflection on issues surrounding performance curating and often shorter, sometimes more personal texts focused more on describing performances themselves. Another major recent publication in this area is the recent anthology *Curating Live Arts* (Davida, Pronovost, Hudon, and Gabriels 2018), which takes an approach more from the direction of the interdisciplinary performing arts, which it refers to as “live arts,” as seen in the title.<sup>8</sup>

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8 See also in that volume a list of networks, conferences, and initiatives related to these issues in the “live arts” in both Europe and North America (Davida, Pronovost, Hudon, and Gabriels 2018, 2n3). See as well the list of recent education programs in this field in the same volume (ibid., 2).

Tom Sellar, at the Yale School of Drama, and editor of the journal *Theater*, has also dedicated two special issues of that publication to this problematic.<sup>9</sup> Sellar's understanding of theatre curating largely corresponds with the received definitions of the music practitioners surveyed above, however presented explicitly instead of as subtext, and within the context of academic papers and interviews, in particular his text "The Curatorial Turn," written in 2014, which would articulate several important aspects of this then-emerging field. Curators are for Sellar the negotiator of various genre categories in an artistic moment when practitioners are blending various influences and practices. They are able to contextualize for an audience these works, and helping give them access thanks to their knowledge of the history of various pertinent discourses of art history, drama, etc. (2014, 22). This corresponds with the uses seen above associating the word curating in music with transdisciplinary artistic practice.

In defining the so-called curatorial turn in the performing arts, Sellar identifies historical precedents for the practice, discussing in particular how the interdisciplinary mixings and political practices of the 1960s and 1970s would lead to a wave of engaged and experimental programmers in the next generation of the 1980s and 1990s (2014, 22). While Sellar names important institutions in the North American context, such as the Wexner Center in Ohio, the Walker Center in Minnesota, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, there exist many at least somewhat analogous institutions in Europe as well, such as the German network of free theatres (*Freies Theater*).<sup>10</sup>

His diagnosis corresponds with similar progressive practices in New Music festivals that would occur in roughly the same time period. As will be shown in Chapter 4, composer Hans Werner Henze's founding of the Munich Biennale in 1988 in an attempt to encourage young composers to create experimental new music theatre works, along with the well-documented effect of the 1968 student protests on his thinking, also fits this description well (see section 4.2.2). The Donaueschinger Musiktage's integration of sound art and installations into its festival as of 1993 can also be understood as early evidence of embracing multimedial and perhaps interdisciplinary approaches to music-making (Köhler 2006). Even Matthias Osterwold's Maerzmusik festivals, examined briefly in Chapter 5, could be described in Sellar's words as a "multiplicity of intersected forms," and resonate to an extent with this diagnosis (Sellar 2014, 22).

In his attempt to describe the titular "curatorial turn" of the article, Sellar however distances such associations from his definition of a more recent form of performance curator, saying that a "newer group of independent performance curators ... has emerged in the past decade alongside a tidal wave of site-based, urbanist,

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9 Vol. 44 no. 2 (2014) together with Bertie Ferdman, as well as vol. 47 no. 1 (2017).

10 See Brauneck and ITI Germany 2017.

participatory, and relational performances” (Sellar 2014, 23). This new role is likened to the independent curators of the art world, and conceptually aligned both with the importance Sellar puts on contextualization, as well as with the *auteur* position of this form of curating in the visual arts (in other words ignoring the curatorial as a methodological approach). This in turn fits with the understanding of the curator in music as being associated with the subjective artistic control over the entirety of a festival or institution seen in the previous section.

Furthermore, and once again corresponding to the implicit understanding of curating above, “skepticism of conventional structures” for presenting theatre has led theatre curators to experiment with various formats for presentation (Sellar 2014, 28). This happens both on the level of individual productions, which no longer necessarily need to conform to the standard requirements of a production, as well as on the level of the festival or institution itself (28–29).

Related to this is an association between curating and institutional critique in the theatre. As Sellar writes:

But in the fiscally fragile, intensely collaborative, and interreliant community of theater makers, public criticism and even internal criticism of program choices remains rare. So, could the performance curator introduce a critical orientation and influence to artistic planning? That trait alone would seem to distinguish them from producers, who generally regard criticism as a press and marketing tool rather than a guiding element for their own work. (Sellar 2014, 27)

This facet of the concept begins to connect with another of its observed uses in music, namely that it is being used as a way of signaling one’s breaking with convention and taking a more critical attitude towards the structures of musical institutions. While this may be more widespread in theatre, in the contemporary music community, there remains a lack of institutionally-critical practices.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Historical practices associated e.g. with Fluxus, like Mauricio Kagel (see e.g. his film *Ludwig van*, 1970), as well as more recent practices like those of Johannes Kreidler (e.g. *Product Placements*, 2008) or Trond Reinholdtsen (the  $\emptyset$  series, 2015–) are notable exceptions, however the marginality of these few examples suggests they are the exceptions that prove the rule. Furthermore, while e.g. Bill Dietz points out the distance of musical practice from the institutional critique movement in the visual arts (2017, 9), Matthias Rebstock argues that this can be attributed to experimental music theatre practices have also been historically distanced from radically institutional critical practices seen for instance in the field of theatre. He writes that “[m]ost works of new or experimental music theatre in the 1970s were performed within structures that New Music had built, especially in the milieu surrounding radio broadcasting institutions. Initially, not many structures evolved parallel to the opera houses. [24] The foundation of free opera ensembles did not set in until the 1980s, gaining a further impetus in 1990s Vienna and Berlin. [25] As opposed to Freies Theater, the formation of a Freies Musiktheater was hence less political and less societally or socioculturally motivated” (2017, 532). It could thus conceivably be argued that the lack of analogous independent politically-

Related to this is an understanding of the term curator put forward by another prominent theatre scholar on the issue, Florian Malzacher. For him, the term is understood as a “self-provocation” (Malzacher 2017, 17). He explains that calling his practice curating is not just exchanging one term for another, but rather demanding a different approach from oneself, a way of questioning one’s mediating practice through a change of title, effectively reflecting this aspect of curating discussed above.

Significantly, these definitions of the performance curator from the field of theatre seem to closely forecast the understandings of curating music implicitly used by musical practitioners surveyed in section 1.2.1. This not only shows the proximity between experimental theatre and the experimental musical practices of New Music (which can also include Music Theatre), but also the need for scholarship uniquely focused on musical practice itself, in order to identify possible divergences from or extensions to the definitions put forward by Sellar and Malzacher.

### 1.3 Scope and Overview

The first concern of this volume is to develop a theoretical basis upon which a study of festivals for contemporary music can be undertaken. The intention is that this basis be beneficial for the further analysis of both these and other festivals, serving as a new theoretical framework in which to understand them. As will be explored, there exists a gap in the scholarly literature around the conceptual, artistic, and music-historical ramifications of current experimentation with the mediation of CCM festivals.

In the interest of spanning this gap, this book will also engage with a significant body of work that is already critically examining the structures of the festival format, namely the field of curatorial studies. Using this field as a starting point for analysis will make it possible to follow the histories of both music festivals and arts festivals back to a common ancestor, the universal expositions, revealing the set of basic theoretical assumptions that underpin both of these types of events. This approach allows for a transfer of concepts from the curating of large-scale arts events to those of contemporary music, in turn setting the basis for a rapprochement between various festival formats that are not often considered together. This is furthermore significant in that it is approaching festivals for contemporary music in

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engaged venues for music theatre works akin to those of theatre or the visual arts accounts at least partially for the discrepancy between New Music and other performing arts as to their engagement with political topics. This is because these other disciplines would develop more radical forms in independent venues, which would then make their way into larger, more established institutions through processes of canonization and the hegemonic appropriation of artistic critique as of the turn of the century (see also Boltanski and Chiapello [1999] 2005).



such a way as to both address this knowledge-gap in the musicological literature, while also establishing theoretical bridges to other academic disciplines.

Curatorial studies had until not too long ago focused mainly on festivals of the visual arts and perennial exhibitions. As will be shown in Chapter 3, it has however recently also become connected to performing arts festivals as well. This is the result of a shift in the self-understanding of curatorial practice (itself together with transformations in the art world), which is no longer exclusively related to the field of visual arts, but rather understood as a more general approach to mediation and creating frameworks for knowledge-production. Curating understood as the result of a carefully-composed event is a theoretical approach that aligns the field with theories of performance and the performative turn, and thus with the historic object of the performing arts. The many similar issues that music shares with other performing arts mean that an examination of curatorial studies in this field is particularly useful in developing an approach to curating festivals for contemporary music.

A result of this discipline-agnostic understanding of curating is that the concept can be applied to a wide range of issues. While this leads to a danger of overburdening the term, it can also be used as a methodology for establishing a form of critical mediation across a variety of media and contexts. This is in turn an approach that is also recursively applied to the writing of this volume itself.

For instance, the work begins with a long literature review establishing a definition of curating. While this is important in framing later arguments, it has also been specifically written as a primer on some of the key debates surrounding curatorial practice historically for a specifically musical audience. This means that it takes into consideration the particular concerns relevant to New Music, while also attempting to address these implicitly through a particular linguistic and conceptual framing in order to make it more easily palatable for that particular group. The goal is to present material for further argumentation, but also to lay out a broader framework for further research—such as the many interrelationships between festivals for the arts and their modes of presentation.

This extends to other areas of this volume as well. While musicology struggles with a lack of adequate tools for approaching transdisciplinary musical works, Chapter 3 provides an adaptable framework in the form of a series of concerns, issues, and common contradictions that can be adapted to help understand new registers of musical diversity.

Care has also been taken that the two case studies that are presented here complement each other in order to provide as broad an examination of issues related to curatorial practice and its relationship to New Music as possible. The Munich Biennale shows the potentiality that musical practices can have when unmoored from their relationship to the external reference of a singular tradition, and how experimentation with the process of creating a festival can take place. The Maerz-

musik festival for its part seeks to establish a new relationship to society and to its structures of knowledge-creation—mediated through the festival programming, itself understood by the curator as a quasi-compositional practice. Together, they show two different ways that curatorial practice in music can be realized in practice, with one festival focusing processes of commissioning, and another focusing on the presentation of works. While these two examples among many are in no way meant to represent a comprehensive panorama, it is hoped that they lay the foundation for further reflection on these and other music curatorial practices in the future.

As has been already mentioned, the other aspect of this framework begins to be laid out starting in Chapter 2 with the establishment of a common historical basis for establishing a theory of festivals for contemporary music and visual arts via the case of the Crystal Palace Exhibition and subsequent universal expositions. Subsequent art and music festivals that would spread around the world in the years after the initial success of the format are argued to be linked together through a common basic dispositive of the festival as a mode of subjectification, ultimately connected to a modernist ideology of display.

Having established this commonality, the rest of the chapter focuses on key moments in the discourse around the leadership for visual arts festivals. The focus of much of this discourse is on the relationship between conditions of display and the status of the work, as well as how these issues relate to the professional profiles of arts practitioners (artists, curators, etc.). A main concern of this discourse at the latest since the 1980s has been on problematizing the figure of the curator, which has in turn led to curatorial practice becoming a main subject of reflection and debate in the visual arts since that time. As curating became more formalized and academicized starting around the 1990s, it began to produce a rapidly-growing number of reflective texts on its origins, histories, practices, and ideologies of these figures and their practices.

One outcome of this proximity to the academy has been the emergence of more philosophical approaches to curating, which understand it as a practice of critical mediation, one that helps set the frame and catalyze events of knowledge-production for others. Arguing with theorist Irit Rogoff, this is the facet of the practice that also gives it a critical potential in light of cognitive capitalism's appropriation of knowledge-production. In general, it is this understanding (not definition) of curating that this book takes as a point of departure for understanding what curatorial practice in the field of music could entail.

With Chapter 3, this approach to curating is connected to an understanding of the receiver-centric approach to the art-encounter, argued through a re-reading of the critique of minimalism by performance studies theorist Shannon Jackson. The constitution of the event of critical knowledge creation from the previous chapter is thus interfaced with a complexification of how the modalities of various media

and disciplinary traditions contribute to it. In order to better understand how the specificities of a performing arts tradition inflect this critical charter, curatorial practices in dance and theatre are also examined.

In dance, the complexities of its relationship with both the museum and curatorial practice are examined, looking at the unique positioning of modern dance practices, as well as the issues and possibilities that contemporary dance practice has produced for dancers and audiences alike.

In theatre, the curatorial practice and understanding of theatre curator Florian Malzacher is examined through an investigation of his project *Truth is Concrete* at Steirischer Herbst Graz in 2012. This is in order to study how curatorial practices in theatre interpret their relationship to critical knowledge production. This section is also an opportunity to make a historical and semantic differentiation between the curator and the dramaturg, who is frequently cited in debates around the mediation of performance as a figure with a similar profile. The dramaturg is found to indeed share many similar features to the curator, however it is concluded that both the curator's historical hypervisibility, as well as the large critical discourse that contributes to it, mean that the latter term is gradually supplanting the former.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, and the Maerzmusik Festival at the Berliner Festspiele respectively, the two case studies at the centre of this volume. In both cases, the approach is to first give an account of the history of the festival since its inception and across its various artistic directors. Cumulatively, these histories build important strata that co-determine current festival editions. They also both offer perspectives on how these festivals have changed over the full course of their development, in consideration also of relevant literature, something that has until now not been rigorously attempted in regards to either of these two festivals.

In examining the Munich Biennale in Chapter 4, this historical examination is followed by an examination of the relationship between the artistic practices of both Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris, the current co-directors, and the forms of administrative experimentation they are undertaking at the biennale. Both composers' focus on the composition of heterogeneous elements in their artistic practices appears again in how they constitute the conditions of production for biennale compositions, effectively establishing a link between their artistic and administrative practices via an expanded notion of composition implying a taking into consideration of many diverse (f)actors that constitute the performative event while creating their work. This relates to curatorial practice in its blending of organizational and creative practices, and resembles the skillset required for the contemporary knowledge worker, with whom the figure of the curator shares many similarities.

Several productions by the biennale will also be analyzed, in order to highlight certain other, also artistic, facets of their leadership. The basis of these analyses

was, in addition to research, also the author's own experience visiting biennale productions.

This first-hand experience informs the analysis of the biennale. It also helps to expose areas where the newly-conceived festival can improve its offering, such as in the need to ameliorate its strategies for mediating productions to their audiences. Despite these criticisms, developing an approach to commissioning music theatre works that produces relevant productions for contemporary society and audiences is a significant achievement in the field, and merits further study. They are doing this by encouraging young practitioners to take charge of the mediation of their works as an extension of their artistic practice, mirroring also the transformation of their own artistic practices into a curatorial one.

Chapter 5 compliments this focus on processes of commissioning with an emphasis on the experience of the festival event itself as the objective of the curatorial practice of the festival curator, Berno Odo Polzer. Here once again, the chapter begins with a historical examination of the festival and its origins as the Musik-Biennale Berlin—a festival for New Music in the GDR, and its subsequent integration after November 1989 into the Berliner Festspiele, where it now still resides.

The festival's focus on presenting individual concerts "composed" by the festival director have led to an analysis of the festival argued through individual works and the specific ways in which they were programmed and presented. Developing out of this, it will be shown that Polzer's music curatorial approach is focused on the specific "composition" and *mise en scène* of musical and other works in order to investigate various concepts and ideas related to music, its history, and its relationship to time and perception.

Polzer's position as artistic director of this festival concentrates a great deal of definitional power in one individual; the festival becomes a realization of his vision. In another example of the usefulness and adequacy of curatorial discourse, it will be argued that this relationship between artistic director and the works he programs has been readily established in curatorial discourse, and that the position he takes is as necessary in the current context as it is bound on a collision course with musical practitioners taking charge of their own processes of mediation, as explored with the Munich Biennale.

While this contradiction exists between emancipated values at the centre of the festival and the establishment of the curator at its authorial centre, the festival is nevertheless regarded as a successful instance of using musical means to create a festival that explicitly positions itself towards major societal debates such as decolonization, gender issues, ecological crises, capitalism and neoliberalism, etc.

Between these two case studies, as well as the effort invested in laying a groundwork for music-curatorial thinking, the key output of this book is the connections that it establishes between emerging new forms of experimentation with the mediation of CCM and both curatorial discourses and a newfound critical project. It

attempts to span the gap between New Music practice (including administrative practice) and other forms of contemporary musical and artistic practice through an exploration of the concept of curating.

## 2 Curating

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### 2.1 Introduction

Music festivals and contemporary art biennales are both based on the common concept of the festival.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, they share a common link in the arts and culture festivals that have arisen in various forms over the course of the past 150–200 years, since their advent in the modern era, and the related social transformations of the industrial revolution and European colonialism. For this reason, the first case discussed in this volume will not be an arts festival at all, but rather the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition), which took place in London's Hyde Park in 1851.

This first universal exposition would prove to be a crystallization of much of the ideologies that would come to lie behind music festivals and arts biennales for the subsequent 150 years. Their historical similarities and divergences in the interim years can in this way be better brought into focus through an exploration of the value systems and ideologies imbued in this historical exhibition's infrastructure. The common ancestor allows for a contrasting between the development of the two different traditions in the interim, in turn a way of investigating differences between music festivals and visual arts biennales.

An integral part of visual arts biennales has, at least since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, become also a form of experimentation with the organization of the display itself as a practice and integral part of its operation. The complex networks that come together to make up the biennale have often been explicitly thematized within biennales themselves, by artists and artworks, but also by the emerging class of curators who design the structures of their festivals in such a way as to take a position within the knot of power relations that define the parameters of the festival.

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1 The Italian spelling will be used (rather than the English “biennial”) in discussing arts biennales. This is in order to mark the relationship that these events have with the Venice Biennale, or as art historian Caroline A. Jones says, to mark their formation “against the backdrop of the ur-biennale, *la Biennale di Venezia*” (2012, 69). Note though that original spellings have been preserved in proper names and self-identifications of biennales (e.g. “Manifesta: European Biennial of Contemporary Art”).

Music and theatre festivals for their part have less of this critical tradition, though these have also operated as similar, if not more powerful, spaces for negotiating power relations and artistic reputations. This evolutionary difference between the two types of festival in relation to the common ancestor is used to bring clearly into focus the many kinds of relationship between ideology and the staging of arts festivals. They serve as sites of modernist ritual, meant to inculcate certain sets of values, be they nationalistic, aesthetic, or critical, in the festival public.

After having examined the Crystal Palace Exhibition and its implications, Documenta will be analyzed as an example of how this tradition, initiated in those earlier universal expositions, continued in smaller festivals specializing only in the arts in the post-war period. Throughout its history, it has illustrated both the process of instrumentalization of the festival, but also the growth of the practice of curating which would ultimately take charge of it. With Szeemann's Documenta 5, the emergence of the independent curator is examined. Remarkable about the figure of the independent curator is how they see the constitution of the exhibition as a form of artistic practice itself, experimenting with its parameters in order to present their own subjective message. The independent curator is thus presented as a post-modernist shift towards subjective rather than universal narratives. Szeemann also called into question the relationship between curator and artist, in particular as artists were also increasingly working with context as well, with the emergence of conceptual and installation art. What Documenta 5 ultimately shows is the beginning of curatorial practice's self-reflexive approach to the contextualization of artistic work, and an early example of the exhibition as disputed territory between curator and artist.

Examining Documenta 11 shows how this approach to experimentation with the format of the large-scale arts festival can be used to explicitly address the problematic forms of knowledge-production of the modern arts festival. Documenta 11 is an attempt at reframing the narrative of artistic development away from its privileged place in the West, asking the audience to consider the wide range of artistic production happening across the globe as entangled with one-another, taking on a post-colonial perspective. It did this not through completely rejecting artistic production of the West, but rather attempting to reframe it within a new, global narrative. The curatorial approach to Documenta 11 pre-empts much of the critical project that defines curating also today: it becomes about working out a particular infrastructure design that allowed for knowledge to be produced in the event of experiencing art that was not a reproduction of a Western-centric ideology.

As curators explored the conditions of display, the question regarding the nature of the distinction between the role of curator and the role of artist can be addressed. While both artist and curator have become engaged in experimentation with exhibition display and contextualization, the professional profile of the curator is found to be distinct in its need to exist as a balancing act between so many

different stakeholders, be they donors, local or international politics, the working relationships with artists, relevancy to current artistic debates, stylistic innovations, etc., that constitute the event of the festival or exhibition project. Mediating between these different interests while at the same time maintaining an ethical “curatorial responsibility” dedicated to nevertheless staking a relevant and critical position in regards to societal debates is what defines the embattled figure of the curator.

This positions the curator as always in-between so many fields. They are a prophet of new ideas, but also a priest charged with preserving the old. They synthesize creative and managerial strategies in their practice, but must remain critical. Their talking and debate is perhaps pre-instrumentalized by cognitive capitalism’s thirst for ideas, but earnest reflection can take place when also considering this aspect in discussion. Balancing between these stakeholders means working actively in the field of management and institutional leadership itself. Ambiguously existing between instrumentalization and critique, the curatorial position is engaged with creating the context, creating situations that resist the possibility of confinement. Rather than allowing previously-problematic concepts to inflate through their integration of their criticism, it becomes about finding place for new beginnings, new stories, ones that better connect with the current transformations of contemporary global reality.

The reason for examining the emergence of curating in the visual arts has been to outline a definition of the practice as a kind of critical mediation that is agnostic in regards to the areas of knowledge that concern it. It is portrayed as a way of considering how mediators can navigate their complex surroundings while maintaining an interest in supporting the creation of artistic experiences that call into question the society in which they exist. Beginning with universal expositions is a way of looking at how the event of art’s reception by an audience has since the beginning of the modernist period and the industrial revolution been informed by a mode of display that disseminates the ideology of power to its subjects. Looking at the post-war period, the goal is to trace the emergence of a questioning of this system through experimentation with the very infrastructure itself, however paired with significant misgivings about this project’s criticality, as it dovetails with the emergence of criticality and creativity with forms of organization as desirable characteristics of the immaterial worker. A line of flight is suggested that does not work dialectically, but rather suggests a persistence of inventiveness with the creation of critical infrastructure, for suggesting new stories to tell that trace pre-existing but non-normative paths through the network.

The first step in building a curatorial framework for analyzing both music festivals and biennales is to examine the early modern universal expositions that they share as common ancestors. Understanding the ideologies that drove these events, which still continue until today, will provide a key to understanding the underlying



*Image 1: SC 1950.82.28. Dickinson Brothers, The Transept, from Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, 1854, published, lithograph printed in colour on paper, sheet: 16 x 19 in., Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts*



ideologies that continue to drive both contemporary festivals, and their continued growth in new areas of the world.

In 1851, what would become known as The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations would open in London's Hyde Park. By the time it closed, it had attained the dimensions of a megaevent: over the 141 days the exposition was open, it attracted over 6 million visitors and featuring 17 062 exhibitors (Teissl 2013, 28). Comparing this to the relatively well-visited Documenta 14 in 2017, with 891 500 visitors over its hundred days in Kassel, the size of this huge undertaking can begin to be grasped (Documenta/Statista n.d.). The exposition consisted of four sections, raw materials, machines, manufactured goods, and visual art, and was meant as a display of innovation and progress from all participating nations. Nations were defined here as all those nations that participated in global trade at the time, notably including China (Teissl 2013, 32). The Crystal Palace exhibited a clear desire to present a showcase of all of human production happening at that time. Between the lines, it told a story of global development, one closely linked with the economic and nation-building interests of imperial England.

From its emphasis on presenting the British Empire on an “international stage” to its doing so through the means of showing exemplary production from many different countries on that “stage” that was the exhibition hall, the Crystal Palace Exhibition would share many characteristics of later arts festivals and biennales. While it was by no means the first large-scale festival, both it and its successors would define the festival format’s new relationships to capitalist ideology, nationalist sentiment, and a growing educated middle class.

As curator Marian Pastor Roces argues, the true subject of the assembled cornucopia was the concept of capital in all its facets: the capital city, capitalist conquest, even the capitals of letters and columns (as in the title, “The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations”) (2010, 57). It is not by chance that this attempt at unification and representation took place in London in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: the city at the time was the centre of the British Empire, which had grown to immense global importance in issues of trade and governance. The exposition itself was both celebration and assertion of London as the nexus of power via the means of this mega-event.

The exposition took place in an enormous temporary construction of glass purpose-built by the architect Joseph Paxton and taken down after its closing. Historical accounts of the building describe it as a vast palace of cast iron and glass reaching as far as the eye could see, a kind of temple to the exposition of all those artefacts from around the world presented within (see Image 1). Its spatial organization would reveal much of the hidden motivations and significance behind this grand event. What the Crystal Palace Exhibition constructed was nothing less than a prototypical modernist architecture, one which claimed the power of definition of global networks and their relations.

Through the construction of its unique architecture of crystal-clear transparency, it created an entire system in which the cultures of the world could be subsumed and ultimately brought to heel under the imperial power of its host. The palace’s transept afforded within the building clear views over all the exhibits, putting them into a grand narrative of industrial progress and triumph before the visitor’s eye. The transparent-yet-impermeable glass walls linked the building with the park and the capital city itself, the definitional centre of the exposition, while also containing it. Its spectacular dimensions were a concentration of the city’s aspirations at profiling itself as the central figure on the global stage, spreading “peace and stability” to its colonies around the world.

This capacity to define a view and vision for a city and its relationship to the rest of the world, as well as the concrete economic impact that such a grand event provided to London, proved to be an irresistible model for many major Western seats of imperial power at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century wanting to stake their claim of superiority and centrality on the global stage. Following closely after London, and in a bid to stake its claim to superiority over other American cities, New York

initiated its own universal exposition in 1853, complete with its own replica of the Crystal Palace. The building, placed in what is now Bryant Park, would dwarf its surroundings, and introduce a new dimension to New York's skyline (Koolhaas quoted in Roces 2010, 55). An exposition in 1855 in Paris would quickly follow.

The number of cities who would come to host such events would from there only grow, including by the end of the century expositions across both Europe, the USA, and Australia with the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1.1 The Scopic Regime of the Crystal Palace

London's Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 can be understood as a point of concentration of so many relationships between society and practices of display, one that would come to be a central influence on later arts biennales and festivals up until today. In order to understand its significance, it must be understood that the exposition's mode of display is part of a larger deployment of capitalist-modernist ideology. This means understanding the exposition and its construction as an architectural materialization of a certain ideology relating to both the city and its international relations, particularly relations of coloniality (Roces 2010, 52).

To do this, one must first examine the relationship between what is put on display and the conditions of display themselves. In his article "The Crystalline Veil and the Phallomorphic Imaginary," art historian Donald Preziosi details the nature of this relationship. For him, the Crystal Palace Exhibition was exemplary of a typically *modernist* system of display, one that would come to establish the basis of art history and exhibition practice in the century to follow.

To say that this system is modernist is to understand it as insisting on a particular worldview, one founded on enlightenment principles of rationality and sense, but also on a self-understanding of Europe (and specifically England), as the foremost innovator in these issues, in other words implying a narrative of teleological progress, with Europe in the lead.

This kind of generalization about nation states comes from the particular status that works in the exposition would have. Imagining once again this grand collection of works of art and industry from so many countries brought together, Preziosi argues that:

The artwork (and perforce any palpable cultural artifact, object, or practice) is taken to bear a relationship of resemblance (a metaphorical—and hence substi-

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2 The Paris Treaty of 1928 would later come to regulate the frequency and list of responsibilities of these universal exhibitions. Enforcement of the treaty is managed by Bureau International des Expositions, also based in Paris. The bureau includes a list of "historically important" universal expositions that predate its founding on its website (Bureau International des Expositions n.d.-a).

tutional—relationship) as well as a part-to-whole relation (...[an] index) to its circumstances of production. (Preziosi 2010, 38)

The objects are placed into the Crystal Palace, and are made then to represent something about the conditions of its production, and by extension the culture of its producers. This means that “the art object’s visibility is a function of its legibility as a *symptom* of everything and anything that could be plausibly adduced as contributing to its appearance and morphology” (Preziosi 2010, 38). He uses the metaphor of the pantograph, an instrument used to extrapolate drawings to different scales, in order to illustrate this *pars pro toto* relationship. The exposition, for its part, underlines these relationships via the exhibition concept formed by this ideology, wherein:

Its exhibitionary order was the ideal horizon and the blueprint of patriarchal colonialism; the epistemological technology of Orientalism as such. [6] It was the laboratory table upon which all things and peoples could be objectively and poignantly compared and contrasted in a uniform and perfect light, and phylogenetically and ontogenetically ranked. (Preziosi 2010, 34)

The collected artefacts of the exposition could be studied, and put into various categories and respective histories. The process of putting these objects in to their systems and ranks, into their relationships with each other, is the double-edged sword of the modernist system of display exemplified by the Crystal Palace Exhibition. The display of these many forms of difference showed a diversity of cultures, but on the precondition of their reduction to legibility within the system at hand, in this way forming the titular “crystalline veil” of Preziosi’s article, which both renders visible and occludes simultaneously.

The display and domestication of difference is argued to be the way in which the British/European identity and narrative of industrial and societal progress and forward motion from a particular past into a specific future is constituted through the manufacture of the Other. In this way, the project of art history becomes about “staging and envisioning thought—about nations, individuals, ethnicities, races, genders, and classes *on behalf* of social agendas” who have vested interests in controlling the narratives of both the past and the future (Preziosi 2010, 39). This social agenda follows what Preziosi calls modernity’s “core problematic,” namely “*the orchestration of orderly, describable, and predictable relations between subjects and between subjects and objects,*” the orderliness being achieved through the “laboratory-like” and neutral container of the modernist system of display (40).

The functioning of the Crystal Palace becomes then about control and authority over a narrative about the past and the (better) future. Central to the formation of this narrative is not just the inclusion within it, but also the way in which this inclusion is included, in this case through the making of “orderly” relations, or

ones that flatten forms of difference into “seemingly endless flavors of the same ice cream” (Preziosi 2010, 45). It becomes thus fundamentally a mechanism of de- and re-contextualization of materials, whereby art and industrial production from many different countries are taken out of their contexts, and placed into a new one, the exhibition. It would become this format that would come to be copied across countless museums and galleries far and wide.

The Crystal Palace, as the solidification in a building of a particular ideology, can thus be said to produce a *scopic regime* of the exhibition. This regime is constituted along the axes of both subjectification-via-architecture (both physical and social), as well as de- and re-contextualization of the exhibited objects within.

### 2.1.2 Modernist Exhibition Practices and the Commodification of the Musical Work at World's Fairs in England

Before examining the implications of this model for cities as a mode of self-identity, it must be shown that the same system of “objectification” and domestication of the exhibited material at the Crystal Palace Exhibition was also at work in the field of music. Philosopher Lydia Goehr, in her book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992), provides the necessary historical background in order to show this, and forms an important reference in understanding the transformation of the status of musical performance.

Goehr argues that around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, musical performance underwent an important transformation in its self-understanding. Whereas music was previously understood as inseparable from its performance, a shift towards music being understood as one of the fine arts alongside painting, sculpture, etc., meant a need for it to be conceived of as a more enduring product, something that could reliably persist from performance to performance (rather than every performance being understood as “based on” e.g. a tune or melody, as is often the case in jazz) (Goehr 1992, 99–100; 152). The result of this change was a renewed emphasis on the score as the locus of “musical work,” or that which is able to preserve the continuity of a musical identity across multiple performances, regulating its derivative interpretations through what Goehr calls an “open concept” (89).

Along with this transformation came a shift in the role of the composer, who was now able to mix aspects of the immateriality of musical performance with its commodification (i.e. ability to be separated from the act of its production, here in the form of the score) in new ways, such as the ability to more strongly assert their authorship over the work across its various realizations over time.

This shift in the ontological existence of music from its performance to its existence as a musical concept and score created by an author and now relatively stabilized across performances would thus begin to be subjected to a similar set of forces as those being applied to the products of other forms of skilled labour (Goehr

1992, 152).<sup>3</sup> These forces are namely the modernist-rationalist technologies of display and the scopic regime that would define the format of the universal exposition. The musical work could now fit into a museal ideology just like other objects, its performativity having been stabilized by the concept of the musical work.

This process has been examined by musicologist Sarah Kirby, who has researched the modes of exhibition of music in London's early universal exhibitions. She has found that at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851, music was found, on account of its performative nature, too ephemeral to be "shown," leading to only musical instruments to be exhibited (their commodity status easily corresponding to a museum logic). By the 1873 exposition however, a solution was reached by those concerned with the representation of music at these events to put on daily concerts at the Albert Hall of "high class" music for the duration of the exposition. She argues that this musical exhibition of sorts gave a sense of permanence to the musical offering, effectively arresting the transience of its performative existence in the same way that Goehr argues in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* above. Though concert programs varied somewhat, works were performed many times over during the 6-month duration of the exposition, achieving a level of permanence of the musical "objects" that she argues were attempts at subverting their performative nature (Goehr 1992, 224). Importantly, Kirby reports as well that works were played in the hall even when nobody was actually listening, further underlining this aspect of the work-as-object. (Kirby 2018, 3–7)

This "objectification" of music, and its ontological shift from a performative to work-based artform, meant that its presentation at universal expositions could be subjected to the same processes of subjectification and taste-making that defined the status of the objects that has been examined with the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition. The display of these musical works meant that the instability and capriciousness inherent to performativity existed at cross-purposes to the self-reflexive, rationalist/modernist approach to the modernist exhibition, which led to the former being subjugated to the rationality of the score.

Just as earlier expositions served the negotiation and establishment of the reputation of objects, so too then could—through repetition and therefore quasi-permanence in presentation—these musical exhibitions serve the negotiation and establishment of the reputation of new musical works and, by extension, their authors (who were the composers, not the orchestra, whose performative labour became that of fidelity to the musical work).

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3 This is to say nothing of the larger deployment of the concept of authorship that would occur over the same time period across both the arts and literature. While the concept existed of course beforehand, it would take on new meaning in its relationship to the concept of "work" that it stabilizes. See here *What is an Author?* (Foucault [1969] 1998).

Discussing how the musical canon could take on the qualities of permanent exhibition at universal expositions is not in order to begin an argument for the analysis of music at world fairs and its relation to canon-formation, as is Kirby's focus. Rather, the interest in showing this linkage is to highlight how universal expositions played an important part in the establishment of a system where artistic production is commodified so as to conform to a system of normative knowledge-production. In exposing the power of capital in forming this system of knowledge production, a first step has been established in highlighting the nature of the relationship between knowledge and power in these large-scale cultural events.

### 2.1.3 The International Narrative of the Festival

The success of the Crystal Palace Exhibition's capacity to objectify, and thus commodify, a range of human industrial and cultural output means that it still provides a basis for the exhibitionary order as it is familiar to us today. As seen in the previous section, this objectification was also found to be capable of extending to music, which is often understood of as performative, and therefore not commodifiable in the same way as other objects able to be separated from the act of their production.

Alongside this drive for objectification, and for control of difference that is so crucial to the functioning of the universal exposition, art historian Caroline A. Jones points out how universal expositions have contributed to a lasting understanding of "*art as experience*" (2010, 69). She connects the universal exposition to an even earlier phenomenon, namely grand tours of Europe as an early form of mass tourism primarily by British, but also by other wealthy continental European nobility, wherein they would visit important cultural sites and works on the continent in search of the origins of their European cultural heritage (Jones 2010, 73–74).

The modernist scopic regime deployed in universal expositions is connected to this history of art-as-experience through the exposition's relationship to internationality, which will also be an important aspect of the biennale and festival as they develop. In the act of collecting this "representative" assortment of objects from across the world together in one place, organizers are able to bring the world to their audience. Recontextualization however then happens on the terms of the organizers, who are able to design the experience of the relation between the elements on display, stringing it into a new narrative of their own devising.

This aspect of creating a survey of international goings-on, putting on display the best that they have to offer, becomes closely linked with the national identity of the host nation, and the cosmopolitan urban centre that houses the exposition. A bringing-together of cultural artefacts from many other places allows for a definition-in-relief of the host city's identity. The ability to study relationships, differences, and similarities allows for the construction of a relational self-identity, one determined through the construction of a narrative of self and other. Jones likens

this to a city and a nation's desire to put itself (back) on the map: via a collecting and displaying of the “map” itself, the city attempts to insert itself into the diagram by seizing control of the narrative.

The (back) in (back) on the map is furthermore key in understanding the relationship between the universal exposition and subsequent perennial arts events such as festivals and biennales via the notion of experientiality. Putting a city (back) on the map involves not just a definitional act, but also the possibility that this definition must be maintained, that it can fall off the map, and only through sustained definitional effort stay on it, creating a loop of sorts. Significant about this looping is its repetition, and thus the importance of its experientiality by its audience; the definition of the city must always be (re)performed, e.g. every two years via a biennale. The uncertainty of the claim to representation requires its persistent decoding, the *process* of looping it and decoding its paradoxes becoming central to its existence.<sup>4</sup> (Jones 2011)

These aspects of reoccurrence, self-definition, and surveying would come to be core components of universal expositions subsequent to that in 1851, as well as later arts festivals and biennales, as will be examined in greater depth in the next chapter. They would also prove to be viral concepts that would appear in various forms of both expos and arts events across the world to this day. This is because this aspect of international self-definition, combined with the knowledge-economy hunger for the production of reasoned understandings of international relations, would prove to be important aspects of various modernities globally.

This can be seen by looking at how the universal exposition spread after the initial Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. This quickly led to fairs in 1855 in Paris, 1862 in London, 1867 in Paris, 1873 in Vienna, 1876 in Philadelphia, 1878 in Paris, 1880 in Melbourne, 1888 in Barcelona, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Just as these earlier waves of emergence of expos, festivals, and biennales within Europe occurred out of necessity when certain historical conditions were met, so too can the emergence of a large number of new festivals around the world be understood in the same way. Examining the list of 21<sup>st</sup> century “world expos” (the equivalent to earlier universal expositions), the lineage detailed above continues until today in cities caught up in nation-building, who are still very interested in the format, with e.g. Expo 2015 having taken place in Shanghai, Expo 2020 taking place in Dubai, and a Specialized Expo having taken place in Astana in 2017.

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4 This loop can be related to philosopher Timothy Morton's reading of modernism, which he not only equates with capitalism, but with a specific viral meme he calls *agrilogistics*, which he argues begins far earlier in human history. See Morton 2016, 84ff.

5 See <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/all-world-expos> for a list of historically-significant world's fairs since 1851.



In other words, this explosion of new festivals around the world can be understood within a framework of a modernist aspiration towards self-definition, networking, and putting a city (back) on the map, expressed through cultural production (in the arts). What this implies is a model of multiple modernities, where the concept of modernism is detached from its relationship to the West, where it is best known to have flourished (Eisenstadt 2000, 2–3). Timothy Morton expresses this same sentiment adroitly in writing that:

Although the desire for it first emerged in America, it turns out everyone wants air conditioning. ... Likewise obesity isn't simply American. Americans are not like aspartame, ruining the natural sweetness of other humans. (Morton 2016, 15)

The point being the decoupling of the accoutrement of modernism (air conditioning, arts festivals) from where they first occurred, usually in the West. It is more broadly an aspect of the Anthropocene, a trait of the concept of the modern human most generally, not reducible to one particular culture or nation. This implies a very different relationship between the festival format and its role in developing countries, one that does not per se need to position itself towards the festival as a “Western” import, but rather as part of a larger, self-determined strategy.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 The Anatomy of Festivals and Biennales

### 2.2.1 Fest/ival

The previous section presented the Crystal Palace Exhibition, as well as subsequent universal exhibitions, as a precursor to the practices of museology and art history that still inform our understanding of artistic work today, serving as an important cardinal point for mapping the origination of festivals for arts and culture since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Before examining arts festivals from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the present, it is important to acknowledge that universal exhibitions should not be thought of as the sole progenitor of contemporary festivals. For instance, theatre festivals in ancient Greece also prove to share many similarities in terms of their array of economic and societal functions with contemporary events (English 2011, 65–66). Theatre scholar Jennifer Elfert furthermore positions the contemporary (theatre) festival within a longer history of the German Festspiel, a format strongly tied with a projection of sovereign power of the Germanic states in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and later as a catalyst for German nationalist sentiment as of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early

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6 “Developing” is meant here in the very concrete sense of investing in the modernist aspirations of self-definition and nation-building.

20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Elfert 2009, 49). Franz Willnauer also supports the emphasis on the Festspiel rather than the universal exposition in his writing on the emergence of music festivals in Germany (Willnauer 2017, 1–2).

Such positions point to a second important aspect of the history and emergence of the contemporary festival and its societal role. Sociologists Liana Giorgi and Monica Sassatelli argue that most writing regarding festivals can seemingly be read as some combination of two different perspectives and theoretical framework. There exist firstly readings of the festival phenomenon that, coming from a Bourdieu-inspired standpoint, will tend to see them as sites for the negotiation of community status, or as James English calls it, participation in the “symbolic economy” of cultural capital (Giorgi and Sassatelli 2011, 5; English 2011, 64). Such a focus has also been seen in the reading of the history of the universal exhibition above, and formulations such as those of Roces, who views the true subject of that exhibition format to be capital in all its facets (2010, 57). In other words, the festival is seen as fulfilling various functions relating to the creation and exchange of different forms of capital.

Giorgi and Sassatelli’s second perspective on the festival format is the understanding of it as a place for the negotiation also of societal values, and as a form of public sphere. While of course intrinsically linked with the negotiation also of status and exchange value in the symbolic economy, they argue that this reading of the festival stems more from a Habermasian approach (2011, 5). Reading festivals from this perspective connects them to earlier festival formats that have occurred over the course of human history, named variously “primitive” or “traditional” festivals (Foucault 1984, 4; Sassatelli 2011, 13–14), which served an important role in the production and reproduction of society and culture (Giorgi and Sassatelli 2011, 4). Here the role of the festival becomes one of actualizing and (re)affirming community bonds and identity through local co-presence.<sup>7</sup>

To understand the festival from this societal perspective, the first step is to understand the “fest,” its root and etymological parent.<sup>8</sup> The fest, historically a com-

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7 Anthropologist Georgina Born, in an investigation of musical habits of Southeast Asian diasporic youth, calls this phenomenon particularly in the musical realm a “musically imagined community” that is constituted by the microcosm of a local co-present public, but is often afterwards globally-dispersed and existing only through virtual (digital) connections (Born 2005, 29).

8 The word “fest” has been chosen as an English approximation of the German noun *Fest*. Though the word is similar in its connotations, the OED’s example sentences emphasize more the light and celebratory aspect of the word more comparable with the German word *Feier* (party). The word should be understood rather in its German connotation and ostensibly less-frequent sense in English. It is more akin to the less-common English “holy-day” [sic], with its connotation of a day of religious observance or religious festival, as opposed to the more conventional “holiday,” more related already since the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the “day of recreation,”

pulsory event for community members, is a site and ritual serving the communication and reproduction of societal order. It is a moment where rules are either set aside or inverted, either out of the necessity of a destabilizing event in the community, or out of the need to reaffirm the values of living together that underpin a community. It is an exceptional situation, and one that serves a variety of functions in ensuring the continued stability of a community. Significantly, the fest and the ritual are frequently associated with various forms of theatre, which can serve just such a function as affirming values, suggesting solutions to conflicts, etc. (Turner 1982, 11).

The concept of the fest is an ancient building-block for the maintaining of a community, its core components of the ritual, destabilization of society, and reaffirmation of a societal order are all elements that have been revised within contemporary society. In a section of *Theaterfestivals* (2009), Jennifer Elfert in her study of the societal phenomenon aligns the formerly-essential fest described above and its now-optional modern descendent, the festival, with ethnologist Victor Turner's distinction between liminal and liminoid rituals. The main differentiation for Turner revolves around the transformation in the understanding of work and its relationship to play or leisure (which both contains and exceeds play) between pre- and post-industrial revolution societies, respectively. He argues that liminal phenomena are phenomena of passage, of transformation across a threshold, they are all those rituals to prevent the destabilization of a community given events like birth, marriage, death, war, etc. They mark a change in status of a member of the community, and are moments when the ritual, the fest, is needed in order to re-establish stability (Elfert 2009, 76).

Liminoid (-oid in the sense of similar) phenomena share characteristics of liminality, but are not mandatory, and are less associated with moments of personal or societal crisis in the same fundamental way. They can be similarly transformational, but are opt-in events that exist as offerings to fill the leisure time of post-industrialist workers (Elfert 2009, 76; Turner 1974, 64). These liminoid phenomena, because of their lack of a binding character, allow for the creation of uncoded space where there exists the possibility for the subversion of established values through the creation of "a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles ... in the direction of radical change" (Turner 1972, 65). This makes the liminoid character of the festival an ideal instrument for the dissemination of new forms of perception and subjectivity, as discussed in the functioning of the regime of sight deployed with the universal expositions.

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once again more akin to the *Feier* (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018a). This second connotation becomes clear also through its use in the context of this text.

The liminoid festival can be further articulated by examining Foucault's similar concept of "heterotopia" in modern society. For Foucault, the heterotopia is the incarnation of the utopia, the non-place, within a real site. It exists outside of all places, while still existing at a real location, such as a fairgrounds (Foucault 1984, 4). It is a place defined less by the actual set of relations that constitute it in its specificity, but rather by their existence as a real screen onto which one can project a vision of society in perfected form. Foucault argues that while what he calls "primitive" societies frequently created heterotopias of crisis, akin to Turner and Elfer's concept of the liminal fest, modern societies are more involved in the production of heterotopias of deviation, ones meant to collect and sometimes contain difference and deviation from the norm. This creation of a temporalized and spatialized moment of deviance will always have a specific, if changing, relationship to the society that it is abstracted from. (Foucault 1984, 4–5).

Foucault continues that heterotopias can also exist as heterotopias in time: they can both exist within the normal functioning of time, while also seeming to suspend it, as during the intensity and seemingly-stretched "festival time" where so much can be done while the clock moves at a totally unrelated speed to the events in progress. This is a time that is isolated and separate from linear time, while obviously in the practical sense of hours and minutes still existing within it. If this is applied back to the core mechanism of the establishment of the festival community, namely its spatial and temporal concentration, then Foucault's conception helps to conceive of the parameters for the creation of a "rite of passage," but within the framework of modern society. It also frames the functioning of the festival mechanism on the two axis that constitute it as a category as such: time and space. The festival is a time within time, a suspended, heterotopic time, separate but within and therefore limited. It is also a place within space, somewhere that transformation can occur, but nevertheless somewhere real. A festival can thus be understood as a spatio-temporal concentration with transformative function.

### 2.2.2 Arts Festivals

While the functioning of the festival format has now been established along two fronts, namely its function as a site for the creation and exchange of forms of capital, and as a site for the (re)constitution of community bonds, what remains to be explored are the specific characteristics of the festivals being examined here, namely contemporary music and arts festivals. This requires a more detailed examination of the historical emergence of festivals exclusively for the arts in the wake of the large-scale universal exhibitions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Both the Crystal Palace Exhibition and its subsequent descendants in London, Paris, and elsewhere around the globe both were and remain to this day costly, large-scale, and enormous undertakings dealing with works from all areas of the

world and many facets of society. The sheer size of these events led to many of their characteristics being distilled and reduced down to “leaner,” purely artistic festivals. These have proven to be (comparatively) smaller affairs that could still function as these large feats of self-definition both for cities and for nations. They maintained the aspirations to the projection of power on the international stage as in the universal expositions, importing much of the formats and working methods, but doing so through a focus exclusively on visual art, music, and theatre/opera. The arts thus become the quintessential brokers of internationality, representing particular ethnic and national values and meanings via the communication vessel of art, which becomes de- and re-contextualized thanks to the modernist system of display, and is thus able to circulate within the smooth non-place of the festival.

Looking again to art historian Caroline A. Jones, she writes that “the twentieth century witnessed the dramatic shift ..., when the energies of the world’s fairs were appropriated by the trade-specific biennial form” (2010, 81). This miniaturization of the universal exposition brought with it the importation of many of those characteristics of the grander format, and by extension also its deployment of representationality as explored earlier. Jones makes this link as well, writing she is focusing on clarifying that

the sets of values and cultural practices inculcated by such large-scale international exhibitions. Seeded by the event of the [world’s] fair, these practices could involve impressive diplomatic events, scholarly conferences ..., spectacular images, celebrated works of art, collectible objects [...], as well as new experiences (and thus new subjectivities) for the middle class. (2010, 80)

The functioning of this system of display becomes an apparatus of education for its visitors, understood here in the sense of a carefully orchestrated showing and seeing in the name of a particular enlightenment agenda, exemplified through these cultural practices carried over from the universal expositions. The concentration of factors listed above were all meant to elicit a specific form of education of visitors. These events were built and billed as special events, moments to be experienced. Their concentration allowed them to create dense moments of exchange, their distinction from everyday life allowed them to take on characteristics of the *ritual*, bringing with it aspects of transformation, and of transforming subjectivities.

All these factors can be seen with the founding of the Venice Biennale in 1895. Though the Venice Biennale in the form it is known today has been the result of over a century of development of its form, it is nevertheless widely regarded as marking with its inaugural edition the first arts biennale, and has come to represent the “ur-biennial” that others would necessarily stand in some relationship to (either in rejection or in affirmation of its organizational decisions).

The most basic characteristics of the arts biennale, while taking some time to be properly established in the way they are now known, align with this view of the

biennale as a purely-artistic, scaled-down descendant of the universal exposition. Like its predecessor, its internationality would come to be one of its defining characteristics (seen for instance with Venice's often problematic system of national pavilions). So too would its emphasis on periodicity—memorialized through the now-eponymous term “biennale,” which effectively promises a repetition every second year. The aspect of capital (and Capital) central to earlier universal expositions is also clearly present as of the beginning of the biennale, with one of its original goals being the hope of re-establishing an art-market in Venice, a formerly-thriving city for art (a goal which largely succeeded), and stymying urban decline (Jones 2010, 73; Papastergiadis and Martin 2011, 46).

The Venice Biennale is thus significant not just for the persistence of its artistic offering since 1895, but also related to this continuing presence its outsized influence on the discourse around perennial arts events (Filipovic 2010, 326). This can be seen, among other places, in the use of the Italian spelling of biennale, rather than the English biennial, to brand other perennial arts festivals around the world.

Though the Venice Biennale is a main stay of the discourse around biennales, this discourse itself is not without its share of issues. Perhaps one of its most well-established points is the issue of a lack of adequate and quality scholarship on the issue of biennales perennial arts events both historically and in terms of a theoretical framework.<sup>9</sup> This in turn connects with a position within the related discourse on curating regarding a lack of scholarship and research on exposition history (see section 2.4.1).

Its most significant issue however is that, despite frequent cross-citations among festivals and biennales, music and arts events stemming from the tradition of the universal expositions are not often considered by scholars or practitioners to exist within the same genealogy. Though especially in earlier festivals, material/medial differences in the cultural offerings being presented were surely

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9 On the lack of an established discourse around biennales, Filipovic writes that “despite the number of symposia, lectures, and debates that biennials have inspired, little sustained critical assessment of the phenomenon – in all its specificities and implications – has yet been carried out” (2010, 16). Fleck writes that “there existed no comprehensive presentation of the Venice Biennale, despite it being the most influential art event of the last century” before his attempt to do so (Fleck 2009, 7; translation added). See also (Teissl 2013, 13). Original text by Fleck: “Bei der Vorbereitung für die Einzelausstellung [an dem österreichischen Pavillion der Biennale von 2007], entdeckte ich, dass es keine zusammenfassende Darstellung der Biennale von Venedig gibt, obgleich es sich um die historische bedeutendste Kunstveranstaltung des letzten Jahrhunderts handelt” (Fleck 2007, 7). Alloway's 1968 study of the Venice biennale should be understood as a notable exception here, see Alloway 1968. NB: This volume makes use of German-language sources. In the interest of monolingual legibility, these have been translated by the author in the running text. These instances are marked with the words “translation added” in the parenthetical references, and the original German-language source is quoted in full in corresponding footnotes.

relatively clear in a simplistic sense (theatre/music performances at fixed times vs. paintings hung for a duration), not only do these events share a common point of origin, but their underlying characteristics and historical developments track to each other.

This can be seen in the lack of acknowledgement and examination within this discourse of analogous important artistic festivals beginning around the same time, and which also continue until today. For instance, Verena Teissl points out that the Bayreuther Festspiele, begun in 1876, can be significantly established as the first purely artistic festival that comes out of this same spirit of the universal expositions, not, as stated by Jones and others, the Venice Biennale some time later (2013, 13). The following sections will explore the parallels between these arts festivals in both the performing and visual arts, highlighting the common characteristics that unite these festival events in order to begin to understand them in a unified way.

### 2.2.3 General Characteristics of Arts Festivals

The consensus around the definition of the arts festival seems to be that there is a lack of consensus—the mutability of its form appears to be one of its most fundamental characteristics (Elfert 2009, 21; Willnauer 2017, 2; Filipovic, van Hal, Øvstebø 2010, 19). However, despite the heterogeneity of cultural projects that can be given the title “festival,” the term nevertheless is not resistant to definition. As theatre scholar Jennifer Elfert writes, “despite a tendency ... to transgress boundaries, festivals are comparable to each other, and therefore also fundamentally definable” (Elfert 2009, 23; translation added).<sup>10</sup> This section will look specifically at how the basic festival schema refracts into symptoms of current performing arts festivals and arts biennales, in order also to establish a field of common ground between them.

#### Limited Time-Frame and Periodic Repetition

Most festivals take place over a limited amount of time and recur with some degree of regularity. While specific institutional constellations and project-management considerations necessary for realizing the festival, such as funding deadlines and size of staff, can have a large influence on their individual lengths, general tendencies are nevertheless discernable. At the lower limit, many shorter performing arts festivals can last as little as one or two days (often on the weekend) of intense programming, as is often seen for instance in the German free theatre scene. More standard-length performing arts festivals consist of around a week of events

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10 “Trotz ... Tendenzen zur Grenzverwischung ... sind Festivals untereinander vergleichbar und damit auch grundsätzlich definierbar geblieben.”

or evening concerts (often 9–10 days, which includes two weekends), such as the Maerzmusik festival at the Berliner Festspiele every March, or the Ultima Festival in Oslo. Sometimes they can last up to a month of often more diffused programming, like Wien Modern or Steirischer Herbst in Graz, which often have more dark days and a less concentrated program. Characteristic of festivals for music is also that most seem to occur annually, with only some happening in the two-year rhythm more characteristic of fine arts biennales. Among these exceptions include Maerzmusik's predecessor, the Music Biennale Berlin, as well as the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, and the Darmstadt Summer Course (yearly from 1946 until 1970, then biennial). Theatre or performing arts festivals can also be of this length, however seem to take place over a slightly longer period of time of 3 weeks (Berlin Theaterreffen) to one month (Salzburger Festspiele, Ruhrtriennale).

Visual arts biennials tend to be longer, not least because they are normally object- and thus exhibition-based (and therefore presumably are subject to a different set of economic calculations regarding visitor numbers), however the longest still last only several months (documenta traditionally for 100 days, the Venice Biennale lasts about 6 months).<sup>11</sup> When it comes to biennale exhibitions, the Paris Convention of 1928, which the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) uses to govern the parameters of world expos (the direct descendants of earlier universal expositions), sets out in its Article 4 that the duration of international exhibitions “may not be less than three weeks nor more than three months” in order to be recognized (Bureau International des Expositions n.d.-b, 8). This codification is a useful rule of thumb, not least because of the BIE's longstanding position within the field.

Regardless of exact length, in contrast to a yearly museum exhibition program, symphony orchestra season, or ensemble theatre program, a festival or biennale implies is a concentration of activity, attention, and effort within a short period of time. Festivals thus operate on a kind of project-basis, also in their administrative structure, rather than through sustained, continuous commitment.

### Spatial Concentration

Festivals and biennales occupy one or more museums, arts spaces, or performance venues for the duration of their exhibition period. These spaces are sometimes purpose-built, happen in public space in the city or the region, or some mix of the above. They normally occur within a relatively small geographical area, which allows visitors to visit most or all of the sites with relative ease.

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11 See the production issues surrounding the Lithuanian Pavilion of the 2019 Venice Biennale, which had trouble financing its opera installation over the biennale's 6 months, an example of the problems that arise when these two different time scales meet (“Their Beach Opera Won at the Biennale. But They Can Hardly Afford It,” *New York Times*, 31 May, 2019).



Purpose-built spaces for a biennale can best be seen in the various national pavilions of the Venice Biennale. Each pavilion in the Giardini is built by an individual nation, who is responsible also for its design. In the particular case of the Venice Biennale, this pavilion system translates the participation of international artists directly to their affiliation with various nation-states, by way of the pavilions they must exhibit in.

While many subsequent biennales have rejected this system as obsolete, among other issues because of this insistence that artists *represent* the values and art of a particular nation (once again an affirmation of the modernist exhibition values discussed in section 2.1.1), art historian Caroline A. Jones makes the argument that “the pavilion component of biennale culture in Venice has proved useful. Pavilions have allowed the problematization of both spectacle and the ethnic state” (Jones 2010, 83). Artists such as Haacke, who in 1993 smashed and destroyed the granite floor of the German pavilion built by Hitler as part of his Nazi art policy, are thus given a clear frame to also call into question the presumptions of the nation-state, which for better or worse still has an enormous impact on contemporary reality.<sup>12</sup> The flipside are situations such as when in 2015, 10 Chinese artists and only 2 Kenyan artists were shown in the Kenyan pavilion at the biennale, in a move that seemed to represent a moment of neocolonialism (Muñoz-Alonso 2015).

In an example from another context, recent editions of Documenta make clear that spatial concentration within one city can also be questioned and experimented with, precisely in order to question this norm. For instance, one can look to Documenta 14’s decision to take place in both Athens and Kassel, Documenta 13’s exhibition in Kabul, or how document 11’s opening in Kassel was understood as the fifth and final of a series of platforms that Okwui Enwezor organized on four different continents for evidence of this. As will be argued in the next section, these important exceptions are all reactions to this phenomenon of spatial concentration.

Spatial concentration is also seen in performing arts festivals as well. Wagner’s famous Festspielhaus in Bayreuth was purpose-built in order to gather a public for whom he could stage his works in what he considered to be ideal conditions. The Festspiele concept, itself informed by Greek theatre festivals, that informed Wagner’s approach puts a strong emphasis on the aspect of *play* (*spiele*) in the sense of recreation, communion, and gathering for the theatre play itself. This is in turn related to having *company* in the sense of the Latin *com/panis*, the breaking of bread together (or bratwurst in Bayreuth), to mark an occasion (an event, temporally-bound), to have a meeting, to conduct business, and to strengthen community bonds. The Festspielhaus’ spatial concentration and nexus of activity can also be seen in more recent buildings such as the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, which the

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12 Jones has also referred to this as conducting “politics by other means,” in ways similar to other international events such as the Olympics, or sports leagues (Jones 2010, 77).

organization in its newly-combined form has occupied since 2001, or the Grosses Festspielhaus for the Salzburger Festspiele, since 1960.

### City (Marketing) and Centre/Periphery

The Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851 brought together works from all the nations doing trade with the British Empire at that time in a celebration of London as the capital, the centre of that empire. The Crystal Palace itself was an instrument for the domestication of difference into a singular national narrative. It was also, in its position as a glass house in Hyde Park, meant to evoke an exchange between city and exhibition, going as far as to integrate the park's trees directly into the building itself.

Since that time, festivals and biennales have been an important mechanism whereby cities—and their tourism boards—are made to be part of the backdrop against which the artistic practice is seen. This profiling can be seen to occur historically at the earliest festivals exclusively for the arts, such as in Venice or Salzburg (Papastergiadis and Martin 2011, 46; Haitzinger 2013, 132). This occurs today also with regions that seek this level of recognition as well, something that can be seen with the Ruhrtriennale in the Ruhr valley of Germany, with Manifesta, which calls itself the “European Biennial of Contemporary Art,” and takes place within a different European city every second year, highlighting it on a European stage, or the European Capital of Culture program, which is often understood by cities to be part of a larger urban regeneration plan led driven by culture (Sassatelli 2011, 21).

As with the world exposition in London, the city itself becomes a co-actor in the event, framing it as “a central node within global production networks” (O’Neil 2012, 53). Aside from the quantifiable interest in a festival by tourism groups interested in increasing their hotel occupancy rates, they also have the potential to generate attention to a city’s place within these global networks. Framing the relationships between global currents and local effects allows cities to increase their brand recognition. As city marketing becomes an important tool for attracting both tourism and business interests, it is unsurprising that festivals often tend to be initiated in cities normally deemed as on the periphery of global currents, rather than in their centres.<sup>13</sup>

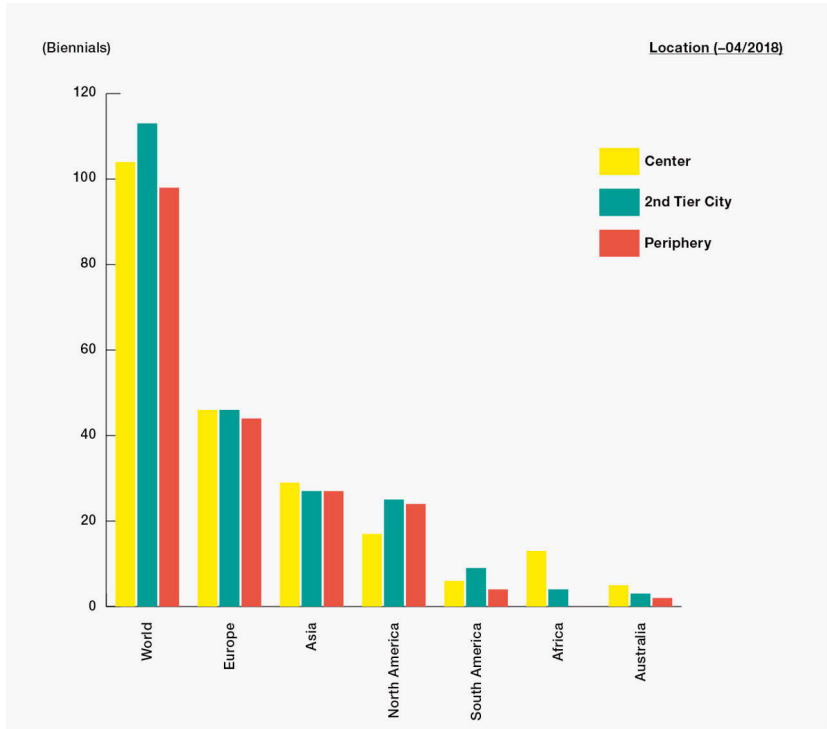
This effect has been studied in relation to biennales for the visual arts: Figure 1, taken from an article by Ronald Kolb and Shwetal A. Patel, illustrates the distribution of visual arts biennales among centres, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, and peripheral cities worldwide, sorted by continent (Kolb and Patel 2018). More important than the relative number of biennales per region is the relative consistency with which they

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13 See here also the publication *Eventisierung der Stadt* (Muri et al. 2019).

are distributed here between first-tier, second-tier, and peripheral cities.<sup>14</sup> Notice for instance in the case of North America that there are even less biennales in first-tier cities compared to second and third-tier cities.

Figure 1: Chart by Kolb and Patel of Distribution of Biennials among Central (yellow), 2nd Tier (green), and Peripheral Cities (red), sorted by continent.



Kolb and Patel 2018. Pay attention to the relative number of biennales in first-tier, second-tier, and peripheral cities within each region, rather than the total numbers across regions. Image reproduced with permission from Kolb and Patel, and OnCurating Journal.

Such numbers support the argument that second-tier and peripheral cities have been central to the biennale form since its establishment with the Venice biennale in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The organizers chose as the site of the biennale the

14 Kolb and Patel consider first tier cities the “nations capital [sic] or ... one of its main cities (e.g. Istanbul is not a capital city, but it holds an important economic, cultural, and social position in Turkey).” Second-tier cities are “not as big as the capitals, but are on the rise and hold a prominent position within the country.” Finally, the third group is made up of biennales taking place in “remote and peripheral regions.” (Kolb and Patel 2018)

*Giardini pubblici* in the eastern part of the city created by Napoleon during his rule. The choice of this contentious historical site was a strongly political statement. As art historian Caroline A. Jones writes:

Venice, the former republican city-state capable of snubbing Rome's authority for 500 years but humiliatingly conquered by the French at the turn of the nineteenth century, could now demonstrate its importance to the young nation of Italy ... As a portal to the world, it could both be a leading component of the nation-state (thereby flattering its king) and assert its time-honored international identity as a cosmopolitan center of the liberal arts and free speech. (2010, 75–76)

With its new arts biennale, Venice was engaged in a symbolic (re)claiming of its status as an important city on the international stage. The impetus for putting the city “[back] on the map,” for self-definition and identity of a city or nation was achieved through the “pedagogical promise to visitors to bring them the world” (Jones 2010, 76). Thus, in a seemingly-paradoxical turn, an affirmation of (participation in) nationhood came along with a turn to internationality, to bringing in others and stitching together through festival-making those relationships between the self and the world. In this way, the self becomes preconditioned on the definition of an outside other, and by extension the nation is constituted through the display of alterity.

This phenomenon can be seen to exist also in biennales that take place outside of the West, and seems to be part of the ideological software that has made festivalization a highly important format for the arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

For instance, the biennale in Gwangju understood itself as part of a process of “shifting gravity,” i.e. the growing influence of Asian biennales in relation to those in the West, which was also the title of the *World Biennial Forum N°1* that took place as part of the 2012 biennale in that city (Hou and Meta Bauer 2013, 19–20). This recognition led to an interrogation on behalf of the Gwangju Biennale as to its second-tier status in relation to the institutions of the West (Lee 2013, 88). Furthermore, casting the biennale in terms of this East–West shift allows for it to explore through the forum of the arts ways in which this is occurring, what is happening to the dominant global narrative as told by Western institutions, and the implications of the “rest” (colonialized places and sites of orientalist projection) affirming their place on the global stage.

A similar tendency towards a re-imagination of the periphery can also be seen to have basis in the history of arts festivals. Teissl argues that since the very beginning of their rise in prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, arts festivals have sought out the periphery as a space that allows for a bit of escape from the watchful eyes of powerbrokers in major cities and cultural centres (2014, 81). She cites the founding of the Cannes film festival in the French Riviera, as well as the festivals in Bayreuth and Venice all as examples of festivals founded outside of major centres out of a

need to establish less codified spaces (82). They were spaces that were able to support a counterculture, or experimental practices and formats that would not have been possible elsewhere (*ibid.*).

Similar stories can be told of Donaueschingen, Salzburg, Darmstadt, Graz, Kassel, Avignon, Shenzhen, etc. For many of these places, the periphery has historically functioned as a kind of retreat from or tension with, the metropolis, like with Foucault's heterotopia, located in the real world but somehow suspended from its surroundings (see section 2.2.1). The periphery seems to lend itself well to the establishment of these heterotopia; the isolation offered by these places, their distance from the discussions and watchful eyes of the centre's influencers allow for precisely the kind of festival community to be constructed that is so crucial to the festival's functioning as a place of transformation.

### **Explosive Growth**

Returning to the concept of the fest can help unlock another aspect of this will towards internationality of festivals and biennales. Both the fest and the festival are strongly associated with moments of self-definition and self-positioning. In the archaic version of so-called "pre-modern" societies, these rituals needed to be carried out at moments that threatened to destabilize the community, such as births, deaths, and transitions of power.

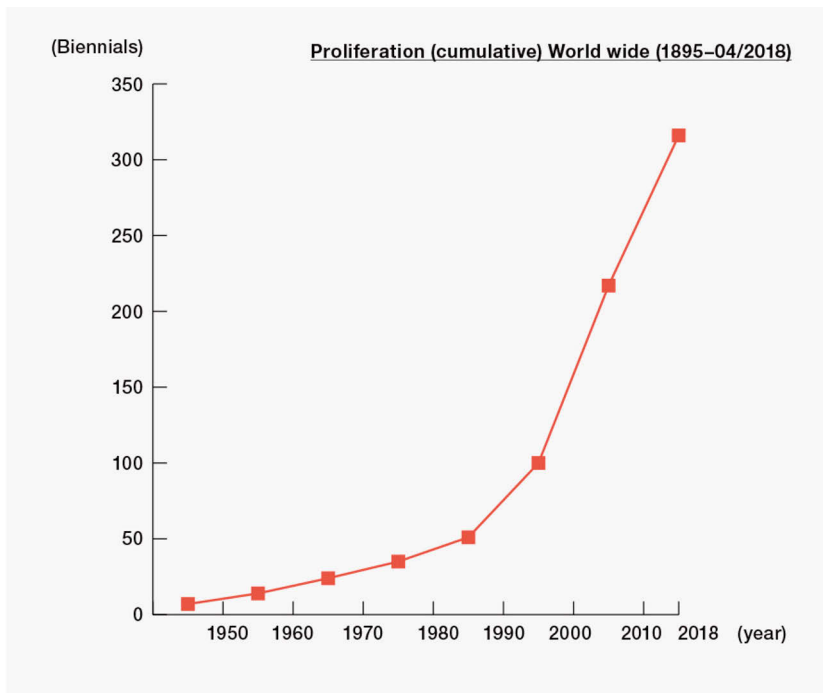
Because of their large scale and high level of societal visibility, modern festivals and biennales are attractive for their ability to bring in tourism, as well as their power to define both a national and artistic narrative for their visitors, which lead them to often put on by similarly-important stakeholders. The study by Kolb and Patel sheds light onto this, examining what funding bodies have historically been responsible for the founding of biennales. They break down the list of stakeholders into the categories of "artists and curators; private foundations; museums; governments; tourism councils; and academics" (Kolb and Patel 2018). What these stakeholders have in common is a shared interest in defining and shaping large-scale national and international narratives about the arts, but also about the societies in which they exist more generally. Once again, they use the same art historical software seen in the Crystal Palace where art is used as a foil for the societal context in which it has emerged.

These stakeholders spring into action in moments of definitional crisis for society, and attempt, through the festival form, to re-stabilize societal norms and narratives in their own interests. In the normative account of the development of biennales, their post-1989 growth is a highly-theorized point. This moment marked a veritable explosion of biennales all around the world, and in particular in China, where they still continue to grow at a rapid rate. This leads to a typical "hockey-stick" graph illustrated again by Kolb and Patel in Figure 2. What it shows is re-

flected also in the discourse about biennales, for instance when Elena Filipovic in her preface to the *Biennale Reader* writes that “it would take until the nineteen-nineties, when an exponential expansion of the genre occurred with the launching of more than a dozen new biennials, for the term to become the household name with which we are now familiar” (Filipovic et al. 2010, 14). Paul O’Neil concurs with the same trend, however puts it within a framework of the becoming-global of visual arts, writing that:

Manifesta; the biennials of Berlin, Tirana, Lyon, and Istanbul; and many of the smaller peripheral biennials, triennials, and quadrennials established across the globe during the 1990s, have all tended to employ a transnational approach, with local artistic production being taken as the main point of departure linked to global networks of artistic production with a handful of roving curators at the helm. (O’Neil 2012, 67–68)

Figure 2: Chart by Kolb and Patel of number of total biennales globally since 1895 “Proliferation (cumulative) of Biennales World wide [sic] (1895–2018)”.



Kolb and Patel 2018. Image reproduced with permission from Kolb and Patel, and OnCurating Journal.

This same sentiment is also echoed by Kolb and Patel, who affirm again this conclusion that “the proliferation of biennials accelerated from the mid 1980s, in particular from the mid 1990s onwards” (Kolb and Patel 2018). However, as stated in section 2.2.2, these biennales must be examined within a shared history together with performing arts festivals. Doing this, Kolb and Patel’s affirmation of the widely-held conclusion becomes only one part of the story.

What this data shows is 1. The extent to which the term “biennale” has seen an expansion in its use worldwide. This relates to a tendency towards an expansion of existing terms has led to an increased frequency of the use of the term in general. 2. The proliferation of the biennale format within countries that are experiencing their own modernisms and moments of national self-definition on the global stage. This can be attributed to the position taken by O’Neil that the format of the biennale began to deal with non-Western artistic production in a significant way as of around 1989. As O’Neil explains:

Biennales are an efficient means by which these localities can map out a place for themselves, at a global level, to become one point in the networked communication between other biennials. (O’Neil 2012, 70)

However, what is significantly missing from this chart are the multiple waves of fairs, festivals, and biennales that have swept across the globe since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tracing this history while looking past just the use of the term biennale suggests a different narrative. What it reveals is that *fairs, festivals, and biennales are all founded in variously situated historic “explosions,” as moments of definitional crisis sweep across the stakeholders able and willing to found them.*

While thorough tracking of all these different perennial cultural events goes beyond the scope of this work (see here however again the exhaustive attempt to do so by Kolb and Patel 2018), what can roughly be considered four different waves of “festive explosions” seem to be able to be identified. Note that the magnitude of these waves (the number of festivals and biennales, their significance and relationship to one-another) could not yet be adequately studied. The first of these is the post-1851 interest in the universal exposition format, with fairs subsequently opening in 1855 in Paris, 1862 in London, 1867 in Paris, 1873 in Vienna, 1876 in Philadelphia, 1878 in Paris, 1880 in Melbourne, 1888 in Barcelona, etc.<sup>15</sup>

Overlapping with these early expositions were also early artistic festivals in Europe, starting with both Wagner’s Bayreuth in 1876 and the Venice Biennale in 1895. This wave would continue with the and Salzburger Festspiele as of 1920, regarded as one of the most important, together with Bayreuth, of the pre-war festivals, as well

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15 See again <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/all-world-expos> for a list of historically-significant world’s fairs since 1851.

as Donaueschinger Kammermusiktage as of 1921, and Venice's addition of music in 1930 and film in 1932.

These early festivals can be described as the growth of a consciousness about the role of the universal exposition in helping to defining a city's role in an international context, with the concept of internationalism being defined in various ways based on local situations. It also is time where the extension of this thinking to smaller, exclusively artistic festivals occurs.

What is also already in place in this era is the groundwork for further post-war festivals throughout the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Festivals in the post-war period would largely be modelled, or explicit differentiations from, the forms of organization created in this early wave in Bayreuth, Venice, Salzburg, etc.

As a second wave, the post-war period marked a renewed interest in the festival and the biennale, especially in Germany, but also within a newly configured global picture. Elfert for instances lists 18 festivals founded around Europe between 1946 and 1950 (Elfert 2009, 28). To this can be added important arts festivals like Documenta 1 in 1955 (see section 2.3.1), and the São Paolo in 1951, which sought for itself an identity within the Brazilian nation compared to Rio (Jones 2010, 76). The post-war festival period saw the rise of a new kind of internationalism, expressed also through the founding of important biennales in Paris, Tokyo, and Sydney. While systematic academic analysis beyond individual festivals of this mid-century internationalism seems relatively scarce, it is still seen as the precursor to the broader globalization of the biennale format as of the late 1980s (70).

Many of these post-war festivals were positioned as celebrations of humanity in the face of the trauma of the world wars. Particularly in the context of occupied Germany, these festivals would also serve, as has been previously established, as places where (both) new nations could shape and project their new values, be they those of artistic freedom of expression in the West, or the struggle against oppression in the East.<sup>16</sup> This boom in new festivals would continue at a significant rate until around the time of the 1968 student protests, when the founding of festivals would slow once again. Elfert claims this is due to the younger generation's view of festivals as being reactionary, unpolitical, and consumption-oriented (2009, 29).

After a period with less festival and biennale growth around the 1970s, there emerges with the fall of the iron curtain and the expansion of the capitalist narrative and Western values across the globe a fertile ground for new growth in festivals and biennales. With this would come the post-1989 expansion discussed earlier, and with it the growth of a global system of arts festivals and institutions worldwide.

While festivals founded immediately post-WWII can be seen mostly within the framework of Western capitalism outlined above, those founded in this era can be

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16 See Ernst Reuter's speech on the occasion of the first *Berliner Festwochen* (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 2).



defined by the adaptation of this narrative of the construction of national identity and aesthetic values to many emerging economies outside of the West, and particularly in Asia (which shows similar percentage-wise growth to other continents, but whose number of biennales is second only to Europe in absolute numbers). Even when these biennials do not actively thematize their relationships to the West and to the Venice model, the appropriation of this form of “festive” knowledge-creation in the service of non-Western emerging powers can already be seen in itself as a repudiation of a universalist, Western-centric worldview in favour of a model of multiple modernities, although this too is a controversial issue (Bradley 2003, 88–89).

### Exceptionalism in Presentation

Never before in the history of the world was there so large a collection of valuable gems and exquisite specimens of the lapidary’s art collected in one building. ... Never was there such a display of these gems as in our Crystal Palace. The Exhibition contains the finest diamonds, the finest ruby, and the finest emerald known to the world. (Great Exhibition 1851, 1)

As this quote from the Crystal Palace Exhibition guidebook *The Illustrated Exhibitor* shows, perhaps the most important characteristic of those cultural artefacts presented in festivals is the exceptionalism of that which is on display. At the Crystal Palace, the diamond in question was the Indian Koh-i-Noor diamond, in possession of the British Monarchy, whose provenance is now being questioned.<sup>17</sup> The “gems” presented at other, subsequent festivals would vary greatly in kind, but would have in common the creation of a special occasion on which to view equally special works, ones that would be unable to be seen by most people, or be able to be presented the quotidian programming of an arts space. The event of viewing thus becomes an important part of the ritual of festival-going. Exceptionalism can be created through novelty or newness, as is the case with contemporary classical music (CCM) festivals, which often involve a large number of newly-commissioned works.

In the case of other music festivals, the staging of works that otherwise would not be able to be staged either for practical reasons, or because they are a rarity in the repertoire can also create forms of newness. This is perhaps most famously the case at the Bayreuther Festspiele, which are dedicated to the presentation of Wagner’s operatic works; massive undertakings that are difficult for even large opera houses to pull off successfully (see here the case of Robert LePage’s *Ring* at the Metropolitan Opera). Other examples include festivals dedicated to the serial

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17 BBC. “Koh-i-Noor: India says it still wants return of priceless diamond” *BBC News*, 20 April, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36088749>.

performance of a specific composer's work, such as a concert series dedicated to the performance of all of Beethoven's nine symphonies at the Salzburger Festspiele 2018.

A last form of exceptionalism can be found in reactions to the specificities of the site of the festival. The Festival Rümligen in Switzerland (of which the Munich Biennale's Daniel Ott is a director) often puts a particular emphasis on its relationship to its surrounding nature, as well as its surrounding community (Ott and Zytynska 2016, 9). Site-specificity is also a very common approach to exceptionalism in arts biennales, where there is a robust history of relating artistic production to its site of display. An example of this is once again Haacke's *Germania* at the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Another is the British Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale: Entitled *ISLAND*, the pavilion did not display any objects, but rather invested in a discursive program around issues of decolonization, islands, borders, and migration. In this way it attempted to address the reality of the physical building itself (situated at the highest point on the island) and its role in the Giardini, as well as issues of migration and their relationship to Venice and Italy, and how these local issues interconnect with the international networks that connect at the node of the Biennale (British Council n.d.).

Elena Filipovic warns though of the danger that this exceptionality can present to the artistic rigour of a festival. Keeping in mind the quote at the top of the section about the chance to see the Koh-i-Noor diamond at the Crystal Palace, she warns of the problem of so-called "biennale art," or an art of "bombastic proportions and hollow premises" (Filipovic 2010, 326). Her diagnosis is to argue that these failed attempts at exceptionalism occur when mega-exhibitions like biennales become too spectacular or commodified, and bow too much to market interests, in other words, when they fail to use their exceptionality as moments to defy traditional institutional order (327).

### Networking and Politics by Other Means

The biennale and the festival being places of gathering, exchange, and networking, Jones makes the point that they can also function as places to practice "politics by other means" (Jones 2010, 83; see also Roche 2011, 136–137). This means that in their function as places to gather and to form common experiences, perennial arts events have the possibility of increasing dialogue and decreasing hostility between groups. This can be seen to be the case in explicitly artistic projects, such as Florian Malzacher's *Truth is Concrete* as part of the 2012 Steirischer Herbst festival, which brought together over 200 artists, academics, and activists all working at the cross-section between art and activism for a 24/7 event lasting for an entire week (see section 3.4.2).

Less drastic, but also more germane are all the many moments of informal contact and exchange that happen at these concentrated gatherings of people. Jennifer Elfert, in expanding on her definition of the festival, mentions the importance of festivals also as networking events, functioning as a place for the establishment and renewal of networks between artists and arts organizations (Elfert 2009, 83). Elfert also argues that part of a festival's specificity is its liveness, which stabilizes intergroup contact, and ensures culpability for bad behavior, meaning participants are subjected to peer pressure to be held immediately accountable for their behaviour. This aspect of festivals is part of a festival's ability to promote instead of violent opposition instead the peaceful resolution of conflict (84–85).

Elfert confirms and extrapolates on the claim made by Jones that the festival can work as a place to do “politics by other means.” This also corresponds with the concept of bringing groups together to hash out their differences within the normalizing forum of the festival can be seen in Florian Malzacher's interpretation of the concept of agonism developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2013) (Malzacher 2014a, 119–120).

Elfert's contention is also supported by finding in contemporary social psychology, with the concept of intergroup contact theory. First put forward by Gordon W. Allport in 1954, the theory contends that intergroup contact can have positive effects on reducing bias among participants, given that four key conditions are fulfilled. These are namely 1. Equal status of all participants within the situation, such as in the military. 2. Common goals, such a mixed-group team trying to win a game together 3. Intergroup cooperation, such as working together to achieve a task, and 4. The support of authorities or customs, who sanction this intermixing. (Pettigrew 1998, 66–67)

There are some latent issues to the theory, such as the contention that intergroup contact is subject to inherent selection bias that “prejudiced people may avoid contact with out-groups” (Pettigrew 1998, 69), and that some intergroup contact may increase prejudice. According again to Pettigrew in a later study, “[t]hese situations frequently occur in work environments where intergroup competition exists as well as in in situations involving intergroup conflict” (Pettigrew et al. 2011, 277).

Nevertheless, in a 2011 meta-analysis of 515 studies in this field of research around this topic, Pettigrew et al. concluded that intergroup contact “typically reduces prejudice” (Pettigrew et al. 2011, 271). Furthermore, they also state that “[t]he meta-analysis found that contact effects typically do generalize to the entire groups involved,” meaning that the effect expanded beyond the immediate situation, as well as that the “findings reveal a remarkable universality of intergroup effects,” meaning that the effects of this contact are statistically significant across many kinds of groups (age, gender, or geographical location) (276).

## Questioning the Power to Make Worlds

While analogies can be drawn between the biennales of the visual arts and performing arts festivals in many of areas that have been listed above, the main differentiating factor between these two kinds of cultural events lies in the *approach* that they exhibit towards these categories. Specifically, it is within contemporary visual arts biennales globally that a clear acknowledgement and critique of their indebtedness to modernist structures and values is explicitly thematized. Though not entirely absent from performing arts festivals, particularly in theatre, such a self-reflexive turn, understanding the festival as a site specifically of critical knowledge production, is a characteristic much more clearly associated with visual arts biennales.

Historically, earlier biennales were often engaged with the reception of works on display, criticizing them, folding them into a discourse, into a history. Beginning in the post-war period, biennials, including already-established ones in the West, began to question their own structural disposition towards world-building and their relationship to state and economic power. They began during this time for instance exploring structural alternatives to the Venice model, such as the São Paulo Biennale's decision to create a biennale without national pavilions already in 1951, a model followed as well by the Gwangju Biennale as well (Jones 2010, 83).

Rather than being sites for the critique of works, they increasingly have come to act as sites for the critique of the theories and ideologies that establish the conditions for criticism in the first place. The goal of this re-examination of theory and the structures of knowledge-production has been to stop serving as spectacles to *reproduce* the colonizer's gaze, as was the case as of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851. Instead, many attempt to "outstare the colonizer's gaze" and establish themselves in embattled sites in an attempt to "exorcise political traumas" (Martínez quoted in Roces 2010, 53).

What is meant by this is precisely an attempt at subverting the scopic regime of modernism that has been laid out in the exploration of the Crystal Palace. The regime in question places importance on the deployment of the exhibition space as a representational container in which narratives suitable to hegemonic power can be manufactured and impressed upon its subjects. Understanding the nature and operation of this container will help to trace the path that can be taken to escape it. The Crystal Palace, with its system of manufacturing a gaze on the objects contained within it, makes a fundamental presumption and separation between its mechanisms of display—lighting, architecture, staging, etc., and the objects being displayed—objects of industry, art, performances. This is a tidy separation of background, or stagecraft, and foreground, or the objects on display.

Underlying this separation is what philosopher Timothy Morton would call the concept of *world*. A world is the result of just such aesthetic effects—like those used

in stagecraft or exhibition design, which produce and maintain a certain illusion that obscures the seams where the effect breaks down, or that hide the gaps in a cohesive story. In Morton's telling, the concept of world can be understood as "more or less a container in which objectified things float or stand," in the sense that it flattens relations and oversimplifies connections (Morton 2013, 99). This drastic reduction in complexity disregards anything that does not fit within its "world" which place the exhibited materials within a teleological history of industrial progress, and the triumph and inevitability of British colonial power.

The Crystal Palace, and the system of its functioning for the manufacturing of a specific narrative and form of subjectivity, is just such a kind of world. As Morton continues, "[t]he idea of world depends on all kinds of mood lighting and mood music, aesthetic effects that by definition contain a kernel of sheer ridiculous meaningfulness" (2013, 105). The mood lighting and aesthetic effect that is produced is here the architectural dispositive, the great sheets of glass, and the grand view across the transept in Hyde Park that formed the Crystal Palace Exhibition, as well as the many other elements of its branding and self-presentation (e.g. "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations...").

Morton points out that this concept of world is extremely fragile, that one only need to begin to scratch at any of its surfaces in order to reveal the extent to which it is a meticulously manufactured and manicured matter. Returning to the ideology of contemporary arts biennales, it is precisely such an examination of the structures of knowledge creation that they are focused on. The goal of such examinations is another kind of narrative, albeit one of a very different tenor, imbued with this will to "exorcise" certain historical traumas as mentioned earlier, in the hopes often of formulating new possible forms of existing together. As Morton writes, the goal of the "critical knowledge production" that is the focus of much contemporary curating in the visual arts is to act as a "rogue machinery ... [that] has decided to crash the machine, in the name of a social and cognitive configuration to come" (2013, 20). Contained in this position is a re-affirmation of the fundamental functioning of a rationalist-enlightenment system, however with the caveat that there are elements of this system that must be reformed in order to be able to address the problems and challenges that both humans and the earth face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, be they issues of social justice, or earth-level catastrophes such as global-warming.

Inasmuch as such a focus on criticality of the structures of knowledge production constitutes a clear area of distinction between contemporary arts biennales and performing arts festivals, it is precisely this facet of curating that is most salient to the performing arts. The next section will therefore explore some key moments in the development of this discourse in contemporary art in order to begin to establish the specific ways in which its lessons can be applied to the particular case of both music and the performing arts.

## 2.3 Curating Biennales

This section will examine the emergence of the professional profile of the biennale curator as they exist today. The goal will be to highlight several seminal moments in its development, in order to show the challenges and debates that define it. The focus in this section is on Documenta in Kassel, because it has been a site for many important developments in biennale curating, but also because it illustrates how many different factors—geopolitics, art history, global vs local—are brought together and negotiated through curatorial practice. The section will focus on three particularly important editions of documenta, each significant for its own reasons. The first section will examine the inaugural Documenta in 1955, and the debates around Harald Szeemann's Documenta in 1972, and the second section will examine Enwezor's Documenta 11 in 2002. Each will focus on different parts of what make up biennale curatorship, though of course it being the same festival, there are certain threads that flow through all of the editions.

### 2.3.1 Documenta V

Documenta was originally established in 1955 by professor and exhibition-designer Arnold Bode. The exhibition was put on with the intention of repudiating the Nazi-era branding of modernism as degenerate art (*Entartete Kunst*), and reintegrating Germany with avant-garde artistic movements, in an attempt to modernize and move forward after the trauma of war. Bode's inspiration came from his visit to the Venice Biennale of 1954, demonstrating the importance of Venice as a site for the dissemination of the biennale model (Wallace 2011, 5). (documenta n.d.-a)

Its first edition took place in the Fridericianum, still in ruins after the Allied bombing campaigns of WWII. It is significantly is the oldest public museum in Europe, having been built in 1779 on the Enlightenment principals of making the art collection of the state visible to the public. This effort by the state to promote the consumption of culture by the masses as a form of education is an early instance of the emerging intellectual culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has already been addressed in examining the universal expositions. (Wallace 2011)

Documenta II took place four years later in 1959, but as of Documenta V moved to a 5-year rhythm which it has kept up since. The exhibition has also expanded into a host of additional sites, including ones outside of Germany, which will be addressed later. The first exhibition having lasted around 2 months, by Documenta 3 it had become deemed by Bode the "Museum of 100 Days," a length that it has mostly kept since then (documenta n.d.-b).

Documenta V, perhaps its most famous edition, took place in 1972 under the direction of Swiss curator Harald Szeemann. Before this though, it is important to

take a brief detour and examine the growth of Szeemann's curatorial practice also before that landmark event.

By the time Szeemann had received the commission for Documenta 5, he had made a name for himself already as an important and influential curator in the art world. Before documenta, he became famous for "When Attitudes become Form" (1969) at the Kunsthalle Bern. The show highlighted artists working in then-emerging genres that rejected the creation of the art object in favour of situations and processes. The exhibition also featured artists whose work could not be "displayed" in the museum in the traditional sense, such as conceptual art and land art, about which can only be informed or referenced through documentation (Szeemann 1981, 47). The show was not well received by the Swiss public; the resulting outcry led eventually to Szeemann's firing.

Szeemann, newly-unemployed, would subsequently go on to found his now-famous *Agentur für Geistige Gastarbeit*, his own for-hire independent curatorial organization. This "agency," consisting only Szeemann himself as a private person, was an early instance of a curator breaking away from a large institution and offering their freelance services for hire on a project-by-project basis to arts institutions.

Szeemann's agency is usually interpreted as a symptom of the fact that the curator's role had, by the 1960s, largely shifted away from the care of collections and towards the staging of exhibitions, a change whose implications would prove significant in the further development of the term until the present. Curating, as one is endlessly reminded, comes etymologically from *cura*, meaning to take care of something. The term *curating* stems from the curator's former professional role taking care of the museum's collections, meaning the storage and preservation of works, but also their hanging and transportation. As many contemporary works became more immaterial, referential (e.g. documentation of land art or conceptual art, as with the exhibition in Bern), or performative, the role of the curator shifted to this second role of exhibition design.

Szeemann's agency reflects this, no longer tied down to museums and their collections, as an independent curator he can focus on the design of exhibition experiences, working in many different kinds of spaces and with a large range of artists. Curating becomes then a situated practice, it becomes performative, focused on the event of the concentration and coming together of works and performances for a short time for an exhibition. This stands in contrast to the museum logic of collecting, preserving, acting as a mausoleum. Artistic and curatorial practice were developing together, away from an emphasis on the narrative of art history, and towards emphasizing art as an event that either happened in the exhibition in the moment of experiencing it, or in the moment of their performance (usually then exhibited as traces, such as video or documentation).

Harald Szeemann's Documenta V in 1972 is regarded as an example of curatorial authorship revolving around the singular subjective authorship of the mystified

curator/genius. Szeemann was given the title of “General Secretary,” and made it known that his final authority over the exhibition would not easily be able to be questioned by the 5–7 person working group who helped realize the exhibition. Documenta V was significant in that it was the first Documenta that did not take place under the leadership of Bode, instead being run by Szeemann, with Bode serving only in an advisory role. Szeemann’s Documenta 5 was given the name “Questioning Reality—Pictorial Worlds Today.” The exhibition that until then had understood itself as an “100 days’ exhibition,” was profiled by Szeemann as a “100-day event,” showing the influence that Fluxus and happenings, as well as the student protests of 1968 some years earlier, had had on Szeemann.

The exhibition was thematic and subjective in its choice of artists and works, in contrast to Bode’s attempt at creating a survey of contemporary art trends at the time. Szeemann’s curatorial concept was to show a juxtaposition of both so-called artistic and non-artistic images with the intention of having viewers decide for themselves just how art should be defined, and to create what he called new forms of seeing (Szeemann 1981, 74). To achieve this, the exhibition was divided into three main sections, “Individual Mythologies,” a presentation of 70 artists mainly in the areas of performance, installation, and process-based art. “Parallel visual worlds,” made up mostly of design, and things not normally considered as art (poster design, propaganda, etc.), and lastly “Artists’ Museums,” where artists curated their own exhibitions. These included Claus Oldenburg’s *Mouse Museum*, Duchamp’s *La Boîte en Valise* (1941), and Broodthaers *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section d’Art Moderne*, among other works (Szeemann 1972, 9).

It was also the first time that installations made up a large amount of the works on display, meaning that many rooms were filled and conceived of entirely by one artist. It should be pointed out that as here the experientiality and festivity of the experience of the work of art is being discussed, that the installation is part of a logical continuation of this trend within the visual arts: As Fried, and later O’Doherty, have argued, the installation can be seen as the transformation of the entire room into the work of art. These kinds of works, which melt out of their frames and share the space with the viewer mean that the experience becomes one “of an object in a *situation*—one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*” (Fried [1967] 1998, 153; see also O’Doherty [1976] 1999, 29). They become theatrical, experiential, and begins to approach the performativity of theatre and music, interesting also for our purposes later.

Szeemann intended for Documenta 5 to be a “schooling of the eye” (*Seherschule*). As has been argued to be the case among the universal expositions and their inculcation of a specific scopic regime, a schooling of the eye is a common refrain among arts festivals as well. Unique to Szeemann’s approach was that it was informed and influenced by the 1968 revolution, and as a result it did not intend to prescribe new values, but rather to enrich and foster the experience of seeing in



itself, in a kind of rekindling of the Enlightenment spirit. Szeemann would then in theory function as a kind of “ignorant schoolmaster” in the Rancièrian sense of providing the audience with a *will* and motivation to learn, through the staging of objects on display, but not an *intellect* to be learnt, which elsewhere has been called a specific political ideology or modernist narrative. He let rather artists and non-art objects to provide this intellect, and ultimately leaving it up to the audience themselves, at least in theory. (Rancièr 1991, 14)

Szeemann’s approach was intended to be an attack on prescribed readings and didacticism in the museum. His argument was that once we have cleaned it of being a mausoleum—a place of worship of the arts—the museum can once again be rendered useful to contemporary artists. During this time, much artistic practice was performative, happening in the street, and in spaces not traditionally associated with art: Much artistic production post-1968 sought to reject the bourgeois institutions of artistic practice associated with the hidden dissemination of their hegemonic ideologies. Szeemann however made a point of utilizing the Neue Galerie and the Fridericianum, the two old museums in Kassel. He tried to bring art *back* into the museum by ridding the museum of its former position of status, and attempting to align it with this anti-bourgeois, emancipatory spirit.

With Documenta 5, Szeemann’s interest was in moving away from grand exhibitions extolling the singular and authoritative course of art history, once again attempting to disavow a core function of the museum institution. He wanted instead to move towards a much broader, more subjective understanding of art history that was made up of “individual mythologies” that gave the audience their own authority to decide how to construct their own proper art historical narratives. He understood his role as differentiating the audiences’ gaze, rather than creating simple and dogmatic yes or no structures of acceptance or denial to the status of art (Szeemann 1972, 74–75).

This emphasis on a lack of art historical theme counterintuitively made this the first Documenta to have a specific programmatic focus set by its curator, “Questioning Reality” (Richter 2008, 110). This is an important distinction that must be made: Bode’s motivation for presenting modernist and abstract art in West Germany was the reinstating of an oppressed history, though one that was perhaps less inevitable than large-scale post-war exhibitions made it seem. Bode, in contrast to Szeemann, worked more as an instrument of a grand, modern narrative of inevitable aesthetic progress, a change in content but not underlying approach from Nazi art policy. Szeemann, in his post-modern, post-1968 style, rejected these grand narratives in favour of smaller, individual ones, “individual mythologies” of the artists, but also, at least in theory, of visitors as well.

## The Independent Curator

Documenta 5 was an early example of a festival that experimented with the conditions for knowledge-creation using its organizational framework. Szeemann's approach can be attributed to a form of curatorial practice that had been emerging, since the late 1960s, which saw curators begin to assert authorship over the exhibition as itself a kind of statement. Szeemann coined the term for this professional profile the *Ausstellungsmacher*, the exhibition maker. Curators such as Szeemann could be "independent" because these figures normally possessed a high enough level of influence in the art world that allowed them to break away from large institutions and work on a project basis on specific exhibitions as they came up.<sup>18</sup>

Although there exists a history of experimentation with the exhibition setting by curators and artists alike well before the focus here on the 1960s, what is significant is that this period marked an increase in the treatment of the exhibition as its own particular medium, as well as in the number of large international group exhibitions organized by these independent curators.<sup>19</sup> Group exhibitions allowed for comparisons and contrasts between works from various artists and styles, orchestrated by the curator through their modelling of the exhibition experience (O'Neil 2012, 16). Exhibitions became thematic rather than linear or retrospective.

Artists were often also asked to make works uniquely for specific shows, creating situations where curators and artists would have to collaborate and establish some kind of working relationship specific to the exhibition being put on. This was a particular relationship to many of the early independent curators, as their curatorial practices were often inextricably linked to the forms of artistic practice of the artists that they represented. The relationships between independent curators like Szeemann and artists such as Buren or Beuys was often symbiotic; e.g. artists often using a curator's stiff frame and concept as a springboard and set of enabling constraints.

The role of the independent curator as the author of the exhibition becomes more complex when we continue to further examine the similarities between their practices and the many forms of experimental art, installation art, and conceptual art that had been emerging since the 1940s.

Because artists' works increasingly depended on specific sites of production and display, it was in their interest to have as much control over these as possible. The issue was that these mediating factors such as hanging plans or choice of site were the traditional domain of institutions or curators. Added to this was, as seen with Szeemann, that curators' roles were shifting to assume authorship over the

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18 Other significant early independent curators were Konrad Fischer, Walter Hopps, and Seth Siegelau, to name just a few.

19 A further exploration of experimental forms of display goes beyond the scope of this volume. See however O'Neil 2012, 9–13.

exhibition and its display, we can begin to see a battle for control over the exhibition and its interpretation emerge.

This new overlap in the responsibilities of artists and curators set up a situation of tension and negotiation between them. Some of the controversies around Documenta 5 are good examples of this, and will be explored below. This situation of the “battle” for the exhibition between the artist and the curator was far from unproductive. On the contrary, it would prove to be a crisis of definition and sharpening of profiles that was highly productive and interesting for the visual arts. The exhibition became the creative nexus of the art world, the standard unit of knowledge production, created as intense moments of negotiation between curators and artists, and of course a host of other stakeholders.

Having now surveyed some of the key aspects of Szeemann’s work, it is now possible to examine the relationship between Szeemann’s persona, his curatorial approach, and the criticism of the exhibition by artists, which will in turn allow for a survey of some of the key debates that underpin the field of curating.

### Criticism by Documenta Artists

Two significant critiques by Documenta 5 artists will be focused on here, Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers.

Buren used his space in the exhibition’s catalogue to write a text entitled “Ausstellung einer Ausstellung,” or exhibition of an exhibition. Buren argued that there was a tendency in exhibitions of the day to *themselves* be portrayed as works of art, rather than allowing works of art to speak on their own. In his analogy, artists’ works function only as “pigments” for the larger “painting” created by the curator—Szeemann. Works exist in a degraded position, as the curator selects them according to their suitability for the larger exhibition work and its central thesis (Buren 1972, 29).

Buren’s argument is that works are both acknowledged as art through their selection and inclusion in the exhibition, but simultaneously destroyed through their valorization solely within the curatorial thesis or narrative, which illuminates only a specific reading of the work. Though part of Szeemann’s concept was ostensibly the emancipation of the exhibition-goer, encouraging them to make their own decisions as to the definition of art, his ascription of artists’ positions into the three main categories of his exhibition were for Buren merely a replacement of one form of control over his works to another.

Szeemann’s position against the traditional museum’s authority over the definition of artistic work can be read as a post-modernist displacement of the role of the museum, and a new form of the same appropriation of the autonomy of the artwork that the museum itself practiced. The modern museum of fine art at the time typically hung its collections chronologically, implying in this pattern a progres-

sion of the universalist narrative of art history. This narrative was rejected by post-modernism, and the authority of the museum in defining art history was taken away by the 1968 generation's rejection of forms of state authority. The exhibition of works by the independent curator acknowledges the failure of the modernist project in the post-modern sense, but, as per Buren's argument, replaces a universalist narrative with a subjective one of the curator's own telling, their "individual mythology."

Thinking again about the system of display of the universal expositions and the beginning of the modernist gallery, the same way of functioning remains. Just like in the universal exposition, artworks are subjected to a dual operation of being taken out of their original contexts and inserted into a new one, making them illustrations of a larger narrative. The shift from a modernist to post-modernist paradigm in the use of the museum then still meant artworks were subservient to the conditions of their display (Groys 2008b, 50–51). Interestingly though, when power then becomes manifest in an "authorizing" subject, the independent curator Szeemann, the criticism of this system by artists seems to be more successful, or are more apparent in the exhibition's presentation. Artists were given a clear sparring partner, and as is clear with Documenta 5, they fought back.

Buren's position of resistance against the domination of Szeemann's approach extended also to his works in the exhibition. He covered seven walls in six sections of Documenta with wallpaper consisting of stripes of two shades of white. Some surrounded works, others were used as normal exhibition walls with works placed on top of them. Buren's interventions were an invitation to viewers to become aware of the walls in the exhibition space: a mild disruption was introduced into the anonymity of the white cube. Buren's intent was to show that

be it the stretcher, the venue, or the social context—the frame in which an artwork is presented is always involved in the production of meaning and itself undergoes changes in function depending on the definition of art brought to bear in any given case. (von Bismarck 2017)

Whether into a universal modernist narrative, or a subjective post-modern position of Szeemann attempting to integrate artists' works into his own meta-artwork, Buren's stripes were an intervention against the subjugation of art to the interests of the exhibition. Buren was not arguing for the destruction of this institution, but rather for its functioning in a way that left artists control over the contextualization of their own works.

A second position within Szeemann's Documenta was the final two installments of Marcel Broodthaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne*, the *Département des Aigles*, *Section Publicité* and *Section d'Art Moderne* (1972). It gives a slightly different perspective on this same issue of the relationship between curator and artist. It differs however from the critique by Buren in its form; resistance is practiced through the consummate

construction of an exhibition within an exhibition, a parody of Szeemann's concept.

The *Departement des Aigles, Section Publicité* consisted of an exhibition showing the use of the eagle in advertising. Significantly, this artist-as-curator's exhibition in the exhibition was reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century exhibitions and ethnological display cabinets. This meant creating a rigorous reference system consisting of an alphabetical annotated index, and labels placed next to each eagle object inscribed with a reference number and the phrase "This is not a work of art" (Snauwaert [1972] 2017, 130).

The throwback to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a thematization of the same ambiguous issues that have been presented in the section on universal expositions. This is namely a highlighting of the exhibition display as a rationalizing force, able to produce its own narrative out of the de- and re-contextualized exhibited cultural artefacts. Broodthaers in reconstructing this system was enacting an "empirical verification" of its workings (Snauwaert [1972] 2017, 131). By imitating as an artist the rituals and practices of the rationalist-modernist museum, he sought to question its power and authority over the works themselves (ibid.). In doing so in his capacity as artist, Broodthaers sought to reclaim territory in the struggle for authority over meaning to artists and their works themselves, rather than the curator.

Second, in the *Section d'Art Moderne*, a plaque on the floor was inscribed with the phrase "Private Property" in three languages. Halfway through the exhibition, Broodthaers changed the plaque to a longer inscription whose final phrase read "faire informer pouvoir" (do, inform power) (Bishop 2007, 17). On this occasion, he gave insight into his reasoning for both the first inscription and the change, which shows us how Broodthaers understood the criticality of this exhibition microcosm: He claims that the inscription "private property" was to emphasize his artistic power replacing that of the organizer Szeemann within his small corner of the larger exhibition, something which he felt he did not achieve with his exhibition-within-an-exhibition. This caused him to change it to the second inscription, meant to "subvert the organizational scheme of the exhibition" (ibid.). What is clear here is the struggle for the artistic work to be able to define its own manner of contextualization, rather than being de- and re-contextualized to suit the "meta-painting" of the curator—here Szeemann, but previously also the modernist museum that functioned in the same way.

The importance in separating out the role of the artist from that of the curator is in order to highlight the autonomy of Broodthaers' position within Documenta 5. There must be space for the artist to be able to subvert the exhibition with its interest in subsuming the artistic position within a preconceived framework. Without this, artists run the danger of falling back into the problematic situation of the exhibition practices of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely the loss of the artists' authorial

autonomy, they exist then only through their representation by a curator to their audience.

His observation halfway through Documenta 5 that his exhibition was failing to establish such an autonomous space for itself, prompting the changing of the inscription plaque, speaks to this as well. Though ostensibly Documenta 5 was focused on empowering artists, Szeemann was skewing towards attempting to compose his own “meta”-artistic position out of artists’ works: the resistance to this act revealed that the role of curator could not be viewed as analogous to the status of the commissioned artists. The system that had worked more or less for exhibitions at Kunsthalle Bern did not scale to the size of documenta.

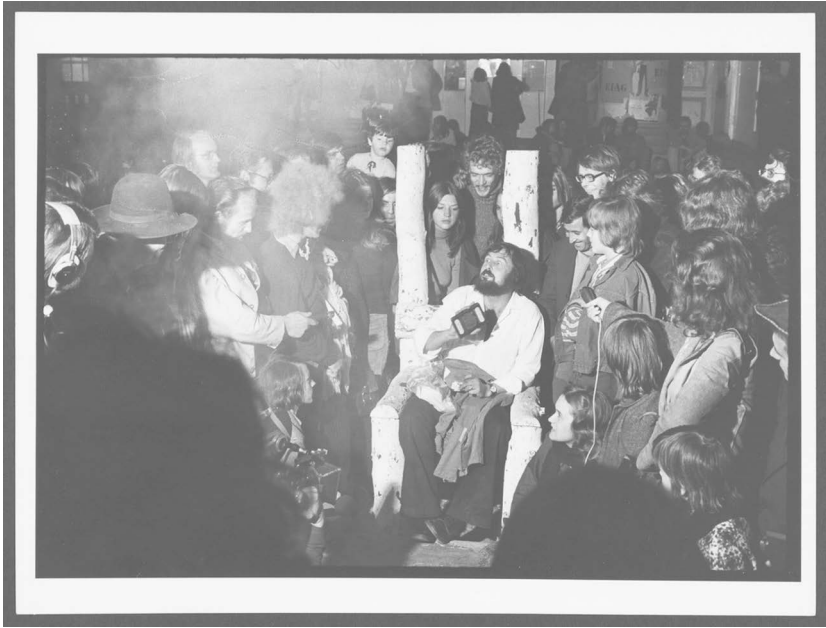
Curators during this time were undergoing transformations in their professional profile as a result of the rapid expansion of the art world. Along with their function as *auteur* of the exhibition, they were taking on also an expanded administrative role, representing artists and their wishes, but also the market, and the financial/logistical considerations of large-scale exhibitions (Bishop 2007, 18). Curators thus differed from artists in that they are reliant on hegemonic powers and their interest in narrative-making. As will be shown with later editions of documenta, part of the curatorial task becomes creatively working-with these constellations of powers.

### Harald Szeemann the Figure

The opening photo series of Szeemann’s book *Museum of Obsessions* from 1981 shows Szeemann at document 5 lounging on a throne, surrounded by a throng of artists. Dorothee Richter shows in her art-historical analysis of these photos that this iconic image has a long history meant to evoke the relation between Christ as god in human form in the middle of the image, and the those who surround him in a clear hierarchy of relations (Richter 2008, 110–111). The curator positions himself as a god, at least in his own domain of the exhibition, a genius, surrounded by his disciples. Documenta 5 was a comprehensive attempt by Szeemann to subsume a multitude of artistic works under one umbrella, thus positioning his practice in a way analogous to his self-portrayal in photos (Richter 2008, 114–115).

Though it has been discussed that Szeemann’s approach could be understood in terms of a shift from modern to post-modern knowledge-production, his self-understanding as singular *auteur* of the exhibition brings up a different problem. Szeemann was not just acting as the “will” of the exhibition, occupying himself with the logistical concerns while letting artists express themselves and their “intellect” as they wished (to invoke again Rancière’s concept of the ignorant schoolmaster), he was becoming as von Bismarck describes it a “first among equals,” rather than a co-collaborator with the artists (von Bismarck 2017). The criticism of Szeemann becomes that he used this plaidoyer for freedom and emancipation as a way of jockey-

*Image 2: Photograph of Harald Szeemann with artists on the last day of Documenta 5, Oct. 8, 1972. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2011.M.30).*



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ing for influence and gaining power for himself. As Richter's analysis of Szeemann and his photos with Documenta artists concludes, what is visible is how Szeemann used the iconography of a seemingly anarchistic and emancipated concept of artistic production to establish himself at the top of a hierarchical system of meaning-production (Richter 2008, 121).<sup>20</sup>

This criticism of Szeemann and his character points to a further important point in the development of curatorial practice. It matters a great deal not just what the curatorial concept is on paper or what artists are presented, but also how

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20 Richter's analysis contrasts Szeemann with the quasi-curatorial work of Maciunas and the Fluxus group. Maciunas, despite half-hearted attempts at becoming the central node in the Fluxus network, was rather more a facilitator. Richter argues, through the analysis of archival photos, that any such self-definition of Maciunas as in the centre of the network is non-existent; rather what is seen are the anarchistic and non-hierarchical moments that were a foil to Szeemann's centrality at Documenta (2008, 115–121). This can be connected to the case study analysis of Berno Odo Polzer's leadership of Maerzmusik, which is concluded to exhibit a similar contradiction in values, see the conclusion of that chapter in section 5.9.

the internal working conditions of the curatorial practice exist in relationship to the stated curatorial strategy. Curating is an act of mediation between all manner of stakeholders that come together to produce the event of exhibition, the stated intention of the curatorial strategy is only one small part of this larger network; the direct actions and choices of the curator, whether intentional or not, are just as important as any discrete statements they should make.

Szeemann's practice shows that curating cannot be simply about hanging and conceiving the exhibition itself, but rather must encompass also the working relationships with these stakeholders, navigating these various social contexts successfully. His earlier projects, such as at the Kunsthalle Bern, were also similar kinds of battles for authorship over the exhibition, battles that Szeemann enjoyed having, and which defined his career. What seems to be the case though with Documenta is that these working relationships began to sour in the leadup to the exhibition itself, with artists feeling that they were losing the ability to negotiate with the curator.

When we look at these criticisms by Buren, Broodthaers, or Robert Morris (whose equally-important criticism of Documenta 5 will not be examined here), the common thread seems to be a sentiment of a loss of control over the struggle.<sup>21</sup> No longer was a shared symbolic space for intense debate over the status of the exhibition possible, it was replaced by Szeemann's singular vision: the curator became too influenced by his own need for self-promotion. This within a changing arts institutional landscape that increasingly centred on the figure of the curator as the hypervisible nexus of power in the art world.

Despite these fundamental and cutting criticisms of Szeemann, scholars Martini and Martini argue that despite his authoritarian structure marking the beginning of a period of hyper-visibility for the solitary curator-figure running through the 1970s and 1980s, his Documenta 5 working method, working together with a curatorial team, would anticipate the trend towards the schema of central curator and network of collaborators that would become common among later biennales (2010, 265).

Remaining within the specific framework of documenta, the network model with a number of collaborators working together with the artistic director would take another generation to establish itself structurally in the institution of documenta. It was perhaps only rhetorically the case with Jan Hoet's Documenta 9 in 1992 that such a system was established, but a collective, network model was strongly reflected in the structural set-up of Documenta exhibitions beginning with Catherine David's Documenta 10 (1997) and Enwezor's Documenta 11 (2002) (Martini and Martini 2010, 268).

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21 On Robert Morris' letter of withdrawal from Documenta 5, see Bishop 2007, 14–15.



Szeemann's first great experiment with the Documenta format thus seemed to fall back into the same kinds of criticisms of an overdetermination of artistic works by its framing and contextualization by the festival that have been seen before. Significantly though, the event should not be solely seen in this light. The exhibition was also an early attempt at experimentation with the structures of knowledge-creation of a large-scale arts festival, and were part of an era that would mark a turning point in approaches to arts festival leadership in this regard.

The struggles with artists like Buren and Broodthaers are also very significant developments, as they represent a growing trend in visual art towards artists using contextualization of works as part of their expressive medium, and taking a position towards the curator's concept for the exhibition explicitly in their works and writings. Buren's striped walls encouraged visitors to acknowledge the specificity of site, working against the manufactured illusion of the white cube. Broodthaers' museum-in-a-museum allowed him to call into question the infrastructure that manufactures perception of works on display.

More important than tying these various struggles into a neat package, what the case of Documenta 5 shows is the transformation of the exhibition by the mid-century into a contested site of various mediations on multiple levels by artists and curators alike. It also shows that mediation of the artistic work is not the sole responsibility of the exhibition curator, but is rather something much less centralized, an action that can be done by curators and artists alike.

### 2.3.2 Documenta 11

Documenta 11 was curated by artistic director Okwui Enwezor, and took place in 2002. This section will explore the particular and landmark ways in which the exhibition succeeded in addressing the issue of representation of artistic production from non-Western regions and artists. This was achieved through a particularly innovative structural setup of the exhibition, dividing it into a series of five platforms, the last of which was the exhibition in Kassel. Also notable was Enwezor's insistence on working as a "manager" rather than curator-as-author of documenta, allowing a diversity of knowledges to flow into the creation of the event.

#### Magiciens de la Terre

Before exploring Documenta 11 itself, an important precursor in the treatment of non-Western contemporary art production in the West must be examined, as its approach (and mistakes) would come to inform the structures of Documenta 11. The exhibition in question is "Magiciens de la Terre," curated by Marc Francis and Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989, which itself was inspired by "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" at the MoMA NYC in 1984–5.

“Magiciens” is notable because it is “widely acknowledged as the first large-scale international group exhibition to have raised the issue of inclusion of contemporary art and artists from non-Western centres of production” (O’Neil 2012, 56). It took place in Paris at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette, and was organized as the replacement to the Paris Biennial. It united work from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, exhibiting it alongside works from the established art centres of Europe and North America.

By examining the criticism of this earlier approach to the inclusion of non-Western art and contrasting it with the structure employed for the presentation of the same at Documenta 11, it will be possible to highlight two sides of a divide in the curatorial approach to large-scale arts festivals. This in turn will help set the stage for understanding the globalized situation of art as it exists today, and will also be important for contextualizing and adding depth of perspective particularly to the conception of the platform format used during the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, the case study at the centre of Chapter 4.

It will be shown that while “Magiciens” treatment of non-Western art epitomizes the ideological paradigm of post-modernist diversity, Documenta 11 is part of a shift to post-colonial discourse as of around the turn of the century. The year of Magiciens’ exhibition in 1989 is significant here: it marked not only the fall of the Berlin Wall and the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union, but also the universalization of Western liberal democracy. This period also saw the rapid expansion in the number and size of biennales around the globe. The art market spread along with it, truly becoming the art *world*, all-encompassing in its narrative and scope. “Magiciens” was part of a growing awareness in the West that artistic production from outside it would need to be more fundamentally addressed in this new global situation.

In section 2.1 on the universal exposition, the argument was that the festival has historically acted as a site for the dissemination of a way of seeing through the eyes of hegemonic power. In section 2.3.1 on Documenta V, this modernist innovation was shown to be able also transition into a post-modern one, becoming subjective rather than universal without giving up its insistence on a singular reading or interpretation. “Magiciens” operated with a similar pretext, as it was heavily criticized for the way it attempted to subsume its diversity within one text, that of the curator. Differences between artistic works were presented in a kind of pluralism that celebrated these differences at the same time as reifying them.

In his preface to the exhibition, Martin spends a lot of time addressing the question of how to receive these works from “other cultures” different to the West, pointing out the challenges in reconstructing the contexts in which the works were made. His solution is first to say that the same criteria of art were applied to both Western and non-Western artists, the latter’s art though needing to be seen in the context of its creation. Throughout the preface, it becomes clear that the goal is one

of cultural dialogue and exchange between the art of the West and that of those on the peripheries of civilization. Though perhaps well-intentioned, it produced forms of otherness that are essentialized and therefore incommensurable with Western subjectivities (Martin 1989, 9). Though arguably creating visibility for non-Western works, Martin was solidifying difference, and further alienating the other from access to power through a strategy of ghetto-izing them (O'Neil 2012, 57–58).

This is a kind of tepid pluralism, a multiculturalism on the established aesthetic terms of the West. What Martin does not do is question the constitution of the fundamental categories with which he worked. His position in collecting and displaying works was one of the curator-as-anthropologist, shifting the focus from the works themselves to the act of gathering them, and ultimately to the gatherer himself, once again mirroring the Szeemann-esque position of a final central arbiter and authority. Martin thus assumes an untenable position at the centre, with the viewer is pushed into a specific and subjective narrative of the collected works (O'Neil 2012, 55).

## Documenta 11

When Okwui Enwezor was chosen by the Documenta committee, he would be the first non-European artistic director in its history, following Catherine David, who in 1997 became the first woman nominated to the position. The festival took as its starting point its particular geopolitical situation: at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, processes of globalization were happening with increasing rapidity, and with it came issues of post-colonialism and the need to address issues of the shifting status of the global south. Documenta 11 also came in the wake of, and was influenced by, the explosion of biennales in the global south that had begun to flourish in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of these, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Johannesburg biennale in 1997 (entitled *Trade Routes: History and Geography*), would be Enwezor's only significant experience with large-scale exhibition-making before documenta.

In an interview with Paul O'Neil, Enwezor positions his curatorial concept for Documenta as fundamentally different from the concept behind "Magiciens," arguing that it has "nothing to do with what I do or the way I think about the transnational sphere." (2007, 112). His main point of differentiation is that Martin possessed what he calls a "new colonist's eye," meaning that in his presentation of art from outside the West, he would seek out positions of "extreme otherness" to the western positions (Enwezor 2007, 113). Seeking to portray works from outside the West that exhibited the maximal amount of difference produces a manufactured contrast that overemphasizes difference, and is ultimately the result of Martin's own taste, not an accurate representation of important artistic practice from the places he sought to represent.

The issue with this kind of approach is that it does not look at how artistic practices can be considered radical or critical within the specific contexts and communities in which they have been made. Rather, a Western art history is imposed onto them instead, with the West coming out as “more advanced” in its development because of the inherent design of the value system being employed. Enwezor’s criticism turns into an argument for once again understanding works in their contexts, rather than against one’s own value system. As will be discussed later, this becomes important also for navigating interdisciplinary arts, as it turns out there that one’s personal temperament and dispositions end up influencing the perception of the artistic work, and the extent to which it can be considered critical or innovative, rather than e.g. reinventing the wheel (see here section 3.2.1).

Just as Bode in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had used Documenta reconnect connect post-war West Germany to modernist and abstract art, so too did Enwezor use Documenta as a site for reinvestigating the relationship between the artistic practices of Europe and North America to the rest of the world. He views the post-colonial constellation in which Germany and the West still play a central, problematic role as having coopted the critical project of the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-gardes, and attempted with his globalized Documenta to locate the new sites where resistance to colonialist-capitalist society is manifesting itself (Enwezor 2002, 45). He argues that this has the possibility to form a new kind of avant-gardism challenging Western values through the presentation of these nascent new models and the new forms of subjectivity that they produce, all of which are occurring outside of the established framing procedures of the West, which by (or through) definition ignore these true threats to its legitimacy (ibid.).

Importantly, this avant-garde is one that has formed in all those places affected by the expansion of global capitalism and neo-colonialism, implying a worldview of fundamental *entanglement* between places all over the globe brought together by the flows of globalization.<sup>22</sup> Decolonization for Enwezor should thus mean putting forward a new way of reading the world that puts into perspective the way in which global phenomena are interconnected, and therefore not reducible to schemas of West and East, or other easy dualisms.

From an artistic perspective, rather than promote the further propagation of the orientalist gaze on non-Western work, it was intended to challenge the hegemony of the West over its ability to define the practices and discourses of contemporary art (Gardner and Green 2017, 111). The previous generation of curators’

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22 See also the research of Shalini Randeria, which deals explicitly with the topic of entanglement as a way of framing global phenomena beyond West-East dualisms, e.g. in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* [Beyond eurocentrism: postcolonial perspectives in the historical and cultural sciences] (with Sebastian Conrad, 2002).

networks were ones based mainly in the West, meaning that these developments outside of that narrow scope were not being addressed in a serious way. Enwezor argues that what was understood to be “international” was really just a focus on the “milieu of the artistic industry clustered in a limited art market in the Western Europe [sic] and North America” (Enwezor 2007, 111).

Though there was a pronounced focus in Kassel on contemporary artistic practice from the global south, and in particular from Africa, Enwezor’s goal was not to bring one to the other, but rather to establish Kassel as a place where what he calls a “deterritorialization” could take place. This deterritorialization was about moving away from an emphasis on clearly-delineated borders or categories of West and East, North and South, replacing them instead with a post-colonial vision of Kassel as a place where many networks of intertwined knowledges would intersect over the 100 days of documenta. Rather than trying to point out and therefore manufacture differences, Enwezor’s concept tried to show how artistic practices around the globe have *always been* intertwined with each other. This is how Enwezor tried to move away from the post-modernist framework deployed in “Magiciens,” where differences were only reproduced and entrenched through exhibition, and towards his vision of a post-colonial one. This goal was pursued through a series of structural and curatorial concepts for running and presenting documenta.

The first structural change by Enwezor was that he wanted to move away from the association between large-scale biennales and the *auteur* position of the artistic director, seen best in Szeemann’s Documenta V. Enwezor thus invited a team of co-curators to work with him, an approach that he had already successfully implemented in a similar way his earlier Johannesburg Biennale. Unlike Szeemann, Enwezor’s team became a group of collaborators, and Enwezor more of a team leader or manager rather than the final authority over the exhibition. The team consisted of academics with backgrounds in the curation of exhibitions: Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya. His intention was to have a mix of different backgrounds, not just curators, but different kinds of intelligence, and to discuss together with them some of the challenges that faced Documenta (Enwezor 2007, 117). The group was unconventional for the time, having backgrounds in both academia and curating exhibitions, which allowed them to balance both art academic interests with the more speculative and open work of the curator, bridging a chasm between these two sides that had gradually established itself since the rise of the exhibition *auteur* curators of the 1960s (Gardner and Green 2017, 111).

This situation allowed for different knowledges to complement each other, rather than the entirety of a mega-exhibition like Kassel be the product of a singular vision. This willingness to be open and share the position of power were signals that Enwezor was attempting to depart from the homogeneity of the singular authorial position, which has its strong associations to both the

singular narrative of sovereign power, and the subjective truth of the post-modern exhibition-as-story, represented by Szeemann and Martin.

Enwezor also broke up Documenta 11 into a series of 5 platforms beginning a year before the biennale, four of which took place in various locations worldwide—and outside of Kassel itself. The first four platforms (in Vienna/Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia, and Lagos respectively) consisted of debates, panel discussions, and lectures. The preliminary platforms took place in the lead-up to the fifth and final platform in Kassel itself, the 100-day exhibition in the small German town.

The discursive program of festivals is often used to catalyze discussion and discourse, but also as a way to constitute it in the first place (Elfert 2009, 136). This community is normally constituted through their spatio-temporal co-presence, in part via the discursive program as communal activity, during the concentrated time of the festival. This system is interrupted here; the community is distributed among the far-flung sites all over the globe during different time periods.

This disruption meant that experts from many different fields all over the world would gradually accumulate the public sphere of Documenta 11. Over the course of the platforms in different cities, they would become part of an imagined community all discussing and debating the Documenta and its challenges. Enwezor's Documenta took on a format that was not just meant as a framework for artists, but also attempted to call itself into question not just from a singular art historical angle, but from many different kinds of practitioners. This opening of the festival to different forms of knowledge was part of a larger shift in the visual arts world of festivals moving away from relying on experts only in visual arts, and towards them being hotbeds of different kinds of knowledges.

The first four platforms were a thorough exercise in the mapping of the particular set of political urgencies that would define the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, issues such as democracy, reconciliation, cultural hybridity, and urbanization, in a host of local contexts. The platforms functioned first as a kind of “manifesto,” meaning that they were an attempt at sketching an aspirational plan for the future, for what Documenta could be, in this sense also closely related to the concept of heterotopia as it has been related to festivals in section 2.2.1.

They also, to take their name literally, were a kind of vantage point, a way of looking into the distance both forward and backward, as well as geographically surveying from four different vantage points, before finally finding their way to Kassel (Gardner and Green 2017, 113–114). Rather than looking out and attempting to plot the map of contemporary art from the perspective only of Kassel, this mapping process took place from a variety of perspectives, in order to study how their vectors crossed both in Kassel and elsewhere (Enwezor 2007, 118). This kind of geographical taking-stock was a key part of the de-centring of the narrative from the North Atlantic towards one that included also the goings-on in the global South. Unlike in *Magiciens*, where differences were essentialized, and forms of orientalism

reproduced, Documenta 11 strove to define a new narrative of mutual dependence and connectivity.

A result of this platform system was that because the four platforms in advance of the Documenta took place outside of Kassel, it meant that “talk was happening elsewhere” and was therefore not accessible in an unmediated form to the biennale-going public who attended the main event in Kassel. This is a disruption of the normal situation of the bodily co-presence of the festival community and the immediate accessibility of their knowledge, something that has been identified as a key component of the festival format. In the context of a Documenta that seeks to thematize exactly the illumination of the infrastructure that makes these flows of knowledge possible, it seems fitting that it itself be also always-incomplete. This is a good example of what is meant by experimenting with the format of the festival itself. Its spatio-temporal concentration is intentionally disrupted by the platform structure as a way of exposing the underlying mechanisms of this system, which in turn was part of the subject of the festival.

In section 2.2.2, the chief difference between music festivals and biennales historically was argued to be that the latter actively experiment with their infrastructure, and with their fundamental constitutional parameters as an important element of their conception. Enwezor here is changing, via the platform format, the constitution of documenta’s festival community, as part of a disruption of the relationship between the arts festival and hegemonic power. This is another instance of visual arts curating focusing directly and explicitly on experimentation with the underlying infrastructure and framework constitutive of the festival, a key component of what makes up the particularity of curating in the visual arts context.

### **Documenta 11 as a Turning Point**

Taking the experiences of “Magiciens” and Documenta 11 together, they lie on either side of a shift in the conception of large-scale exhibitions. “Magiciens” was still the product of a post-modernist interest in an ultimately still Western-centric narrative of pluralism, of West and an abundance of Rest with fixed identities, subjected to a still-Orientalized gaze also reproduced through display. On the other hand, distancing itself also rhetorically from “Magiciens,” Enwezor’s Documenta 11 was an attempt to give the institution a new project for the new millennium. This was the introduction of a post-colonial approach to the curation of documenta, i.e. one that attempted to create a curatorial framework or infrastructure that would lead to an exhibition highlighting the inextricable entanglement between the “West” and the regions and people of the world it had formerly branded as “Other.”

Enwezor’s Documenta 11 was about sketching a “deterritorialization” of both the format itself, but also more generally as a project going forward for artistic practice globally. Deterritorialization as a concept is obviously taken from the works of

Deleuze and Guattari, but the question often in the arts is what exactly is meant with the term. Deterritorialization here is both a move away from the historic focus on the “territory” of Germany as a state and German issues, towards a wider focus on the relationship between Germany as embedded within Europe, and its relationship to other countries around the globe. Second, related to this, it is a move towards a thematic opening of Documenta away from a specifically art-history-related concern, and towards an expansion of the number of different disciplinary models that the festival worked with (Enwezor 2002, 42).

Documenta could then no longer be judged on the basis of one frame of reference, that of its German critics, but rather would be pushed into a “deterritorialized” zone that was covered by no one field of knowledge. This non-territory was not arbitrary or any-which-thing, as post-modernism is accused of being, but rather an attempt to capture the inherent complexity and density of global art as it exists. As O’Neil states, this approach positions Documenta 11 as “a starting point rather than an end point from which to consider our current global condition” (O’Neil 2012, 59).

Enwezor’s Documenta serves as a framework for understanding the current form of biennales around the world. It exhibits the characteristics and challenges of the festival as it has existed in modernity, but takes also the step, explicitly but also relatively successfully, of intervening in the organizational concept of the festival in order to counteract its instrumentalization by Western hegemonic power.

His implicit understanding of curating is as a practice focused on manipulating the acts of mediation and contextualization of the festival institution. The specific focus on the institutional context is important because of how it determines the *episteme*, the scope of the knowable and sayable in the Foucauldian sense, within a given situation. Attempting to move into a “deterritorialized” zone where by definition no expert could exist, was a way of shifting this contextualizing practice away from the prescriptive functioning of the modern festival.

The lack of the possibility of a priori experts in this kind of festival set-up makes the act of organizing and staging the festival itself into an experiment with unknown outcome. Curators, like Enwezor, if they are trying to create a festival concept that looks to shift contemporary episteme, can themselves only improvise a situated solution in this great field of uncertainty. They can draw on previous experience, but ultimately because of the nature of a practice involved in the creation of new relations in networks, must always start again anew.

This curatorial practice can then perhaps be called *contemporary*, in the sense put forward by Agamben in *What Is the Contemporary?*. He proposes that the contemporary is “he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness” (Agamben 2009, 44). Being contemporary to one’s era is to constantly be engaged in a looking for that which has been cast into shadow, and not allow oneself to be “blinded by the lights of the century” (Agamben 2009,



45). What is furthermore significant is that Agamben ascribes the power to do this to the poet, and thus to an artistic sensibility. The act of designing and adequately executing a curatorial concept, like Documenta 11, one that is able to point a gaze at that which lies in darkness, arguably through this definition becomes an artistic practice in itself, but more importantly is a practice of designing the parameters for specific kinds of knowledge creation. The particularities of this case, the establishment of a curatorial team, the platform system, they are all means to an end, which is a curatorial concept that “stares back” at the colonizer, and attempts to shine a new light on the arts festival as a means for the solidification of a Western identity, and the manufacture of an exoticized other.

Documenta 11 has been presented here because it is a good example, but not at all because it is the only example, of a curatorial concept as a quasi-artistic practice. The festival can be seen within a tendency to so-called “discursive exhibitions” that emerged within large-scale exhibitions in the 1990s, as the profile of the curator was transforming from someone with know-how on how to successfully mount and stage an exhibition to a figure more focused on reflecting upon and experimenting with parameters for knowledge production. Situating and understanding this turn towards more theory-based and experimental curatorial practice will be the central concern of the next section.

## 2.4 Curatorial Discourse

The case of Documenta 5 demonstrates the battles for authority and control of the exhibition format. On the one hand, Szeemann as curator made the exhibition into his own Gesamtkunstwerk, attempting to subsume the positions of the participating artists into his own vision for the exhibition, using them as “pigments for his painting,” as Buren put it. On the other, artists such as Buren and Broodthaers dedicated their artistic practices to exploring and manipulating the conditions of display. Buren’s stripe paintings encouraged visitors to think of the white cube spaces of the museum as only being an illusion of neutrality. Broodthaers’ artist museum imitated the protocols of a “real” museum, and in doing so explored how this seemingly-invisible infrastructure is constitutive to the exhibited objects.

With Documenta 11, Enwezor’s approach was to work more as a facilitator. He worked together with a team of academic curators who designed the program as a group. Documenta was split into five platforms around the world, giving a series of perspectives on Documenta and its relationship to the global art world. In terms of presentation and contextualization of works in Kassel itself, Enwezor left this mostly up to artists. Rather than composed group exhibitions as a form of curatorial meta-composition—a favorite form of Szeemann—artists and collectives

occupied large spaces with their own works showing the intertangling of global networks, and the activation of alternative archives.

In both these cases, artists were involved in the presentation of works that can also be considered curatorial, in that they experiment directly with the mode of display, and also attempt to design the parameters for a specific kind of event of knowledge for the audience to occur. With this in mind, the history of the artist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century should not just be described as the production of discrete objects, but, as Filipovic argues, there is also a whole history of “artists taking into their own hands the very apparatus of presentation and dissemination of the work that they had produced” (Filipovic 2017, 7). This can range from installations and interventions such as have been presented by Buren, Broodthaers, to many more forms of artistic expression.

These kinds of projects combine aspects of what has been contended here to be curatorial practice with artistic practice, and raise the question as to how they can possibly be distinguished from one another. A discussion of these terms will help make clearer both the relationship between curatorial and artistic practice, as well as the specific kinds of challenges that curatorial practice faces, in particular in regards to forms of critique.

### 2.4.1 Historical Emergence

This section will look at a selection of some of the most important characteristics that define the professional profile of the curator as opposed to the profile of the artist. It is important before doing this to note that these “professional profiles” should not be understood to correspond to specific people. A hallmark of the contemporary worker is their need to take on many different kinds of jobs, sometimes as artist, sometimes as curator, other times as proofreader or gallery assistant. These characteristics should thus be understood as symptomatic of the curatorial profile, rather than prescriptive, exclusive, or exhaustive. It is more an attempt to capture the challenges and discourses that exist when one ends up in a curatorial way of working; it is not an exhaustive how-to guide.

A first step is to reconstruct and extend a genealogy of the contemporary curator, following the argument put together by O’Neil in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2012). Though this telling of a history of curatorial practice should itself be understood against the background of a certain formalization and academization of curatorial practice that began in the 1990s, it can also help to shed light on how this particular profile has taken on a specific identity within the arts ecosystem.

As curators began to consolidate power over the field of visual art starting around the 1960s, the response from the wider art field was increasing calls for what then was termed the “demystification” of the role of the curator. In other words,

rather than accept the ascension of the curator-as-author of the exhibition, there was pressure for the curator to be understood as a co-actor in the development of an exhibition project, not as the gatekeeper of established values regarding the role and value of art. Instead, the insistence was that the role of the curator would be clear and transparent to the viewer of the exhibition (Obrist 2017, 129).

What was needed was this process of *demystification*, or exposure of the so-called “invisible hand” of the curator. Seth Siegelau was one of the most prominent independent curators of this era, having worked closely on exhibitions with many early conceptual artists. In Obrist’s interview with Siegelau, he describes this process of demystification as a “process in which we attempted to understand and be conscious of our actions; to make clear what we and others were doing” (Obrist 2017, 130). Being conscious of one’s actions as a curator, and also attempting to make them clear to the audience, was not just a symptom of the assertion of subjective authorship of the curator over the exhibition, but also a repudiation of the hidden and “mystical” power structures of the museum, too.

The museum’s historical status as a place of rationality and authority meant that it was subjected to little of this kind of oversight of its activities, or its underlying ideology. Thus, the invisibility of the process of mediation against which curators like Siegelau and others were turning has come along with a mandate to explain both itself and the institutional structures with which it was interrelated. As O’Neil puts it, “the emergence of the curatorial position that began with the process of demystification—as an opposition to the dominant order of what, and who, constituted the work of art—became a discussion about the values and meanings of the work of the exhibition” (O’Neil 2012, 27). These discussions were self-reflexive, meant as a way of making curators aware and accountable for their strategy of mediation.

By the 1980s, the curator’s role would skew even more towards that of the sole author of the exhibition, which became understood as a “synthesis of artwork, concept, and praxis transformed into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*” (O’Neil 2012, 22). Exhibitions over this decade tended to bring together heterogeneous works into forms of “dialogue,” or subjective and non-art-teological narratives of the curator’s own design. In other words, it was an imposition of the values of the individual curator onto works as a form of the curator’s own self-presentation. The curator becomes the arbiter of taste. From a different perspective, Boris Groys argued that therefore selection for inclusion into the exhibition becomes the most important form of expression in the artistic system. The link between curator and author becomes in this way clearer: “the author is someone who selects, who *authorizes*” (Groys 2008a, 93).

In the 1990s, the “supervisibility” of curators can be seen as a mutation of this need to combat the opacity of decision-making in the museum. Strategies of so-called institutional critique, labeled as such by practitioners like Andrea Fraser, saw

artists try to subvert their compartmentalization and categorization by curators, attempting to reclaim some control of the narrative. Instead, these attempts to criticize and illuminate the hidden workings of the museum often served only to strengthen curators' reputations; it seemed that there was no such thing as bad publicity, particularly if it was intelligent.

In these moments of transparency, curators themselves are put on display, appearing as the centre of symposia, biennials, etc. Being asked to explain themselves thus became the offering of a platform on which to promote both themselves and their positions. Often hidden under the guise of this visibility or demystification, what would end up happening were re-enactments of a cult of celebrity that only reinforce their status as *auteur*. Transparency becomes a discursive performance of the curatorial statement rather than the works themselves (O'Neil 2012, 36).

These discursive performances, which had always played an important role in festivals, also began to take on a more central role, being sometimes put into the foreground in front of even artistic practices themselves. As O'Neil and Wilson argue, this "curatorialization" of discursive and education platforms raises important questions as to the possibility of producing non-instrumentalized forms of openness and criticality within the structures of the visual arts (O'Neil and Wilson 2010, 12–13).

This is seen for example in Obrist's curatorial output. The *Interview Project* that he has pursued since the beginning of his career in the 90s, interviewing a massive number of people in the art world, publishing many of them as well, exemplifies this approach, working as a kind of "protest against forgetting" (O'Neil 2012, 41). Obrist however still remains focused on the contemporary, and finally on his own self-performance more than anything else (as is obvious from the rest of his career), once again asserting a curator-centred personality under the guise of an engagement with, and increased visibility of, the past, reaffirming O'Neil's point about the guise of demystification. This is also how initiatives such as Obrist's interview marathons function, arguably serving to enrich the curator's reputation under the pretense of openness (among others at Serpentine Gallery, 2006; Documenta 12, 2007; Luma Westbau (89plus) 2013, etc.).

The 1990s are often referred to as the "age of curatorial studies." This period marked a concerted attempt to create a comprehensive historical and academic discourse around exhibitions of the past, curatorial innovations, and models in the name of transparency. This is an academic formalization of the field that had been expanding since the 1960s.

Beginning with the Curatorial and Critical Studies Program at the Whitney in 1987, this decade saw an explosion of education programs teaching curating to students in academies and universities, as well as a range of publications exploring

the discipline's history.<sup>23</sup> The emergence of curatorial studies meant a formalization of curricula, but also the emergence of a more rigorous academic discourse about also the implications of this kind of formalization. This academization only heightened the already important role that conversation and speech played in curatorial practice. The curator had become a nexus of debate and criticism, and in doing so had also consolidated other professions in the arts into it, such as the role of the critic (who had largely been replaced by the exhibition catalogue, produced by the curator), and the academic. (O'Neil 2012, 2)

Exhibitions and festivals being themselves temporally-limited events, the study and formalization of curating as a profession has seen a growth in catalogues and an entire publishing industry around exhibitions and curatorial practice. Documentation (what is reproduced, why, and how) and the curator's statement can often then become prioritized over the actual experience of the of exhibition, overriding the artworks' chance to make a statement of their own.

Documentation becomes particularly important with the emergence of the unprecedentedly-dense network of art institutions and professionals that has emerged as a result of communication technology and cheap air travel. As of the 1990s, this now-global art world would provide the conditions for the emergence of a curatorial class as itself a thoroughly-globalized profession. These new curators were what helped establish the mythical profile of the globalized biennale curator, living life in airport lounges as they jet from one biennale to another. (O'Neil 2012, 44–45)

The attractiveness and glamour that became associated with this new kind of curatorial practice are important to emphasize; the job attracted many former historians, critics, and administrators lured in by this dream job. The attractiveness of the concept of the “curator,” meant here specifically in the sense of one person's job, would do much to create the interest also of other art forms in adopting this mantle, in the hopes of also achieving a similar level of status and success.

### 2.4.2 Curatorial Ambiguity

“He went to a philosophre which was the procuratour of the poure peple and prayd hym for charyte that he wold gyue to hym good counceyll of his grete nede.”  
(William Caxton quoted in Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018b)

Around the beginning of the Common Era (AD), Roman Emperor Augustus, began sending so-called “procurators” instead of senators to oversee the governance

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23 For a list of publications about curating that have emerged since the 1990s, see O'Neil 2012, 144n162. For a list of magazines and journals dealing with the topic of curating since the mid-aughts, see *ibid.* 146n174.

of provinces far away from the capital Rome. Unlike senators, who were equal in standing to the emperor, procurators were sent as Augustus' representatives, and tasked with taking care of the functioning of the provinces in his stead. This included tasks such as taxation, the care of the emperor's extensive possessions, and ensuring the functioning of the province in the emperor's absence. Procurators would thus come in common usage to be understood as those people who manage or steward the affairs of another (ibid.).

Looking at the OED's entry on the procurator, this definition can be seen to expand over time. Procurator becomes the title given to those people who manage the affairs of another person or entity, such as a church, a household, or through the mechanism of power of attorney represent another person who is in some way unwilling or unable. It is the exercise of power through representation of others.

The wielding of such power must always involve some element of trust from those being represented, and an element of responsibility and acceptance of the consequences of their actions from the procurators. This leads to the third definition in the OED, namely "[a]n advocate, defender, or spokesperson," as illustrated in the quote at the beginning of this section (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2018b). The procurator acts in what they think is the best interest of those who they represent, often in their absence or because of their inability to do so on their own.

The rise in popularity of the term "curator" has meant that its exact definition has been hotly debated for some time. For the most part, texts on the topic begin with the etymology of the word curating, which they trace back to the Latin *curare*, meaning to care for, or otherwise *cura*, meaning the cure. This word stems from the museum curators who were charged with the care of the growing museum collections of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As has been shown in section 2.4.1, the rise in interest and influence of the term has come along with a shift towards exhibition-making rather than caring for collections. Szeemann for instance, became one of the first independent curators around the 1960s, travelling around to different museums, Kunsthallen, and festivals like Documenta or the Venice Biennale, creating exhibition concepts for them, not caring for their collections.

Thinking about the procurator here can serve as a way of thinking about responsibility and representation as a key dimension of curatorial practice that can perhaps better describe its professional profile as it exists today. Rather than caring for a collection, the curator is a *representative* for many different interests, and must mediate between them in order to create the curatorial project that they want to achieve.

Raqs Media collective, in their text "On Curatorial Responsibility," emphasize this aspect of the curator acting as a guarantor. They show that, in staging large-scale international biennales, curators end up representing a large number of diverse and often contradictory interests, negotiating between them in order to make

staging an exhibition possible at all. In their non-comprehensive list, they point out that curators can often be accountable to regional governments trying to increase their cultural capital through the project, art-world elites with insufficient knowledge of the particularities of the site, a jet-fuel-powered carbon footprint so large it eclipses any talk of sustainability, the possibility that the project reinforces the hegemony of problematic local interests, become unwilling real-estate agents for processes of urban renewal, or unwitting impresarios for the local government, etc. (Raqs Media Collective 2010, 281). Their point is that curators must negotiate this thicket of stakeholders, while simultaneously making sure that their project is artistically of the highest quality they can achieve, and that it fulfils the expectations of the public, who is either a supporter of the project through public money, or comes to visit it. Raqs argues that this negotiation is per se impossible, and that curating exists in a permanent state of guilt to at least some number of these stakeholders (2010, 282).

Curating then becomes de facto a game of compromise between these different factors, never making every stakeholder happy, but managing to negotiate between them to find the best possible imperfect result. They point out though that if this is the case, the curator needs to have some kind of guiding principle or ethics in order to know how to navigate these complex situations. To solve this, they take up the notion of *curatorial responsibility*, arguing firstly for its inherent performativity: responsibility as the ability to respond, to be answerable for the actions one takes, and not blame results on extenuating circumstances (Raqs Media Collective 2010, 285). This means remaining in dialogue, and acting as a node rather than as a tyrant, who would abuse one's position of definitional power (as seen in the Szeemann example). This responsibility is understood by the collective as such:

*Curatorial responsibility* consists in taking the position of being a custodian of the ethical, authorial, pragmatic, and programmatic energies that act in concert to transform the occasion of a biennale into a process whereby (for the duration of the event) a space of creativity, display, and discourse is rendered public in a manner that articulates criticality, intelligence, pleasure, and an informed response to the matrix of social and political relationships that tie local contexts to global realities. (Raqs Media Collective 2010, 285)

Just as in the analogy of Emperor Augustus' procurators, the task becomes about acting in the best interests of those who have granted the curator custody over some part of mounting an arts festival. This kind of performative shaping of the intensities and flows that run through the event of the festival is a compelling way of thinking about these responsibilities. The task for them becomes one of the *art* of negotiating between these various demands on the curatorial profile in order to hollow out for the biennale a space of relative autonomy from its surroundings, enabling it also to take positions that respond and interact with those same sur-

roundings. This enables, at least nominally, the arts festival to remain a place of change and transformation, also in the sense of the festival that has run through this chapter.

Returning to the overarching question of this section, namely how should the relationship between the artist and the curator be conceived of, this position by Raqs will help to frame the answer: Curating involves a process of negotiation for the biennale between a wide and heterogeneous group of stakeholders that span the breadth of local and global power dynamics in a given place.

This conclusion is supported by Beatrice von Bismarck, who argues that it is exactly the unclear position of curating between so many different stakeholders and responsibilities, in reality a paradox, an impossible situation, that lends it its critical potential. More specifically, it is for her in the negotiation and articulation of this position that its critical potential can continuously unfold.

What von Bismarck argues is unique about the curator as opposed to the installation artist with whom they share so much similarity is their position in-between various roles and stakeholders, producing an uncertainty and unclarity that creates a potential for a critical practice. It is this paradoxical status of the curator that allows them to embody a particular *critical* role in the field of the arts. Precisely because of their mixed loyalties, their position as mediator within that minefield of relations that constitute the exhibition, they are able to “slip between” established codes and norms, maneuvering into a position of critique.

Because these mediators bring together disparate interests within themselves, von Bismarck argues with Bourdieu that they are two-faced, paradoxes, and always in a balancing act (*Doppelgestalten*), similar to the argument by Raqs Media Collective (von Bismarck 2007a, 20). Borrowing from a text by Bourdieu entitled *Genèse et structure du champ religieux* (Genesis and structure of the religious field) (1971), von Bismarck identifies two figures that help explain this situation, those of the priest and the prophet. The priest is the guard of that which is already deemed to be holy and in need of protection, they are the gate-keepers. The prophet is interested in the creation of new *doxa*, new forms of holiness, which have the potential to destroy or at least upend the old order (20–21).

Before the emergence of independent curators, and curators-as-exhibition-makers, the curator traditionally corresponded to the priest, *caring for* and upholding established values, for instance the museum’s collection-as-canon. The artist corresponded to the prophet, and still fulfills this function of the creation of new ideas. The independent curator has however also taken on characteristics of the prophet, thus becoming “a flexible, dynamic, and contingent constellation of op-



erations and positions, a specific form of criticality in the art field” (von Bismarck 2007a, 23).<sup>24</sup>

For her, the difference is that despite their sharing of a common area for expression (in the conception and execution of the exhibition), where they differ is in the curator’s unique position between the various stakeholders who are responsible for the exhibition happening, be they funding bodies, the museum institution or board, the audience, the artist(s), etc. The artist is responsible for their work, and in the case of creating an installation or exhibition-within-exhibition (as in Broodthaers’ case), also for many similar aspects like the relationship to the audience. They can however rely on a preexisting administrative, institutional, financial structure to make this happen.

The curator cannot, and is responsible for bringing these stakeholders together in such a way as to create the conditions for work to happen in the first place. That they subsequently can also act on the exhibition and its conception is precisely the double role that is being highlighted here. They are somewhere undefined in-between, creating the potential for conflict because of the working methods they share with both sides.

Von Bismarck understands the creation of new doxa as an inherently critical practice. Her understanding of critique is as a repartition of sense, or the reconfiguration of the existing regime of perception into a new one, changing the realm of the possible (understood in the sense of Agamben’s “What is the Contemporary?” detailed above). The curator must use the tools at their disposal, namely those of composition, ordering, presentation, mediation, etc., in order to achieve this repartitioning, playing these two different statuses, as protector/priest and innovator/prophet, against each other. They thus exist in a *double role*, in a liminal zone between administrative and content-based work. This creates “a flexible, dynamic, and contingent constellation of operations and positions, a specific form of criticality in the art field,” one that able to slip in between established codes and norms in order to achieve their curatorial goals (von Bismarck 2007a, 23).

### 2.4.3 Curating and Immaterial Work

The nascent tourism industry that fed the universal expositions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a harbinger of a shift in the focus of societal production from an industrial model of the accumulation of physical capital to one of cognitive capitalism, which focuses on the accumulation of immaterial capital and the dissemination of knowledge in order to create profit. “Cognitive capitalism” is used here in the sense of Moulier Boutang, who understands it as a system where “the capturing of gains

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24 See also Marchart’s similar definition of the curatorial function (note: not the curator as professional role) as the creation of counter-hegemonies in the Gramscian sense (2005).

from knowledge and innovation is the central issue for accumulation, and it plays a determining role in generating profits” (Thrift 2011, vii). Mauricio Lazzarato argues that this shift reached mass dissemination around the 1980s and 1990s, and saw workers’ skillsets orient themselves towards two main characteristics: first an emphasis on “informational content,” meaning the ability to communicate and exchange, and second, activities not traditionally understood as work, like forming public opinions, taste, or artistic standards, would become standard skills required for the workforce (Lazzarato 1996, 132).

In many companies, the task of the worker has shifted to become about taking on the responsibility of making decisions, and functioning as an “interface,” successfully mediating problems in order to find solutions (Lazzarato 1996, 134). This is a kind of living and intellectual labour is called post-Fordism, or a model of the labourer after the demise of the so-called Fordist worker. Whereas the Fordist worker is involved in an assembly of mass-production, which is standardized and regulated, the post-Fordist worker is tailored towards small-scale production, or otherwise involved in situations where their creativity and problem-solving abilities are required in order for the business or factory to remain productive and profitable.

Ability to manage, process, and communicate information become key skills of the worker. Capital becomes interested in investing in technologies of management and the facilitation of communication and networking. The realization has been however that this also requires investing in technologies of control of the very subjectivity of the worker, making modern management techniques interested in having “the worker’s soul ... become part of the factory” (Lazzarato 1996, 133). Personality becomes a key factor to be controlled, making sure that workers are able to work not just effectively, but *affectively*, practicing the management of relationships and conflict resolution.

Interdisciplinary arts scholar Shannon Jackson points out that this kind of immaterial and affective work has long ago been theorized by feminist studies in their project to recognize the same sort of work done by women that was not recognized at the time as work (2012, 26). It has also been the domain of the performing arts for the entirety of their existence, which have had to develop ways of coping with the precarity of making a living off performative, affective work (*ibid.*). This kind of work is therefore not new, but rather just “something newly pervasive” with the service economy (25).

Thus this shift towards work that is performative, affective, and immaterial means that the work of society begins to resemble the artists’ as it has emerged over the past 200 years. The arts start to become conflated with the dominant form of social production. Given the importance of creative labour today, it would follow that artists and artistic work could be a kind of model for this kind of labourer. This view is supported by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*

([1999] 2005). They argue that the student protests of 1968 calling for revolution and freedom from the oppression of industrial capitalism, and striving for autonomy, spontaneity, and creativity were in the following years integrated into the capitalist system. The “artists’ critique” as had been fostered by artists since the French Revolution was able to become a cornerstone of capitalist production, fitting with the subsequent transformation of the workforce to creative and affective work: If for instance the rigidity of a nine to five job was criticized by the students of 1968, then flexibility became a key trait of the post-Fordist worker (transformed into precarity).<sup>25</sup> The rigidity of what the protestors called *Metro-Boulot-Dodo* was replaced with a capitalization of creativity and self-realization ([1999] 2005, xxxvff). There are two main points to be made against this backdrop.

The first is to understand the centrality of the figure of the artist in post-Fordist society. As Chiapello argues in a later text, since the transformations after the 1968 protests, the model of the artist has been largely incorporated into contemporary management discourses. Job security was given up in favour of flexibility and creativity, and the post-Fordist worker is lured into forms of affective work that, though they may resemble the model of the artist as it has emerged over the past 200 years, in fact has become controlled and managed by capital (Chiapello 2012, 50).<sup>26</sup>

Chiapello raises the question as to whether there still exists a possibility for artistic critique in a post-Fordist society that has largely co-opted its historical project of searching for a so-called “authentic” life. In her conclusion, she claims that it is possible, but qualifies it by highlighting the difficulty of the task, as it must now be done through insisting on the autonomy of the artwork, while successfully navigating the pitfalls of its integration into cognitive capitalist discourse. She asks openly if there can be limits to capital’s need to instrumentalize, reproduce, and control, or whether it in fact goes on indefinitely (Chiapello 2012, 51).

It has been shown how, already in the case of Documenta 5, artists struggled to insist on the autonomy of their work before the expanding role of the curator. However, if the defining characteristic that separates curatorial practice from artistic practice is that it works as a mediator between heterogeneous stakeholders spanning many areas of society, then perhaps curating can be understood as a site where instead of attempting to steer around the “pitfalls” of e.g. the management discourse, it worked with them instead. Curating then would resemble a kind of

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25 See also Elke Bippus 2016.

26 The separation between artistic critique and social critique theorized as having come out of the 1968 revolution by Boltanski and Chiapello has been ignored here for the sake of brevity. In any case, Lazzarato’s position against this separation, arguing that many workers affected by social critique are in fact also creative workers, would seem to argue against this separation. See *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello ([1999] 2005) and Lazzarato, “The Misfortunes of the ‘Artistic Critique’ and of Cultural Unemployment” (2007).

artistic practice that has arisen over the same period that the transformation into the information society of cognitive capitalism has taken place.

The second point is then to consider the position taken up by von Bismarck, who points out the familiarity between curatorial practice and management discourse. Outlining the new economy's shift towards forms of immaterial labour, von Bismarck's argument is that the curatorial profile embodies the skillset of the creative worker even better than the artist. The curator not only participates in the exclusive domain of art, that leading industry (*Leitindustrie* in the Marxist sense) of the new economy, but is also *active* in forms of social technology such as networking, management, etc., thriving in it, not just trying to avoid its pitfalls. Curating becomes an exemplary blending of both this fetishized domain of art and contemporary management technologies that dominate the contemporary economy (von Bismarck 2005, 175–178).

The curator then performs on two different registers. The first is, as von Bismarck explains in section 2.4.2 that they operate both as priests and prophets. This means that they are caught in a balancing act between caring for established values one the one hand (as priest), and generating new doxa on the other (as prophet). As presented in section 2.3.1 on Documenta 5, this is mainly a task that happens within the creative sphere of the festival itself. The *other* register is that of management, which gives it an ambiguous relationship to immaterial labour and to the management of forms of knowledge. This is comparable with section 2.3.2 on Documenta 11, where Enwezor used his position as artistic director to become a manager and thus enabler of a small team of curators who would stage the project collectively. If Enwezor resembled then a manager in the sense of the new economy, it was one whose goal was the portrayal of the entanglement of Western artistic practice with its colonies and the rest of the globe, a thoroughly critical project, once again in the sense of “not being governed *like that*” after Foucault, or as Chiapello once again calls it, the search for an “authentic” life.

This is precisely the characteristic of curating that differentiates it from artistic practice. Curating has an uncertain profile, a role shimmering between instrumentalization and critique (an uncertainty that will also carry forward to curating performance). In this ambiguity of the position is where von Bismarck positions the potentiality and critical ability of the curator, situated in its double, liminal role between so many mediations.

The curator's capacity for critical action can then be argued to exist because of its ambiguous position in-between stakeholders and forms of administrative and artistic practice. This ambiguity means though that whether a curatorial act is in the final instance indeed critical depends also on its exact circumstances, which must be analyzed and determined on a case-by-case basis. Approaching the critical capacity of curating in this way portrays it as an inherently situated practice,

in that, because of its ambiguity, it is not critical per se, but rather in a specific moment of practice can be considered to act critically.

Such a conclusion argues to an extent against the usefulness of a history of curating, as conceivably any such history would not be useful any case-specific analysis of curatorial practice. As Enwezor says in an interview with O'Neil, he sees the value of a history of curating, but understands himself as an autodidact (Enwezor 2007, 114). Furthermore, despite the formalization which took place in the field in the beginning in the late 80s and 90s, a great deal other successful curators today have idiosyncratic career paths that have landed them in the same position. What then is the usefulness of a history of curating for curators, and furthermore, what is the use of this history for critical mediation in music? If these practices are really so situated, then what is the use of discussion and analysis removed from the urgencies of a particular context?

### Definite Expansion

The task at hand seems to be not one of liberation from confinement, but rather one of undoing the very possibilities of containment. We can rail against the structures that confine us, but until we produce the models of knowledge that operate conceptually against the very possibility of containment, ... we have absolutely no way out of this conundrum. (Rogoff 2015, 39'17")

As curatorial scholar Irit Rogoff says in the quote above, the answer to this issue of the relevancy of a history of curating for a curatorial practice that must necessarily take place in a particular context is to reframe the problem.

A first important consideration is that curators like Enwezor are in some way immersed already in this body of knowledges and practices that are questioning the conditions of display and their implicit support of certain modernist/colonialist ideologies. Where a history of curating can help is where this way of thinking seems to be necessary but not yet so widely spread, as has been argued to be the case in regards to the leadership of music festivals. Despite sharing a similar history of their emergence and basic framework, there is a lack of critical leadership practices.

This connects to Rogoff's differentiation between fighting against confinement and creating models for knowledge that cannot be contained in the first place. The approach is not to understand curating as a discrete silo of knowledge belonging to a foreign discipline, but rather a collection of stories and ideas that can help realize a model for unconfined knowledge among musical practitioners. In this way, the schema for a curatorial approach to music festivals becomes not one of comparing one to another, or of looking over the fence between them in order to appropriate the term curator. Rather, the approach is an extension of this "undisciplined," network-based way of thinking. It is a way of thinking that does not disregard history,

but rather takes the liberty to avail itself of histories that serve the production of critical knowledge in a given situation.

Rogoff, in her text “The Expanding Field,” makes this connection more explicit by positioning curating not as a resistance against infrastructures such as the functioning of the festival that has been presented here, but rather

the ability to locate alternate points of departure, alternate archives, alternate circulations and alternate imaginaries. And it is the curatorial that has the capacity to bring these together, working simultaneously in several modalities, kidnapping knowledges and sensibilities and insights and melding them into an instantiation of our contemporary conditions. (Rogoff 2013, 48)

This aspect of “kidnapping” seems to be highly appropriate here, in that it captures the fact that these histories and ideas are already existent, but cordoned off from fields in which they can potentially be made useful. In this way, curating becomes a practice that is not connected to any one particular history or set of rules, but engages with particular knowledges through a specific and concerted act of choosing those that are most suitable to solve a particular problem.

Having established this, it is still worth examining the “expanded field” that Rogoff positions as similar but in opposition to curatorial practice, both in order to underline this point, and to show the forces resisting it. She argues that in contrast to the construction of situated constellations of knowledges and histories that the curatorial puts forward, many concepts in contemporary arts practice have been able to expand and take on many different other meanings, but without allowing them to “burst” when they get too large and become something new (Rogoff 2013, 43). Curator is for her one of these terms (*ibid.*). This is part of a misguided politics of inclusion of subversive ideas into concepts once antagonistic to them, and for instance how criticism of museums, etc., can often be welcomed and presented within the institution, without the institutions themselves being in any actual danger of having to enact change (44).

This siloing is a kind of instrumentalization of critique, making it harmless, and something that ends up benefiting the institutions rather than calling them into question. This remains based on the modernist production of plurality, because what underlies it is a domestication of difference that prevents fundamental categorizations themselves from being questioned. In this way, it is a continuation of the paradigm of the Crystal Palace and its “crystalline veil,” which makes visible a variety of cultural artefacts while also subduing their ability to challenge their frame (see section 2.1.1). The suppression of concepts critical of the institution functions in this way through a reversal, a catch-and-kill rather than an exclusion, resulting in the “expanding field.” Instead of change, there is only an inflation of the institution to make room for more (Rogoff 2013, 44).

In this regard, curating, untethered from its confinements, but nevertheless still existing as an approach, a way of finding and linking, becomes a methodology of drawing new relations, ones that reframe/reimagine rather than reproduce relationships between knowledge and power/infrastructure (Rogoff 2013, 47). This is the basis for the understanding of curating music that is being formed here, in that it is focused on drawing together relevant histories, ideas, and examples, in order to create an alternate point of departure for both understanding, and hopefully also conceiving of, festivals for contemporary music.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 has been shown to be a common ancestor between festivals for both music and visual arts, in that it represents an exemplary system of commodification of artistic practice not limited to one medium or another, but rather exhibiting an imposition of modernist values onto artistic and technological production. This applies as much to visual art practices as it does to those of music.

The approach taken by the 1851 fair, continued and refined in subsequent universal expositions, would serve as the conceptual basis for the smaller, more specific arts-focused festivals that would come shortly later. These festivals would focus variously on performing arts, music, or visual art, but share significant similarities in their construction. While these festivals are normally written about from separate academic perspectives within their own disciplines, this chapter has attempted to think of them within a unified, more general history of the arts festival. It has argued for not only similar origins, but also that all arts festivals share a range of organizational and programmatic similarities.

After having established these similarities, it has been argued that the music festivals that have been examined do have a different approach to these common characteristics, namely that there exists a history of experimentation with the festival format as a critical curatorial practice mainly in the visual arts, with a similar history not being readily discernable in music festivals.

These aspects being however crucial to understanding the administrative practices of the two case studies examined later, an overview of critical curatorial practice as it has developed historically in the visual arts had to be undertaken. This would establish an archive of practices and ideas that could subsequently be used in understanding and analyzing those case studies and how they fit in or diverge from that history of curating in the visual arts.

Curatorial approaches to Documenta were then examined over the years, as they provide important examples that have all had a great deal of resonance in the field.

That festival also has the advantage of having followed Germany periodically through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, allowing for the different approaches to its leadership to be put into historical relief. Perhaps the most famous documenta, Documenta V, was examined for the role that it plays in curatorial discourse as representing a watershed moment in the emergence of artistic critique, and artists taking control of the contextualization of their works. It is also significant for its curator, Harald Szeemann, and how he transformed the role of curator into a kind of meta-authorship over the exhibition. Documenta 11 was profiled because of the non-art-teleological methodology it employed in addressing the artistic production of Western and non-Western art alike. Connected to this, it is also exemplary in its use of a curatorial team, rather than a singular figure.

As a final element of examining curatorial practice and discourse in the visual arts, before investigating its transformations in the performing arts, several important theoretical positions have been examined, in order to better establish a definition of the term: O'Neil's history of the profession argues that attempts at reckoning with its increasing power and influence in the art field only strengthen its practitioners, who have turned, for better or worse, into a nexus of debate and criticism. A second position, adapted the positions of Raqs Media Collective and Beatrice von Bismarck regarding curating as a form of responsibility, and combined this with an actor-network-based approach to understanding the relationships between curatorial practice and the stakeholders that it must work for and with. Such an approach will help conceive of curatorial thinking in other fields as well in the next chapter.

Finally, curating was examined from the perspective of immaterial labour and a critique of cognitive capitalism. The unique mix of artistic and managerial skills required of the profession make it the *Leitindustrie* for the creative economy. What this also means is that the critical project of both artistic and curatorial practice must be rethought in order to effectively respond to this new integration of their skillset by capital.

This rethinking must take place with a disregard for the “disciplining” of knowledge by capital, keeping it siloed away in separate categories. Arguing with Irit Rogoff, curating can be understood as the methodology for doing this, because of the focus that it puts on combining knowledges irrespective of background in the interest of achieving new and necessary perspectives. This approach recursively also informs how this volume is itself conceived, in its attempt to establish new, solid connections between curatorial practices in the visual and performing arts and leadership practices in music, where these ideas and perspectives are needed in order to enrich and empower budding curatorial practices in that field.

In this way, knowledge and ideas from curatorial practice in the field of the visual arts has been drawn into a large new arc that extends also to festivals for music. The next chapter will fill in some further important pieces in this puzzle



through its examination of how curatorial practices have been developing in the performing arts of theatre and dance, where they are also related to similar practices there, but are also ultimately imported from the visual arts.

## 3 Performative Curating and Experimental Performance

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### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presented a history of curating in the visual arts, and showed how it has transformed into a practice of critical knowledge creation that has become unmoored from the specificity of the history of European visual art and can be applied to a variety of areas of knowledge. The focus of the chapter was the emergence of the professional figure of the curator as unique from, but in a contested relationship to, the artist.

Chapter 3 will examine forms of interdisciplinary exchange in the arts in general, to be able to properly understand the implications of these transfers and to catch the slips of logic that happen when shifting contexts and frames of reference. The chapter begins with a reading of the work of Shannon Jackson, who has produced a body of work related to the study and scholarship of the interdisciplinary arts that serves as a backdrop to an increasing amount of contemporary artistic production. Her approach will be adapted into a method for understanding how to navigate this transdisciplinary field also from the perspective of curatorial practice.

Jackson's approach is furthermore both to acknowledge the importance of discipline-specific knowledge of existing artistic traditions, while also recognising that the contemporary situation of their high amount of hybridization can only be understood through a viewer-centric model, one that is also informed by the contextualization or mediation of artistic work. Her work both acknowledges the existence of the interdisciplinary arts that increasingly defines the wider arts field today, while also qualifying the existence of this space by arguing that its inherent hybridity resists systematization as a field in itself, always co-determined by one's vantage point on it.

The chapter will also focus on curating's various relationship to contemporary artistic practice in the performing arts of dance and theatre. These fields both have a rapidly maturing relationship to the notion of curating, a concept that is still only nascent in the field of music. They furthermore are historical siblings of musical practice, sharing both a common history of immaterial artistic production, and

large areas of overlap such as in ballet and opera. Examining how these two fields have parsed curating as a concept and adapted it in various ways to their various disciplinary exigencies will set up a foundation for talking about what curating could mean in the field of music.

### 3.2 Reading Shannon Jackson

Performing arts festivals and visual arts biennales alike have begun to present a heterogeneous mix of theatre, performance art, musical concerts, and exhibitions, often organizing themselves instead around various themes, questions, or concepts rather than artistic medium. There has also been a rise in prominence of high-profile festivals that exhibit a strong emphasis on their capacity to mix various kinds of artistic productions, such as the Ruhrtriennale or Steirischer Herbst.

As opposed to more established interdisciplinary festivals like the Salzburger Festspiele, which has since its inception programmed the performing arts of opera, concerts, and theatre, these newer incarnations often seek to program diverse forms of artistic practice that are often more experimental, or that are more “conceptual” in their approach, meaning that their form is subservient to the idea they want to express. They are also more likely to program community art practices, as well as to exhibit a stronger relationship between their programmed performance and a larger curatorial concept for the festival.

With this strong upwards trajectory in the amount of mixing of artistic practice, the challenge is to develop an approach to understanding and describing them that is flexible enough to keep up. These new and highly dynamic modes of artistic production and presentation display a large amount of variability from one festival (or festival edition) to another, from production to production, and in how they engage with or are understood by their audience, making recourse to solely their artistic traditions not viable.

The reality is that these fields of the arts are, as theatre scholar Tom Sellar diagnoses, “blurring forms with unprecedented fluidity, and discourses ... are resolutely, and freely, interdisciplinary,” with the challenge emerging of how best to navigate these new waters (2014, 22). What becomes a problem is how best to characterize these practices, and how to describe them productively. If the frame of reference is itself constantly shifting, how can production and reception of these works be conceived of?

What does not seem to be a productive path forward are attempts at some grand systemization or genealogy of these intricate hybrid forms; any system would arguably only exist as a permanently-insufficient map. Rather, a more contingent and localized approach must be attempted: understanding interdisciplinary arts involves constructing tools adapted to the specificities of the event of their occur-

rence. This is more a practice of following the networks of connections that make up these events, with a crucial aspect being also the biases and blind spots of the researcher themselves.

The following section will first attempt to give a basis for this approach through a re-reading of minimalism, and through connecting together various texts by Jackson into a larger project. In doing this, it will also reimagine the core of Jackson's argument as part of a theoretical basis for a curatorial practice in music.

### 3.2.1 Theatricality as the Violation of Medium-Specificity

Jackson's first move to orient herself within the wide field of interdisciplinary artistic practices is to centre the constitution of the work on its receiver. This leads for her to a performativity of reception inherent to all artistic production, and problematizes the difference between the performing and visual arts, which in this argument also have performative characteristics. This section begins by anchoring itself to debates arising from the last significant historical intersection between performance and visual art in the 1960s, specifically centred on the concept of theatricality and its relationship to minimalism.

#### Minimalism

Minimalist artists, such as Robert Morris, but also Frank Stella, Sol LeWitt, and others, focused on large-scale works and basic shapes and patterns, foregrounding the encounter with the work over marvelling at the virtuosity of the artist's skill. Their approach to painting and sculpture was one that, hung directly without frames on the gallery wall, implicated also the spaces it occupied. O'Doherty's early analysis of minimal art saw the movement as part of a larger shift in the history of painting away from understanding a hung painting as "totally isolated from its slum-close neighbour by a heavy frame around and a complete perspective system within ([1976] 1999, 16). As art and life began to spill into one-another in various avant-garde movements, so too did artists create "shallower" paintings that relied less on an independent system of perspective marked by a frame. The edges of paintings, and photographs for that matter, were gradually softened, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, meaning that hanging plans, how much space a work had to "breathe," and how a work interacted with the space that it occupied would all play an ever-more important roles. By mid-century, with the advent of colour field painting, and minimalism shortly after, "[s]ome of the mystique of the shallow picture plane ... had been transferred to the context of art," O'Doherty argues, meaning that the exhibition *space* became co-constitutive of the experience of the work (29). The wall participated in the work, rather than acting as its physical support: The territory that needed to be afforded to pieces for appropriate "breathing" to occur would transform the gallery space into a key part of the *experience* of art.

Art critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried would famously accuse minimalism of possessing what they called “theatricality,” and therefore not living up to the specificity of their respective media. This was for them a repudiation of the modernist project of distilling media to their unique characteristics, and utilizing that medium-specificity in the pursuit of artistic expression (Fried [1967] 1998, 151). For Fried, in the case of painting, this meant that paintings “must be pictorial, not, or not merely, literal”: what they needed was to have some aspect that distinguished them from other media (151). If minimalist painting is not perceived as pictorial, then it consists for him only of objects, and thus becomes simply literal and co-existent with the viewer in the space—for Fried a quality of non-art, and obviously not for him a positive characteristic. This lent it a quality of what he calls “stage presence” better suited to the theatre than to modernist art, which painting was to reject, should it still value purity and autonomy of image and gesture.

The work of minimalist art thus lost the ability to express any unique quality of painting as a medium for depiction, Fried argues. At the same time, as O’Doherty points out, it bled into the space around its frame, into its context, and became influenced, or even composed by, its surroundings. The viewer became co-constituent of the work’s existence; there needed to be some sort of *event* of artistic production that constitutes the work as such, the experience of looking at it in which it begins to exist as such, rather than a set of objective characteristics that would persist regardless of viewer. In this way, theatricality, understood as the encroachment of “non-art,” of art’s context, and as the moment of encounter with the artwork, would become crucial to understanding artistic practice.

### All Media are Mixed Media

This encroachment can be related back to a theme that runs through this volume, namely a shift from a modernist aesthetic model that seeks purity and specificity, in following a line of argumentation that extends from the universal expositions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until Fried, to a post-modernist aesthetic model that, *a priori*, understands the image, and by extension the work of art, as inherently mixed.

The media and visual culture scholar W.J.T. Mitchell argues contrary to Fried that an image can never be pure and enduring—rather it is tied to the scopic regime of an era, and its regimes of power, which determine what is seen and made visible. At the beginning of *Picture Theory*, Mitchell names this shift in the understanding of the image the *pictorial turn*. He describes that this turn “is ... a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality” (Mitchell 1994, 16).

This turn is not a rejection of the modernist approach to the image, but rather designates a shift to a new set of problems, casting the understanding of e.g. Fried as one that only holds true under a certain privileged and ideal(ized) set of condi-

tions. For Mitchell the post-modernist, a painting cannot be simply an unambiguous and self-contained sign-system capable of being read by whoever possesses the power to read it (which would be those in possession of a knowledge of art history in the traditional sense), but rather the image and its meaning is constituted by a complex of forces acting together in a given situation (Mitchell 1994, 13). In this way, the receiver of the image is taken out of a subject/object dichotomy, and is placed into a situated encounter. Rather than needing to fashion the right key to the lock, imagine instead Alice's becoming-with shrinking potions and growing cakes in the first pages of *Alice in Wonderland*: an approach that creates an assemblage transgressing subject/object divisions (c.f. Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 233ff). Mitchell's understanding implies fundamentally a lack of purity, an in-between state dependent on the nature of the encounter: all media are mixed media.

Returning to Jackson's argument, she contrasts the two different viewpoints of Fried and Mitchell, but argues that Fried's concept of "theatricality" can itself be a way of viewing Mitchell's position that the medium is inherently mixed. She points out that in Fried's view, theatricality is understood as "an 'in-between' state in which forms belonged to no essential artistic medium; to work across media, that is, to violate medium-specificity" (Jackson 2005, 172). She then takes this criticism of minimalism and turns it around, arguing that the performativity that defines theatricality, *and by extension theatre itself*, can be understood then *not* as a unique to the medium, but rather as "the means by which visual media undo their specificity," essentially drawing a bridge between Fried's criticism and Mitchell's approach via the notion of theatricality itself (173).

This undoing of specificity argued by Jackson is a disengagement of visual culture from the belief in the purity of an absolute image, which is replaced by the theatricality of a constant mixture of image and world, of media, and of sensory modes (2005, 164). Important to note is that, as argued in Chapter 2 by looking at the universal exposition as the birthplace of a scopic regime of modernism, "visuality" is here understood as an adherence to that regime in general, rather than the eye as a sensing organ.<sup>1</sup> The usefulness of this concept is in how it positions the concept of theatre as not a certain set of practices, but rather a state of transgression within artistic practice more generally, orienting them—in their respective contexts—towards a recognition of the inherent mixedness of their mediums, and

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1 This distinction will be elaborated on in more detail in section 3.3.1 below, where Yvonne Rainer's contention that "dance is hard to see" will be understood as a rebuff of this ocular-centric regime through the practice of dance. The point being in short that while dance is obviously *received* by the eye (among other senses) in the banal sense, processuality and ephemerality are inherent disruptors of the ocular-centric regime's more general conviction as to the eye's rationality.

finally to the recognition of the various constituent actants that make up the event of performance.

It implies instead a “networked” approach, where the observer exists in some relationship with both the work, as well as all manner of other factors that act on and constitute this relationship *per se*. The system of inside and outside the frame is replaced with an inquiry into the forms of connection between the viewer and the framed image. This perspective shift does away with the notion of a neutral background, and instead asks in which ways that background is linked to the viewer (see also Latour 1996, 6).

This is the basis for a *receiver-based approach* to understanding perception; for what happens in this shift towards a network-based understanding of the performative event is the loss of the possibility of being able to observe from the outside, or from a vantage point that does not itself interact with the material being observed. This is a refutation of the ostensible “passivity” of the spectator’s gaze, which looks on at the action from outside of the proscenium stage. In the same way that minimalist painting spilling over its boundaries into its context, into the gallery space, so too does the concept of theatricality no longer understand itself as confined to a subset, a frame, of perception, and is more all-encompassing of the specific receiver.

The inherent impurity of mediums, of inscriptions and inscribing surfaces, that comes along with this model is what allows for Jackson—in a later text—to then shift the creation of this “theatrical” situation away from the art object itself and onto its receiver. Counter to Fried’s view of the dangers of theatricality, every confrontation with an artwork is argued to have a reality-producing dimension, this theatricality that he wished to avoid (Jackson 2017, 18).

This means that the concept of performativity becomes relocated from being a way of understanding certain works, such as minimalist art, to being a theory of the reception of artistic practice in general, becoming reality in the moment of a receiver’s uptake of it. The moment of uptake is the taking of a specific position as actant in the network, the taking on of a perspective, which allows for interaction with it at all (once again because of the lack of an outside).

This position must be understood as complementary to the fact that many contemporary artists, in a lineage stemming from minimalism and continuing through relational aesthetics and community or activist art, employ the performative dimension of the artwork, its so-called inter-subjectivity, as their medium (see Bourriaud 2002, 22–23). To this category can obviously be counted the minimalist artists spoken about earlier, but also works in the tradition of relational aesthetics in the sense of Nicolas Bourriaud like Rirkrit Tiravanija with his soup kitchen works, e.g. at the Venice Biennale 1993 or Art Basel 2015, or more recently works by Tino Sehgal like *This Variation* (since 2012). These works create situations whereby the theatricality of the confrontation with the work of art becomes the

recursive subject of the work itself. This allows for a self-reflection on the mechanisms of the process, but is only a subset of the entirety of artistic production. To be clear, the thrust of the argument is rather that this inherent theatricality and mixedness of media is a way of approaching the perception of art in general as a situated encounter.

### Receiver Untangles Interdisciplinary Arts

Returning to the use of “performativity” as located in the receiver and their confrontation with artistic practice, the issue becomes that its various uses within the discourses of the visual arts and the performing arts prove hard to untangle from each other, and seem to exist in different amounts to each other in various projects.

If the inherently interwoven interdisciplinary arts and their various mixtures of references only complicate the ability for differentiation, then the solution is to stick by the receiver-driven model, reaffirming the importance of reception as itself a performative act across the spectrum of artistic practice. The receiver, based on their temperament and their position as a node interlinked with others in the network, is what determines how to contextualize the ambiguously-situated performative work, depending on their own particular affinities. This can be a familiarity or education in sculpture, dance, theatre, music, or other artistic genres, but also class, gender, languages, life experiences, etc. etc. Depending on how these connections are aligned within the individual receiver, a work will be read within different constellations of references and connections, effectively leaving the work of untangling references to individuals (Jackson 2017, 26).

Thinking then towards what this implies for the practice of curating within a receiver-centric paradigm, the argument is that it becomes all the more important to understand the backgrounds, different historical references, and analytical methods of the receivers as well as practitioners/producers, all of whom co-constitute together the event of performance. The point is not the arbitrary connection of disparate nodes, but rather the acknowledgement of the complexity of these networks in order to better operate and intervene in them. As Haraway says, “[n]othing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something”—which can be taken for curatorial practice to mean that its challenge is to understanding the interworkings of affinities and relationships, as well as creating new fictions that hazard new kinds of connections (2016, 31).

Jackson for her part addresses this issue by arguing that it is extremely important when analyzing the interdisciplinary arts field to acknowledge various qualifications that produce “different ‘differentials’” (2005, 174). Within these mixed media, knowing what the receiver’s boundaries are, and how and why they are transgressed, becomes the only way of establishing common criteria and frameworks.



This means that an understanding of origins, of backgrounds, or expectations, becomes necessary in order to avoid a homogenization of references and an oversimplification of disciplinary histories. A homogenization of this kind would only result in a loss of much discipline-specific knowledge and nuance in practice, and would simply replace it with a drastic reduction in complexity and references. Significantly, and not coincidentally, this corresponds with the work of developing a curatorial responsibility among mediators of artistic practice.

### **Jackson's *Rockaby***

Examining an anecdote from Jackson's 2011 book *Social Works* will help further crystallize the idea of context and its constitution as a key actant in determining the perception of artistic practice. In the book's prologue, she describes two different encounters with Samuel Beckett's *Rockaby* (1980) in two different contexts, which produce a perceptual chiasma typical of her work and approach to interdisciplinary arts. The short, one-woman play consists primarily of a woman sitting in a rocking chair, rocking back and forth. Jackson, having been a student of theatre performance studies, describes seeing it once in a darkened theatre, with the concomitant expectation that once the lights went down *something* would occur. She was instead confronted with an unbearable slowness of the work, and in particular a drawn-out too-slow back and forth of the rocking chair. She contrasts this experience with a different encounter years later of the same work, this time at the end of an evening of walking around looking at installative performances. On that occasion, she saw and experienced *Rockaby* as a "moving spectator," and felt at ease with its speed, finding even the rocking chair's movement to perhaps be too fast. (Jackson 2011, 3)

The point is not the factual speed of the rocking, but the split created by the difference in how her "perceptual apparatus was differently attuned," measuring the first from the perspective of theatre, and the second from that of sculpture (Jackson 2011, 3–4). The example illustrates how the receiver is at the centre of determining their relation to an artistic practice, dependent both on their disciplinary background, but also on the constitution of the *performance* of the encounter with the work, or the "theatricality" of the situated confrontation with it.

The fact that the contextualization of *Rockaby* within two different situations can change so drastically how the work is perceived is what is significant here. It shows the porousness of the work, and how it is not in fact some essential whole, but rather something that is constituted in the event by a variety of factors. It shows how tailoring and intervening in the constitution of the event can change the perception of the work. Contained in presentation is the *present*, the durational moment, which is itself an articulation of the conditions that determine its realm of possibility.

As curator Aneta Szyłak argues, the practice of curating must recognize that the virtual preconditions out of which the constitution of the event is articulated, its context, reaches its roots much further than any curator could aspire to realistically grasp. The difficulty for her thus lies in speaking of a context while simultaneously always existing within one, or as has been argued here, being both part of the network and tasked with intervention into it. For her, curating becomes a task of experimenting with how to “productively engage with the context” in a way that activates it and opens the door to new possibilities, new departures (2013, 220).

The context of a curated project, the relations that it establishes with the world, far exceed the intentionality of those who operate within it; any set frame delineating inside and out inherently exists only as a construct that can be subscribed to or not, similar to the proscenium arch's relationship to theatricality, or painting's relationship to borders. However, curatorial practice is about identifying relationships, focusing on the challenge of creating as exhaustive a list as possible of relations, and attempting, with the finite connections one has, to shift and reconnect relations to create space where transformations can take place (Szyłak 2013, 221). Remembering the words of Raqs Media Collective from Chapter 2, curating thus exists in a permanent state of “guilt,” meaning that though its approach is bound to fail, the value lies in the effectiveness of the attempt (see section 2.4.2).

Having now established this performative, network-based approach to the receiver's perception, as well as the role of curator-as-mediator to be one node in the network, it is now possible to shift to look more at the development of a particular *savoir-faire* for curating in this interdisciplinary arts space.

### 3.2.2 Jackson's Ten Theses

Before looking at curatorial practices in the fields of dance and theatre in the remainder of the chapter, a final aspect of Jackson's work will be examined which crystallizes a series of ten theses out the initial conversations at many early symposia and conferences that sought to grasp this new and confusing mixed field of performance as it exploded in relevance around the early 2010s. Jackson calls this collection her top ten “occupational hazards” while studying the interdisciplinary arts. The notion that these hazards can be “occupational” is what is meant by the development of a know-how for navigating the interdisciplinary arts: it is a way of flagging that this field, by virtue of its particular characteristics, must develop also specific knowledge about how to successfully navigate its material reality in the realization of the goals set out in Chapter 1 (Jackson 2014, 56). While all are interesting for better understanding the interdisciplinary arts, the four presented here are the most readily applicable to the occupational hazards of curating the performing arts specifically. The following examination will thus serve not only to

present Jackson's arguments, but also to begin to anchor it to problems specifically of performative curating and curating performance.

### **"Innovation to Some Can Look Like a Reinvented Wheel to Another"**

Beginning with Jackson's fourth thesis, "Innovation to Some Can Look Like a Reinvented Wheel to Another," she explains that within this new reality where disciplinary histories are being mixed and presented to audiences with various amounts of familiarity with a given kind of artistic practice, there arises a danger that "one set of eyes is seeing the reproduction of a tradition where another pair of eyes may have assumed invention," a so-called "hazard of swapped contexts" (Jackson 2014, 57).

The hazard lies in the fact that these practices are easily misunderstood by critics, viewers, and other artists when it is not clear what the focus of their artistic practice is, and made explicit what precise conventions the practice is attempting to either abide by or criticize. Jackson gives the example of artist Andrea Fraser's *Museum Highlights* (1989), which, when viewed as a visual arts practice, are calling the legitimacy of the museum as an institution into question, and when viewed as theatre bear many trademarks of very established theatre conventions: the use of a costume, a script, and a persona, without calling these conventions into question at all (Jackson 2014, 57). The significance of the work is clearly not in its use of a costume and a script, and rather in what it says about how a museum's infrastructure informs what it displays (*ibid.*). This reading is however dependent on its specific context of the museum of the late 1980s through which it must be viewed in order to function. Doing so requires then a specific kind of pre-existing knowledge of that situation which was most likely possessed by most participants on her tours. This does not mean that one should always take the most empathetic view towards understanding a work, but rather that it must be evaluated within its network of references in order to understand its critical or transformational potential (this also makes intervention and criticism all the more effective and/or trenchant).

### **"What Happens When Virtuosity as Technical/Physical Skill Meets Virtuosity as Conceptual/Cognitive Skill?"**

Jackson's fifth thesis highlights the tension between two understandings of virtuosity that are used in assessing quality of artistic production in both the visual and performing arts, and which are often confused. These two different understandings of virtuosity revolve around various disciplines' relationships to the conceptual turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fields like the visual arts have largely embraced the conceptual turn into their production, placing value on works that explore ideas reflecting on the notion of skill itself. Virtuosity is still an operational concept in the visual arts, but it has shifted to a virtuosity akin to what Paulo Virno identifies as that of the

post-Fordist worker, namely one that is measured by its ability to create the capacity for political action through immaterial production (Jackson 2014, 58; Jackson 2012, 16–17). This can otherwise be described as the ability to explain or articulate an idea or concept, or win an argument through superior rhetorical ability. It is a virtuosity understood as a “critical form of reflection on the parameters and definition of art itself” (Jackson 2014, 58). Contemporary classical music (CCM) on the other hand still values a skill-based approach, and the pleasure of virtuosic skill understood as a kind of exceptionalism, or the demonstration of a high amount of technical know-how or mastery in a specific area, such as on an instrument. Jackson equates this with the “lay” notion of virtuosity, what is still commonly held to be its main definition. For Jackson, “[s]ometimes rigor in the Conceptual sense of virtuosity looks amateur in the lay sense of virtuosity—and vice versa” (2014, 58). The point is that in conceptual virtuosity the *idea* of artistic freedom is being explored and criticized, which is what is virtuosic. *How* this is done is still important, but the technical know-how to actually do it is secondary.

Her point is that these two forms of virtuosity often become crossed. The criticism by an audience member with experience only with CCM, where conceptual work is not well-established, could for instance conceivably be that “anyone can do this,” and that it is thus not “real” music because it does not live up to that understanding of virtuosity in the exceptionalist sense (because it takes little lay virtuosity to do). Conversely, an audience member interested more in conceptual virtuosity could criticize a CCM concert for its unquestioning acceptance of a certain assumed ideology or tradition, which is often associated with mastery over that same system. Such is the confusion caused by the mix of these two different kinds of virtuosity.

This once again relates to differences in the training and dispositions of those evaluating works from a variety of disciplines. It means that the works at an evening of student CCM compositions will have a very different relationship to virtuosity and to where they place value than a similar evening of music coming from the Fine Arts department down the hall, who are being trained in a totally different system of values. It should be noted that this observation does not mean that works are or should be carefully siloed, or that the dispositions and evaluation of audiences can or should not be shifted. It is rather a recognition and identification in the first instance of various territories of artistic practice.

### “Suspiciously Over-Skilled”

Jackson’s two points so far can be read as examples of how to increase the sensitivity of the practice of performance curating to the nuances in artistic production that exist within the inter-performing arts field in which it acts. With her seventh thesis, she raises the point that intentional forms of mis-contextualization can help

fulfil the material goals of the institutions which house these practices while being detrimental to the artistic practices themselves. She for instances references the argument by Sabine Breitwieser that much of the current interest of museums in programming dance is as a way of “bringing back what some people are missing in the contemporary visual arts, namely, beauty and skills, which reappear in the form of perfect and perfectly controlled bodies” (Breitwieser 2014, 287).

After so much conceptual art has attempted to subvert these categories, they become reintroduced into the museum in the guise of programming works from another artistic discipline. Dance, less unwieldy than performance art, becomes a kind of trojan horse for sneaking the spectacle of beautiful bodies back into the museum—a space that has since the 1960s sought to profile itself as representing protest and the fostering of counter-hegemonic ideas, as seen in Szeemann’s Documenta 5 (see section 2.3.1).

This is what can be called a contextualization by curators in bad faith, meaning that it goes against the ethical compass of curatorial responsibility set out in Chapter 2. The problem is that aspects of the artistic practice are emphasized that serve to increase visitor numbers to the museum through the staging of an “event,” but the danger lies in when this event becomes one of pure spectacle, in other words a commodification of experience in order to meet visitor number targets rather than to engage with the material itself.

Art historian Claire Bishop offers an example of this in action: she presents the example of the recent interest in programming performance, and particularly dance, for the MoMA NYC’s atrium. Bishop relates the instance of a 2012 performance of an adaptation of Jérôme Bel’s *The Show Must Go On* (2001), where dancers dance as they would at a party to a slew of pop songs (e.g. David Bowie’s *Let’s Dance*, 1983). The group is made up of a mix of amateurs and professionals, which invite the audience to consider issues surrounding the skilling and disciplining of dancers’ bodies. For Bishop, the work needs a proscenium stage and the connotations of theatre that accompany it in order to frame the tension between skill and lack of skill, between audience entertainment and anticlimax. In the MoMA, the work “played into all the worst tendencies of museum-as-spectacle,” as the work devolved into “a carnival of local stars performing the ‘best of’ Bel’s work for their peers, while the general public craned to look on from the upper levels” (Bishop 2014b, 65).<sup>2</sup>

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2 The New York Times’ Claudia La Rocco concurred with this assessment of Bishop’s. Her detailed review of the performance for the paper ends with the line “The crowd certainly seemed pleased. But pushed or provoked? Not by this bonbon.” (“Stars and Amateurs, Both Hamming It Up: Jérôme Bel’s ‘Show Must Go On’ at MoMA,” New York Times, 22 October, 2012).

*The Show Must Go On* was effectively transformed from a critical examination of the skilling of the dancer's body and the role of audience entertainment (delivered through pop hits) and its negation into a spectacle in its own right. This change was brought about not through a drastic change in the work (though it was shortened) but rather through a shift in its context, one that did not *care* to attempt to adapt the work's central question to a radically different context and by extension set of connotations. What happened instead was that the work became complicit in producing empty entertainment serving the museum's need to boost visitor numbers irrespective of content.

This can be the more negative side of interdisciplinary artistic practice. When works are placed within new contexts, there exists the possibility that, through the unsuitability of the venue or audience for the work, it become instrumentalized for goals other than its own, such as here with the MoMA's inadequate staging of Bel's work. There is an inherent difficulty in identifying such situations because these presentations happen almost by definition there is a lack of knowledge about the artistic traditions that they are coming from.

### **"Live Art and a Living W.A.G.E"<sup>3</sup>**

Jackson's tenth thesis espouses the importance of not losing sight of the importance of fair working conditions within the interdisciplinary arts space. She argues that the broader societal shift to a service economy, also having its effect on the arts, takes on a very different status in the traditional performing arts then it does for other forms of artistic practice.

She points out that the immaterial labour of the performing arts "have been in existence long before the experience-based economy discovered them," and because they have recourse to such a history, may also offer "resources beyond those that reify the 'Society of the Spectacle,'" forms of resistance engrained in their traditions (Jackson 2014, 55). She gives the examples—from theatre—of tours, repertoire, and unionization, which allow for workers to "avoid the itinerant destiny of ... working in a temporary form" (Jackson 2012, 22). Problematically, as forms of performance in particular more away from their established spaces, place new demands on performers, and encompass new kinds of practitioners, conversations about working conditions become extremely important, as hard-won established models are frequently inadequate in responding to these situations outside of their traditional purviews.

These various non-standard forms of performance raise many new challenges in regards to basic working conditions for the performing arts as well: The concrete floors highly valued in the white cube are anathema to dancer's bodies; they

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3 The acronym stands for Working Artists and the Greater Economy, a New York-based non-profit.

also provide horrendous acoustics should any sound be needed. Marathon performances often have trouble addressing the requirements of performers, who often cannot perform for eight hours in a stretch without risking injury or needing to go to the bathroom—such a length of time also exceeds e.g. the standard shift length for musicians, posing a challenge to providing fair compensation without overrunning costs or simply ignoring former norms. Perhaps most fundamentally, project-based work is on the one hand much more flexible, allowing initiators the freedom to put together an ensemble of performers based on the particular skills needed for a piece, but on the other a threat to job security because of its predisposition towards short-term contracts that tend to also skimp on employee benefits and social security. In experimenting with formats for presentation, these considerations must also be taken into account, in order to not allow for exploitative and unfair working conditions to creep into a field that has historically been at a high risk of falling prey to them.

The situation is of course never one or the other; this interdisciplinary arts space can offer new opportunities for financing performance, such as the selling of documentation (not usually done by most performing artists, save professional musical recordings), or the notion of “collecting” performance.<sup>4</sup> When approached with the aforementioned understandings of the dangers of instrumentalization, and of non-standard forms of performance undoing hard-won improvements in the working conditions of performing labourers, then the interdisciplinary arts space can be an interesting area for experimentation with performing arts practices.

Taking Jackson's thoughts on the inherent performativity of the encounter with the art object as a starting point, this section has argued that a receiver-based model of artistic perception is the most adequate for navigating the many lacunae of interdisciplinary practices. It allows for a navigation of this field that can respond to the idiosyncrasies of each particular case, which due to the nature of this field are mixed and many. It also avoids having to systematize an approach to heterogeneous practices, which would not adequately serve the material at hand.

Her approach provides an effective framework for considering these fields curatorially, as it too also works at the nexus of so many other connections. The focus on the performative event of encounter, be it with an art work or a performance of *Rockaby*, is also significant, in that it highlights the *performative* aspect of curatorial practice, as a practice directly involved with assembling and influencing some subsection of the factors that come together to constitute the event of performance.

The next sections will explore curatorial practice in the fields of dance and theatre respectively. Particularly in this now heavily transdisciplinary context, Jack-

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4 As has been done for instance with the works of Tino Sehgal, which have been collected by for instance the Guggenheim and the M+ Collection.

son's theses on navigating the interdisciplinary arts will in this regard also help with locating important concepts within the various fields, and locate also their historic relationships to critical knowledge creation. What remains to be explored then is *how* exactly different performing arts have been converging into an intermixed model, as well as how the concept of curating has become an important endpoint for organizational practices (such as choreographer, dramaturg, or composer) in different ways in different fields. Though the observed trend is towards a mixing of disciplines and a convergence in interdisciplinarily-oriented institutions, discrete histories and medium-specifics inform this convergence, and should be preserved in the interest of fostering a rich interdisciplinary field, rather than one overdetermined by e.g. the dogma of the visual arts.

### 3.3 Curating Dance / Dance Curating

This examination of the emergence of curatorial practice in the field of the performing arts starts with dance. Dance is a particular case due to the infatuation of museum curators with dance in recent years for various reasons that will be examined. It therefore offers if not the closest direct relationship with museum curating, then certainly the most theorized, as well as an interesting illustration of interdisciplinary exchange often falling along the lines of disciplinary background: marked differences in the interpretation of dance in the museum often seem to fall along the lines of disciplinary affiliation.

Surveying the relationship between curatorial practice and dance will be the beginning of creating a conceptual foundation for theorizing curatorial practice in music. By examining the ways in which the philosophical goals of curatorial thinking interact with the realities of dance history and dance practice, insights into the particularities of performing arts practices more generally can begin to be drawn. The issue is not just how the concept of curatorial thinking from Chapter 2 looks when applied to dance, but rather also how the specificities of dance practice themselves inform, change and interact with this thinking as well.

#### 3.3.1 Dance is Hard to See

"Dance is hard to see" (Yvonne Rainer quoted in Lambert-Beatty 2008, 1)

André Lepecki, in the introduction to a reader on dance, identifies five aspects of the practice that can help orient the discussion on its relevancy, namely "ephemerality, corporality, precariousness, scoring, and performativity." He argues that the



fact that dance has come to be defined by an engagement with these facets has allowed it to act also as a mirror for our society's confrontation with the same on a broader scale: Its ephemerality disrupts the economies of objects, as has been presented in the previous section. Dance's corporality can become a site for understanding, critiquing, changing how we relate to our bodies, which are the locus of so many vectors of power. Its precariousness as an art form mirrors the precarization of labour under financial capitalism. Scoring relates to the directives given to the body, its systems of codification and disciplining. Finally, the performativity of dance, the fact that it only exists in the moment of its enactment, disrupts notions of authenticity and finality; dance must be ongoing in order to exist at all. (Lepecki 2012, 15)

Dance is ideally positioned as an art form to deal with these issues, according to Lepecki, because of its history of experimentation with what have turned into the core building blocks of contemporary reality. If work in a post-Fordist society is becoming performative and affective, then dance's affectivity and ephemerality are its model. This relevancy of dance should not however be understood as inevitable; dance did not win the relevancy-lottery for contemporary society. Rather,

dance was already *equipped* to tackle the problems at hand. However, it still had to rediscover itself, away from the paradigms of aesthetic modernism (thus it had to form a critique of the notion that dance was "the art of movement") and of choreonormative modes of training, composing and presenting dance. (Lepecki 2012, 19)

Though well-placed, it is much more the recent history of dance since the beginning of its period of experimentation in the late 1950s that would give it the capacity to be so relevant. This divestment from a modernist paradigm is interesting and relevant for current CCM practices that still seems to have difficulties divesting from the same model, and which, though possessing a similarly-relevant package of characteristics (ephemeral, performative), has failed to resonate in the same way.

Scholar Sally Gardner analyzes dance's relationship to a history of experimentation and the divestment from aesthetic modernism by contrasting the emergence of modern dance (different from the "aesthetic modernism" criticized by Lepecki) with the tradition from which it departs, namely ballet. She writes of that older art form:

Ballet was the 'folk dance' of the aristocracy, and has continued as a form of eminently 'social dance' in the sense that it is publicly instituted, supported and widely taken for granted." (Gardner 2008, 55)

In pointing out the "publicness" of ballet, Gardner seems to contrast its affiliation with notions of the spectacle and the projection of power (see once again the universal expositions) with the "individuality" and therefore subversiveness of mod-

ern dance practice. As it has often been closely tied to individual choreographers, it creates idiosyncratic practices that resists codification and therefore systematization by the same mechanisms. The individualized value systems created by such practices she in turn also contrasts with the publicness and thus pervasiveness of ballet and its measurement of quality, arguing that “in ballet the ultimate point of choreographic reference is always the externally generated norms or ideals of the ballet style – what [Laurence] Louppe calls an ‘absolute reference [1997:31]’” (Gardner 2008, 58).

The early work of Yvonne Rainer, with works like *Trio A* (1966) will help illustrate this shift, and will help as well to formulate a revised framework for understanding dance practice that in turn connects with its uptake in 21<sup>st</sup> century museums. The four-and-a-half-minute work was an attempt by Rainer to strip away “story, character, and emotional expression,” as well as anything that made the dancer’s body extraordinary, alluring, or seductive (Lambert-Beatty 2008, 5). What was left was a task-like grammar of the body itself, attempting to expose the bare functioning of the body as a thing in itself, using only the energy needed to do so, and not any more (ibid.).

In her own analysis of *Trio A*, Rainer begins with a list of aspects of minimal sculpture, attempting to translate them (self-admittedly in a non-systematic way) into the practice of dance. *Trio A* should thus “eliminate or minimize” phrasing, development and climax, variety, and the virtuosic feat, as well as “substitute” them with “found” movements, repetition, task-like activity, and a human scale. (Rainer [1966] 2008, 58)

Rainer’s reference to minimalism allows for a useful point of comparison with the ideas developed on minimalism’s theatricality in section 3.2.1. It shows a similarity of concern about the construction of the performative event and the encounter with the work, rather than an emphasis on figuration or ornamentation taken from a specific tradition (of ballet, of figurative art). Just as minimal art was seen to violate the medium-specificity of painting, bursting out of its frame and interacting with the spectator in their reality directly, so too was *Trio A* an attempt to reject the spectacle of dance in favour of a distillation of the situation of performance itself. Dance at the time was for Rainer a play of admiration by the audience and their gaze, answered by a seduction on the part of dancers (Rainer [1966] 2008, 13). Trying to counter this, Rainer conceived of *Trio A*’s aforementioned task-like movements, and instructed performers to not make any eye-contact with the audience. Her intention in doing so was to bring the performing human body into a state where it could be regarded in the same way as an object—understood here in the sense of the minimalist objects with which she identified.

*Trio A*’s antispectacularity was a way for Rainer to address the situation of performance itself, the moment of encounter between the spectator and the purely physical body. In this way, just as minimalism rejected the interiority of the pic-

ture frame, so too did Rainer's work reject the interiority of the dance spectacle in favour of an engagement with the constitution of the encounter itself *as* encounter. Her work was a negation of spectacle, focusing performance to the specific moment of its enactment rather than on its incarnation of an "absolute reference" as mentioned in relation to the value system of ballet above (Gardner 2008, 58). The work thus becomes a way of developing a kind of dance practice that is focused on understanding the audience as part of the work itself, rather than exterior to it or looking in on the spectacle from the outside (perhaps of the proscenium arch). They became rather *participants* in the performance, in that their mode of seeing, their "period eye" (to borrow an analogous concept from Bourdieu) was itself being directly challenged and brought into question, not just served with its appropriate input within an agreed-upon system.

This way of understanding the work of Rainer by Lambert-Beatty is initially somewhat contradictory, as it would seem to suggest that the aversion to objecthood that has traversed this volume now seems to be the solution to the issue of the engagement of spectatorship. However, just as has been illustrated with minimalism and its "theatricality" criticized by Fried, the cypher of "objecthood" is used by these experimental practices of the 1960s to mean a kind of artistic production that rejected the spectacle in favour of an engagement with the performative constitution of the moment of art-production itself; the network approach put forward in section 3.2.1.

Lambert-Beatty's analysis of Rainer is particular in that after establishing that the focus of the work is on understanding the spectator-dancer relationship as its core concern, she analyzes *Trio A* not in relationship to a history of dance that it seemingly rejects, but in relationship to the "changing culture of mediation" of the mid-1960s (2008, 131). Because the dance focuses on its relationship to the audience, it follows then that an understanding of the audience of the time, an attempt at the reconstruction of the Bourdieuan "period eye," would be the most sensible way of reconstructing and analyzing how the work was transgressive. She thus takes reviews, photos, first-hand accounts of the work not as universal facts, but as themselves indexical of what made the work so transgressive at the time.

For this reason, much of the chapter Lambert-Beatty devotes to *Trio A* specifically is focused on photographs of the work from its first performances in the 1960s. She first argues that the constant, slurred movement of the dance, as opposed to the separation into phrases of ballet, was a means for Rainer to counter and critique the sexualization of the audience's gaze on the dancer's body. She second points to the material reality of those same photographs, many of which have some body part or another smeared and out of the camera's focus, arguing that this can be read as more than just the conventional image language for denoting movement, seeing it rather as "miniature acts of rebellion within the photographs themselves ...; almost as if the frozen bodies are resisting their photographic status,

still” (Lambert-Beatty 2008, 164): *Trio A* designed as a transgression and struggle with both the image-world of its day and the constitution of the scopic regime in which it was to act. Rainer’s objective of turning dance into an object through the removal of ornamentation and the rejection of spectacle turned her practice into an experimentation with the modes of perception of her audiences. In the same way, minimalism’s rejection of the painter’s hand, its insistence on primary forms and large dimensions, were transgressing the medium-specificity of the painting, and directly take part in the performative event of the encounter between art and receiver.

What these practices have in common is that they use medium- and discipline-specific approaches in order to produce works that approach from different angles this performative state. As Rainer’s *Trio A* shows, what is required for dance to move away from its modernist project set by the ballet tradition is to focus on becoming an artform able to engage with contemporary issues, critically exploring as its aesthetic project how power acts on the body. This is how the discipline can manage to both retain a level of specificity related to the embodied and tacit knowledges emerging out of its tradition (also of experimentation), while at the same time developing practices focused on the performative event of their constitution.

In having clarified and worked out for itself this approach to its medium, dance has arguably also gained a flexibility to participate in both the transdisciplinary context of mixing arts practices, and interdisciplinary context of programming different kinds of art practices from several fields. This is because what constitutes dance practice in a formal and categorical sense become more unclear than ever, however the focusing of dance practice on the performative event of its realization has allowed for a productive crisis of definition to emerge. Said differently, the question *what is dance?* becomes as crucial to answer as it is impossible, in that any systematic answer that this question demands would per se be rejected. Dance scholar Erin Brannigan argues that as dance, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century moved away from its established relationship to ballet, the project of contemporary dance became shaped by people seeking alternatives, trying to figure out what dance could stand for (Brannigan 2015, 6). What has resulted is a flourishing of dance practice, a whole host of partial, situated answers to the question of what dance is.

Furthermore, because these practices are critical, situated, and concerned with the constitution of the event of critical knowledge production, they can be said to share many characteristics with curatorial practice as it has been analyzed in the previous chapter. Though a further investigation into the historical developments of modern dance is outside the scope of the current volume, what can be seen is that the productive crisis of dance would produce a rich array of dance practices that would also come to interact in numerous ways with forms of performance in the visual arts.

The task here is not to examine such interrelationships in depth, but rather to look at how it has interacted with concepts of curating. While modern dance's move towards a focus on the constitution of the event of performance, and its emphasis, seen in *Trio A*, on eliciting criticality through e.g. a disruption of the period gaze, its concerns begin to resemble many of those of the visual arts as well. It is thus no coincidence to see the proximity between the likes of for instance Rainer and Robert Morris, as well as the growing influence of dance and choreography in visual arts practice in the years since, which will be examined more closely in the next section.

### 3.3.2 Dance and the Museum

Art historian Claire Bishop identifies three waves of the intermingling of dance and visual arts. The first is in the late 1930s and early 1940s, in particular with the legacy of the Bauhaus, the second in the late 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of minimalism and performance art, and last the current wave as of around 2000. She also surveys three major museums and their relationships to performance over these three periods, the NYC MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Tate Modern, showing that, of the three museums, aside from occasional performances and the collection of dance-ephemera, and the Whitney's persistence in supporting various performing arts causes throughout its history, significant about the current wave of visual arts and dance is the unprecedented scope and scale of these museums' commitment to performance (Bishop 2014b, 63). If additional evidence of this trend is needed, the breath of major museums that have made commitments to creating departments and positions for curators of performance (which includes dance as a significant category) around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is overwhelming. Bishop relates that though Tate Modern does not have a performance department, Catherine Wood is their "Curator of International Art (Performance)," the MoMA has had a department for performance since 2009, the Whitney has a full-time performance curator since 2013, the Stedelijk Museum has a so-called *Public Program* including much performance, etc. (Bishop 2018, 27n20). Similar engagements by art fairs, including *14 Rooms* at Art Basel 2014, and the "Live" section at the Frieze art fair also as of 2014, help underscore the dimensions of this dedication. These institutions will often understand and present dance as existing in a significant relationship with the visual arts and many of its historical movements, including performance art.

Given this scope, there is something different that must be precipitated out of the connection between the museum and dance this time around, granted that the various practices of historical modern dance show a certain degree of consistency in their emphasis on the constitution of the performative event, from Duncan to Cunningham, Rainer, and others. Two reasons for the increased role of dance in the museum since 2000 will be given; one having more to do with the realities and

practicalities of 21<sup>st</sup> century museums, the other having more to do with the fact that the chief concerns of contemporary art have come to resemble those of dance.

### A Practical Solution

Whereas earlier forms of visual arts performance took place in theatres (DADA) and galleries/lofts (happenings and Fluxus), they began by around the 1980s to take place more in public space (e.g. William Pope.L). The rise of relational art (e.g. Felix Gonzalez-Torres) and institutional critique (e.g. Andrea Fraser) in the late 1980s and early 1990s would then move visual art performance directly into the museum. Lastly, live installations, and delegated performances performed by artists for hire beginning in the 1990s (Abramovic's 2010 retrospective, or LeRoy's "Retrospective," both at MoMA) disconnected performance from their authors and began to shift the nexus of visual arts performance to the museum (Bishop 2018, 25–26).

As these large-scale museums began to grow in influence and prominence as tourist destinations, performance began to be seen as a way of marrying this new-found relevancy of the museum together with artistic practices that were not as mausoleal, but were rather happening live as a persistent spectacle, playing into the growing importance of the experience economy for museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bishop 2014b, 72). The Tate Modern for instance around this time begins programming performing arts as one-off events, as a way of profiling its increasingly popular museum, and offering a different form of cultural event to attract more visitors (ibid.). Also notable is the large-scale project *11 Rooms* (first in 2011 for the Manchester International Festival, then later expanded incrementally up to *15 Rooms* at the Long Museum in Shanghai in 2015) by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach. Visitors found themselves in an oversized corridor designed by Herzog & de Meuron with doors extending along either side. Entering them would each reveal one room where a performance was ongoing over the duration of the exhibition's opening hours.

What can be observed with the increase in popularity of performance writ large at institutions such as the Tate Modern or *11 Rooms* is also a gradual muddying of the boundaries between dance and performance art, to the point where, with terms such as "conceptual dance," the borders between them become impossible to differentiate any further (see also Rogoff's concept of "expanding fields" in section 2.4.3.). This mixing would occur in particular in relation to certain lines of dance practice coming from a lineage of the Judson school and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. These lineages of dance practice have well-established relationships to the visual arts, in their common relationship to Black Mountain College (and therefore the Bauhaus) and subsequently to the New York School and Minimalism. This makes them naturally compelling for visual arts curators to program (Bishop 2018, 28). Bishop points out that this choice on the part of visual arts insti-

tutions to shift their performance programming from performance art to dance in particular can be understood by looking at the difficult relationship performance art has had historically with arts institutions (27). Not only is performance art intentionally resistant to being collected like painting or sculpture, but its ethos is often one of an oppositionist and confrontory politics to the visual arts institution. The performer/receiver relationship itself is often called into question, many times to an extent meant to unsettle or challenge the audience directly (as in Abramovic's loaded gun and other such objects in *Rhythm 0*, 1974) (ibid.). Conversely, dance, particularly when it has been transplanted from its familiar home in the theatre, offers a safe and attractive alternative, and plays well into the spectacularization of the museum-going experience. As Bishop argues in a different text, the pared-down, austere presentation of much dance in the museum offers a marked contrast to much contemporary art production; “[t]he dancer’s body holds a knowledge that cannot be simulated, and thus satisfies a yearning for skill and seduction that visual art performance rejected in its inaugural refusals of spectacle and theatre” (Bishop 2014b, 72) (this position is also taken by Sabine Breitwiser, see also section 3.2.2). Dance in the museum can thus often be read as a kind of underhand move, an infiltration of the valorization of skill and technique in performance long scorned by performance artists in the interests of boosting museum attendance and audience engagement.

This reality of dance’s relationship to the museum therefore however in quite strong contrast to the position put forward earlier that with the advent of modern dance, as exemplified by the work of Rainer and others, its aesthetic project would largely become one of criticality and exploration e.g. the body’s relationship to its subjectification by power. This would seem to contradict the reality of the situation as it has been put forward here, with dance being recontextualized once again as an artistic practice with a skill-based conception of virtuosity leading to it being a trojan horse for formal beauty in the museum.

It is useful at this stage to revisit some of the lessons learned by examining the work of Jackson, in particular her first thesis that “one set of eyes is seeing the reproduction of a tradition where another pair of eyes may have assumed invention,” once again the “hazard of swapped contexts” (Jackson 2014, 57). Where perhaps one way of viewing the entrance of dance into the museum is as the reproduction of a tradition of the commercialization of the museum experience, this view may also fail to account for other facets of what is happening with this change. In order to explore these shifting viewpoints further, it is useful to examine more closely the relationships between early instances of dance in the museum and their scholarly reception.

### “A Choreographed Exhibition”

In 2008, what scholars seem to agree was the first so-called “dance exhibition” took place at Kunsthalle St. Gallen, entitled “A Choreographed Exhibition” (2008). The format would grow rapidly from there, the beginning of a whole subgenre of dance exhibition in the museum, mainly by a small subset of conceptually-minded dancers, such as Xavier LeRoy, Boris Charmatz, Martin Spångberg, Tino Sehgal, or Jérôme Bel. In principle, the format offers an interesting solution to the issue of dance in the museum: rather than just presenting dance performances in the gallery, a “choreographic thinking” would be applied to the curatorial concept for the project itself. Practitioners of dance would then go about working in the museum as an expansion of choreographic practice understood as curatorial practice.

Dance scholar Erin Brannigan raises a series of issues around this entanglement of dance and museums that show both its dangers and its possibilities. Brannigan begins by taking a closer look at the seminal “A Choreographed Exhibition” at Kunsthalle St. Gallen, and in particular how the exhibition was understood by its curator, Mathieu Copeland. Examining this exhibition will allow once again a closer look at the actual realization of such projects, and the conceptual problems that they raise.

The exhibition consisted of three dancers who were present during the opening hours of the space for a month, realizing scores given to them by dancers, artists, and choreographers sequentially one after another over the course of the day. For Copeland, creating an exhibition consisting only of the movement of bodies in a space was a way of resisting the culture of the art object, a criticism of the art world which takes on critical, political, and temporal dimensions (Brannigan 2015, 12). Dancing becomes cast as a subversive act against the commodification of the object, a way of attempting through its “immateriality” to resist involuntary participation in the art market. However, in the accompanying exhibition catalogue, Copeland begins his exhibition text by wagering a redefinition of the exhibition as a “choreographed polyphony” (Copeland 2013, 19). He then uses it to re-examine the constitutive components that form the exhibition—which is for him “material, textual, textural, visceral, visual” (19). His intent is to rediscover ephemerality and the immateriality of experience and lived time within this constellation through the gestures and movements of the dancers he hires, who become the medium through which the exhibition will be realized. Copeland also points to the “inherent choreography” that accompanies gestures and movements whenever they appear as something which can be made visible via a criticism of the art world’s emphasis on objects. Brannigan summarizes his attempt at subverting an object-based art system through performance by saying that Copeland’s focus is on

the contribution of dance to the visual arts’ critique of the subject/object division and the social and political forces this unleashes, along with a destabilization of



the object as the primary model for the work of art, and finally the reactivation of an intersensorial mode of spectatorship in our encounters with art. (Brannigan 2015, 15)

This understanding of dance as emphasizing “an intersensorial mode of spectatorship” is what allows for her to characterize the relationship in Copeland’s work between dance and the visual arts. She writes that for him, “*choreography* is equated to the exhibited result of curating and organizing materials, bodies, spaces, [etc.]” (Brannigan 2015, 12). It becomes then a practice “of control and constraint across a multiplicity of physical and intangible variables,” in the sense of mediating the conditions of a given event (*ibid.*). What this means is that equating choreography with the practices of curating from the visual arts amounts to a nivellation of choreography with exhibition curating, and thus the curator with the choreographer. She then criticizes this comparison between curator and choreographer, arguing that “[t]he methods and practices of choreography ... are lost here, and the term stands for a much broader concept of a composition for living bodies” (2015, 12–13). The emphasis rests on the curatorial gesture that brought the project into being, rather than the individual dancers, who are treated as a neutral and undifferentiated medium—a notion that is outdated in the field of dance, where the individuality of specific dancer’s bodies play an important part in works (13).

This touches on two significant issues. The first is a return to Jackson’s thesis that “Innovation to Some Can Look Like a Reinvented Wheel to Another,” also called the hazard of swapped contexts. What for Copeland is a transgressive move, creating an “immaterial” exhibition as a rejection of the culture of the art object becomes, when looked at from the perspective of dance, a project that ignores the specificity of the individual dancers’ bodies, and that thus does not reflect the material-specific knowledges or current trends in choreographic practice. It becomes a project involving dancing, dancers, and choreographers, but because of its configuration and conception becomes a protest against the art object, rather than a specifically choreographic work.

Second, the contention implicitly made by Copeland that choreography and curating are indistinguishable terms because both involve the organization of materials and bodies in spaces is reminiscent of curator Irit Rogoff’s criticism of the expansion of terms explored in Chapter 2. She argues in “The Expanded Field” that there are a great deal of coexistent terms that have widened the scope of their respective definitions so as to become evacuated of stable meaning. For Rogoff, a great deal of these terms in the arts field have

a historically determined meaning which has been pushed at the edges to expand and contain a greater variety of activity—but never actually allowed to back up on itself and flip over into something different. (Rogoff 2013, 43)

These terms have been siloed and kept in line as a means of suppressing their need to take off in new directions.

Relating this to Copeland's statement as to the equivalence of curating and choreography, the parallels are clear: Choreography is defined for him not in terms of its narrower, historically determined meaning as was established with modern dance, and codified by Lepecki and others (i.e. it is a particular tradition of composing the movement of bodies), but rather as a practice of composing the movement of bodies *in general*. This is the process of inflation at work that Rogoff is calling out. The concept of choreography as put forward by Copeland is evidence of its being expanded, with the result being the destabilization of its meaning and an unclear (or underdetermined) relationship to its object. Rogoff's position is that one should not bother trying to work out the new boundaries of this kind of expanded term, but rather that the inflated term should be popped, and allowed to "flip over" into new approaches, for instance via new paths originating at the crossroads of dance and visual arts curating.

Taking these two criticisms into consideration, can it perhaps be Brannigan's analysis more than the project itself that is simply not approaching the project from an effective viewpoint for understanding? While Copeland's flattening of the concept of choreography may not have been curatorially very interesting, regarding the exhibition solely from the viewpoint of dance would also seem to miss his intention of creating a subversion of the art object, as has been argued with Jackson. What seems to be more probable in this situation is that the performance exhibition genre was in its infancy, and both curator and critic were experimenting with how to approach a renewed interest in the immaterial, performative experience of the exhibition. A useful way of addressing this impasse is to compare it with the analysis of a more recent example.

### Grey Zone

To this effect, Claire Bishop argues that as this form of performance has developed in the intervening years, it has begun to offer its audience a unique form of performative experience. In a recent article from 2018, she argues that the dance exhibition exists in a so-called "grey zone" between the white cube and the black box, a clever play on words, but also an example of interdisciplinary hybridity. For Bishop, the performance exhibition is unique in its ability to offer an audience experience that has been lost in the two traditional spaces to experience art, the black box and the white cube. The black box, she relates, emerged out of a desire in the 1950s and 1960s to strip the theatre of its baroque technologies and return it to its essence, namely the audience-actor relationship, a project now also supplemented by an emphasis on multimedia technologies. The white cube for its part is a typically-modernist exhibition space, decontextualizing objects and portending to a

rationalist-objectivist environment for their viewing. Common to both is that they function as spaces for conditioning and disciplining of the subject through enforcement of certain codes of behavior in order to minimize disruption: one must not be too loud or boisterous in either of them. (Bishop 2018, 30–31)

Bishop's argument is that with the introduction of dance performance into the white cube space, "the viewing conventions of both the black box and the white cube are ruptured ..., [and] the protocols surrounding audience behavior are less stable and more open to improvisation" (Bishop 2018, 31). The unruliness of dancing bodies in an exhibition space, especially given the often marathon nature of these performances, provides the audience with a certain cover to also "be themselves" and conform less to preestablished norms of museum or performance-going. She takes as an example a dance exhibition that has further developed Copeland's approach, namely Anne Imhof's work for the German pavilion for the Venice Biennale 2017. Entitled *Faust* (2017), the performance consisted of a raised glass floor, allowing visitors to walk as if floating a metre over the pavilion floor. Underneath, and occasionally above as well, a troupe of performers interacted with various objects in the space, danced, and rested. Performers above the glass would dance among the visitors; performers below would press their bodies up against the glass, or fog it up with their breath, while the audience, separated only by that thin pane, either filmed on their phones, or looked on at close proximity (Bishop 2018, 34–35).

In *Faust*, there is no best vantage point, the audience is free to move around and pick their own unique perspective on the performance. The event time of a performance at a specified hour is replaced as well by the exhibition time set by the opening hours; in this way as well the audience determines themselves the length of the performance by "voting with their feet." Most importantly, the dance exhibition allows for a regaining of intimacy between audience and performers because of the factors above. Dancers twist and push through the throng of people, they relate to you their personal stories, or you observe their genuine moments of distress or rest. Because of this, the dance exhibition has become the place "where you go to see performers sweat" (Bishop 2018, 31).

Bishop's position towards the "grey zone" created by dance exhibitions is an example of how both artists/curators and theorists can successfully navigate the nexus of references that come together at the intersection of dance and visual arts. Bishop shows that Imhof, Sehgal, LeRoy—and perhaps even Copeland—have managed to create practices that combine the concerns of their dance practices with those of the museum, presenting these works also in such a way as to work well specifically in their unique context.

Showing also how the discourse around these events has developed, she also shows with this article how the scholarship around dance in the museum has matured and developed an effective language and perspective on these kinds of projects since its rather basic beginnings at the beginning of this third wave of

dance in the museum. Bishop's most striking position is to emphasize in her article the titular "grey zone" between dance and visual arts that is created by dance exhibitions as their most important characteristic due to their innovative approach to spectatorship.

Placing emphasis on this is itself a departure from the norm in this discourse. Over the past decade or so of its formation, the focus has often come to lie strongly on issues of precarity for dancers in the museum. New forms of dance practice have often been accused of being the result of the neoliberalization of dance work, and thus the dismantling of norms regarding dancers' working conditions.<sup>5</sup> Bishop herself explicitly positions her article as moving forward from this trend, arguing that the whole application of Italian post-Workerist thought (such as Virno) to the field of performance is, though important, only serves the propagation of gloomy narratives of neoliberal conquest over art (2018, 23). Rather, she states that she wants to show how, speaking of *Faust*,

this work isn't simply an unreflexive replication of the neoliberal experience economy in which it thrives, but tells us important things about the changing character of spectatorship. (Bishop 2018, 24)

This attempt to move past a certain part of the existing discourse on dance in the visual arts is interesting in that in trying to refocus it on the character of spectatorship, it is pointing more in the direction of trying to understand how a new format can be understood phenomenologically as a uniquely new kind of hybrid.<sup>6</sup> This prioritization returns to a central point, namely that the danger of simply expanding terms should be carefully avoided, instead when engaging with interdisciplinary arts, the task should be to try to understand the hybrids that occur as unique blends that can potentially create new paths forward, rather than trying to fit them into already "overexpanded" concepts. These should importantly be understood to include *both* curating and choreography, but perhaps not new concepts like that of the grey zone coined by Bishop.

In any case, against this background of a maturing field of dance exhibitions, the concept of the grey zone that dance exhibitions create corresponds with an ap-

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5 See in particular the special issue of *TDR* entitled "Precarity and Performance" edited by Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider in 2012, and also Shannon Jackson's "Just-in-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity" (2012).

6 Also illustrating this maturation of the genre, a progression in the sophistication of Bishop's thought on this topic can quite clearly be seen between the 2018 article being discussed and an article on the same topic from 2014 entitled "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate MoMA, and Whitney" (Bishop 2014b). Whereas the first article is much more an attempt to establish a historical and factual basis for these new dance initiatives, the second is more concerned with the question of what new forms of perception these initiatives are creating.

proach to curating that cuts across various disciplines and creates new approaches and perspectives on artistic practices. Dance exhibitions bring together elements of different artistic traditions: conventions of exhibition of visual art, modern dance's emphasis on being "hard to see" i.e. being experiential rather than based on an object/subject division, the media-informed viewing habits of the contemporary spectator, and even the programming requirements of contemporary museums. In doing this, a new form of mediating performance is emerging in practice, one that untangles this genealogical puzzle in ways that respond to the demands of new kinds of audiences. In the best instances of these grey zones, and other combinations of dance with the museum, this form of mediating dance is both *critical* in its focus on and thematization of the spectator-performer relationship, where it is suggesting a new kind of intimacy, but also *informed by the history of modern dance* and thus *discipline-specific*, continuing and reimagining a certain form of dance practice.

This is lastly also an example of how the concept of curating, having been developed in the visual arts, can flow into the performing arts and create also there new forms of presentation through a curatorial engagement with the specificity of the mediation of performance to contemporary audiences. As will also be shown in in the next section on curatorial practices in the theatre, what is meant by this kind of development is not just a maturation of the theoretical tools used in analyzing performance, but also a mediating praxis that is itself developing too.

### 3.4 Curating Theatre / Theatre Curating

#### 3.4.1 Dramaturgy vs. Curating

Theatre scholar Tom Sellar argues in his 2014 essay "The Curatorial Turn" that the performance curator is the "great white hope for progressive theatre makers" (2014, 21). This inflationary claim is contrasted by Sellar with the historical role of the dramaturg, who he portrays as fulfilling similar functions in regards to "[c]onnecting a public to the art through interpretation," but who does not possess the same level of institutional power and influence to be able to do this effectively (26). The performance curator is thus portrayed as a rebranding of the dramaturg's role, the only difference being imbuing them with more control over budgets and authority over decision-making. This effectively imports the curatorial discourse's mystification and emphasis on the author-function. His definition thus reads like an expansion of the term curator into the field of dramaturgy in the interest of dramaturgs wanting to assert their power and authority over the performance event within theatre institutions.

The concept of dramaturgy, and more specifically the role of the dramaturg, deserve however a more nuanced exploration than this, in order to evaluate the

extent to which it too is establishing new beginnings within the interdisciplinary performance field. By situating the distinction historically within the context of the emergence of the term in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the observation that the term has not gained the same amount of attention as its visual arts counterpart, the relationship between these two terms for mediating figures can be better clarified, and more effectively linked to contemporary practices of mediation in theatre.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, during his brief time at the Nationaltheater in Hamburg in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would, in a series of essays, outline the broad definition of the dramaturg as it still persists today (Lessing [1767–1769] 2003; Turner and Behrndt 2008). In his conception, the dramaturg becomes responsible for a fluid and shifting list of responsibilities that work together in order to design the entirety of the experience of theatregoing, from the audience's perception and behaviour to the text and the actions onstage. In this way, the dramaturg would become responsible for the theatrical *event*, with the goal of presenting works of theatrical repute and which achieved this Aristotelian ideal of tragedy and catharsis to the audience in a manner amenable to them (Turner and Behrndt 2008, 19–23). This basic approach would determine the general profile of the dramaturg going forward. They act as a mediating figure between various stakeholders both internal and external to the theatre. This means not only communication between directors, actors, stagehands, and audience, but also a whole host of (potential) responsibilities, depending on the project, theatre, and individual profile of the dramaturg (and of course on the historical era they are working in).

A contemporary dramaturg can be responsible for editing and choosing texts to realize, designing the yearly program, positioning the theatre within its wider arts ecosystem, choosing directors and putting together production teams, doing research on productions and material, being involved in the conception of works with their teams, suggesting changes to productions in rehearsals, doing public relations and marketing, being involved in producing new works, applying for funding, managing budgets, etc. (Beck 2007, 313). Obviously no dramaturg can do all of these tasks all the time; the intention in listing this wide range is to show the extent to which being a dramaturg also comes with the challenge of defining just what the exact profile is that one takes on, depending on a host of personal and institutional factors. What cuts across all these different tasks is the understanding of the dramaturg as a kind of mediating figure responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the delivery of a work's *drama*.

The elicitation of drama is understood here as being achieved through negotiating between various aspects of and stakeholders in a performative event, as has been established earlier in this volume. It is situated in the unfolding of what theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann calls the *performance text*, which is constituted by all the different various sense-giving actants that make up the situation (2006, 85). This in turn means that all those other aspects that have been listed, in other words

the social and material infrastructure of the theatre and its labourers, influences the creation of the drama, as well as the realization of a performance through a specific text, production, staging, on a given night with a certain audience and set of performers. Just like in curating's relationship to context, there is no way to draw a definitive line between text and context, rather the job of the dramaturg is a working-with these different forces, steering them to the best of their (ever only partial) ability in order to make an expression of the world in the world.

Taking from Lehmann's later book on dramatic theatre, he argues that the *af-fective and mental upheaval* that is the result of the tragic formula is what lies at the centre of theatre's societal relevance (2013, 16). Lehmann makes clear that this upheaval is something that must take place in the performative event, and cannot be simply reduced to a tragedy communicated solely through the linguistic text of a work, e.g. when experienced through the play as literature. Rather than it being a characteristic of dramatic theatre, he calls tragedy a state that is achieved differently across predramatic, dramatic, and postdramatic forms of European theatre practice. In doing this, not only does Lehmann diminish the importance of a literary text, which is often the basis for much theatre scholarship, but he argues that "there can be no tragic experience without a theatre experience" (Lehmann 2013, 30; translation added).<sup>7</sup>

Lehmann connects the tragedy at the centre of theatrical experience with a gesture of transgression. While Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* for instance played with this transgression within the theatre play itself, contemporary theatre's act of transgression is more fundamentally one of its framing and contextualization. Lehmann writes of contemporary theatre practice:

So if it is correct that tragedy can be located in a moment of transgression, then what this means in the times of deconstruction of representational theatre is that it raises the question as to whether transgression [*Überschreitung*] must still be sought out (only) in that which is displayed [*dargestellt*], or whether it much more must be sought out in the mechanisms of display, of theatre itself, in its form and in its praxis. (Lehmann 2013, 21; translation added)<sup>8</sup>

His point is that the contemporary dramaturg's area of responsibility must not be limited to the confines of a work, but must also consider the mechanisms of contextualization of the entire apparatus itself in its broadest sense in order to realize a dramatic experience. This ends up closely resembling the concept of curatorial

7 "es [gibt] keine tragische Erfahrung ohne Theatererfahrung."

8 "Denn sollten wir das Rechte damit treffen, das Tragische in einer Geste der Transgression zu verorten, so betrifft diese Überschreitung in Zeiten einer Dekonstruktion des Theaters der Repräsentation gerade auch die Frage, ob eine Überschreitung noch im Bereich des (nur) Dargestellten zu suchen ist, oder ob sie vielmehr die Mechanismen der Darstellung, des Theaters selbst, seiner Form und seiner Praxis betrifft."

practice as put forward earlier in this volume. The question then becomes what happens to the concept of *drama* and thus the *dramaturg*, as well as articulating any potential difference between this profession and curatorial practice.

Lessing's concept of dramaturgy emerged, as has already been stated, during the early enlightenment period, in an age when the centrality of the theatre text to theatrical experience was undisputed. His *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* can be interpreted as a way of describing a kind of *Werktreue* that is anchored to the playtext in such a way that it functions as the locus of meaning. His understanding of the role of the dramaturg is as being *in service* to the realization of the drama qua playtext. As Lehmann explains, dramatic theatre is defined by its adherence to this text, and with it its adherence to a coherent and cohesive narrative world that is formed by it. The task of the dramaturg in dramatic theatre is to ensure the functioning of the "dramatic frame" of the tragedy (Lehmann 2013, 271–272).

European theatre's move away from dramatic towards post-dramatic forms of theatrical production, where the playtext is only one aspect among others in the constitution of the performance text of the theatrical performance, has seen also the role of the dramaturg adapt and often take on expanded roles and importance. Their goal continues to be the realization of the tragic formula, now however no longer as much through a "Werktreue" realization of dramatic texts, but through the practice of working with the various actants that constitute the specificity of the performance.

While the dramaturg seems to have survived the transition to post-dramatic theatre, more contemporary developments may be proving to be too difficult to keep up with: European theatre practice is moving away from a post-modern approach that informed much post-dramatic theatre, embracing more an approach marked by engagement off the theatre stage, applying its strategies instead in order to intervene directly in societal processes outside of the proscenium arch, as Lehmann remarks. It is at this juncture in the development of European theatre that the concept of the dramaturg seems to struggle to remain a relevant practice, based on how theatre practitioners are talking and reflecting on their practices. As theatrical practices are often now being combined with other arts in a larger interdisciplinary arts space, what has followed is a seeming loss of interest in the term as compared to the concept of curating.

This leads to the need to distinguish finally between the concepts of curating/curator and dramaturgy/dramaturg. The approach of the last chapter was to present curating as having developed into a practice of co-creating the event of critical knowledge production, a practice of wresting actants into a constellation that allows the possibility of non-hegemonic knowledge creation to occur. The chapter also examined how the *curator* is the embattled professional profile of many arts practitioners that do this. Curators must contend with the issues of being in a position of mediating forces of power, and the relationship this has to their own



increase in power and status that comes along with being a middleman, and which is inherently linked to proto-capitalist tendencies towards control.<sup>9</sup>

Dramaturgy can now be understood as a term that stemmed from enlightenment-era attempts at transforming the theatre into a space for public education through the realization of dramatic plays. At the foundation of theatre lies the tragic formula, which describes the intended effect of affective upheaval in the theatrical performance. The dramaturg is in charge of ensuring, as best they can, the realization of this performance. What dramaturgy emphasized early on was the importance of the performance itself, with the shift to post-dramatic only strengthening the role of the dramaturg in the constitution of the performative event.

In making this juxtaposition, it is argued that curating as a practice of co-creating the event of critical knowledge production and dramaturgy as the practice of creating a performative event of affective upheaval and transgression are *largely equivalent practices*. Their similarity exists firstly because of their common history as mediating figures within the cultural institutions of the enlightenment, charged with both caring for upkeep of the institutions (the network of performers, the material needs of museum collections) and with offering the public what they considered to be exemplary cultural production. This similarity must be understood to have some important qualifications. While the dramaturg has also undergone changes in the interim, and while their power has in some cases been greatly expanded, the discipline and tradition in which they operate has only within the past decade begun with any significance or magnitude a process of transformation of its mediating figures towards considering the mechanisms of display themselves, as Lehmann writes, in the curatorial sense.

This view is argued by theatre scholar Bertie Ferdman in an article on the relationship between curating and theatre. She takes from curatorial scholar Paul O'Neil the late 1980s as the period when visual arts curating made the shift from "a *logistics* of programming to a *concept for* programming," meaning a shift in focus from the logistical considerations of tickets and bookings, towards aesthetic goals (2012, 10). This is opposed with the situation in theatre, where such approaches are only now beginning to be established. For Ferdman, a common emerging trait among this new kind of practitioner is that they are engaged in questioning "pre-conceived assumptions that shape performance, as well as his or her own role in shaping that discourse," in other words a form of mediation that is aware of its position within the manifold relationships that make up the performative event but which tries nevertheless to enact upon them some influence (2012, 17).

If it can then be established that curatorial practice and this critical approach to dramaturgy that has emerged in the past decade are indeed largely equivalent, and

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9 This happens through control e.g. of availability, see regarding this Andreasen and Larsen 2007.

becoming more so as both dramaturgy establishes the discourses around moving from a logistics to a concept for programming, and artistic practice itself becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, then what can surely be established as a difference between the two is when they rose to prominence.

As has been shown in Chapter 2, the figure of the curator in the visual arts has a long history of struggle with its relationship to the author figure, and as a result of this struggle has developed, at least partially, coping mechanisms within the field itself. Thus within the community of the visual arts, there exists forms of resistance engrained in it that help resist (though also that help perpetuate) this form of curatorial authorship, such as institutional critique (see section 3.2.2) or forms of collective curation, tempered by the persistence of the myth of the curator-genius (such as Obrist or Szeemann).

In theatre on the other hand, there is a very different relationship to the issue of authorship and its relation to mediation. This can be exemplified in the genre of director's theatre (*Regietheater*), where the director has grown into an all-important author figure, when not taking on the god-like status of *auteur*. The example of director Frank Castorf shows how this style of being director can also be expanded to an entire theatre (in his case Volksbühne Berlin). Contrary to the visual arts, there has been much less of a reckoning with this kind of singular authorship over collective work. As Ferdman has rightly argued, the discourse around this is emerging, and a variety of "alternative models" of curating performance also exist that are collaborative, non-hierarchical, and open. They reject the Szeemann-like star curator in favour of collective governance and decision-making done by artists themselves according to various structures and protocols (Ferdman 2014, 14, see also 2.3.1n20). The terms curator and dramaturg therefore do not share this same kind of equivalency.

However, returning to the dramaturg, there is also the issue that historically, the position has worked differently from this, which has arguably been part of its downfall. Dramaturgs are not normally in leadership positions, taking on rather subordinate roles that are structurally removed from certain kinds of autonomy (over budgets, over staffing). As Sellar points out, "[t]he dramaturg's ideas must be processed through layers of collaboration and according to the theatre's flexible but omnipresent hierarchies" (Sellar 2014, 26). This is mirrored for instance by the (after the 2019/20 season former) director of the Münchner Kammerspiele Matthias Lilienthal, who, in interview with Sellar, also sees the problem of the dramaturg as being one that is limited by its position within the institution of the theatre. He says that in calling himself a curator instead, Lilienthal has found that he has come into newfound possession of a "freedom generally to set up a framework not limited to the standard repertory," rather than being severely limited in his outcomes by the preestablished infrastructure in which he worked as a dramaturg (Lilienthal 2014, 78).

The only seeming contradiction to this position to this problem of the dramaturg's lack of authority can be found in the approach practiced by Brecht with his Berliner Ensemble around 1954 in the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. Similar to the all-encompassing practice of Harald Szeemann beginning in the 1960s, Brecht's ensemble consolidated a great deal of power and decision-making in him and his role as dramaturg, in the interest of realizing his vision of the plays the company would stage. Unlike Szeemann however, Brecht would seemingly only produce a model for further consolidations of power by theatre directors (such as the aforementioned Frank Castorf), with seemingly less resistance from the institution of theatre.

Therefore, though dramaturgy is per se now similarly positioned to curating, and has also recently undergone the same shift towards conceptual and contextual production rather than on logistical concerns, the lack of an already-established discourse, as well theatre's lack of dealing with issues of singular authority/authorship to the same extent as the visual arts have, mean that theatre practitioners who are both beginning to enter the interdisciplinary arts, working more conceptually and expressively with context, and are seeking a pre-existing fundus of academic work and artistic examples in this field are gravitating to the curatorial discourse instead of a renewed approach to dramaturgy. This has the advantage of being able to engage with the mediating practices of a wide range of artistic practices, including performance. Because of this, its discourses are all the more adaptable to also experimental and conceptual theatrical practices. While dramaturgy is a term mostly associated with one kind of artistic practice, the curatorial discourse has profiled itself as a flexible and adaptable field equipped for interdisciplinary arts practices.

What then remains of the specificity of theatre as a field with its own unique history? Does it get totally subsumed into curatorial studies, vanishing without a trace? The answer is once again to return to the specific knowledge of theatre practitioner within the wider curatorial field.

### 3.4.2 Truth is Concrete

As part of the 2012 Steirischer Herbst festival in Graz, Austria, chief dramaturg Florian Malzacher initiated a 7-day/24-hour "marathon camp" that would be called *Truth is Concrete*. The project occupied a black-box theatre and an accompanying gallery space for the duration of the project, in spaces designed by raumlaborberlin. Activities would continue through the night, with participants invited to also sleep, live, and eat at the camp for the duration of the event. The title is in reference to a quote hung above Brecht's work desk during his exile in Denmark, and served, in Malzacher's words, as "a reminder never to forget the reality around him" in a time of extreme political turbulence (Malzacher 2014b, 5). The marathon's goal was

to rediscover the link between the arts and politics against a background of intense geopolitical upheaval: Malzacher recounts the watershed events that were transpiring as the team was conceiving of the project: the Arab Spring was spreading across the Middle East, the Occupy Wall Street movement had started, the European debt crisis was in full swing, and the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe had begun, to name just a few. The question for the organizers became whether art could have a role to play in these global crises, or whether, as one populist extremist politician put it, art could only ever be a leftist hobby.

To try to answer this, the marathon presented artistic projects engaged in social and political change through talks and presentations, as well as present a great number of performances, concerts, and workshops that engaged participants directly. Events during the 170-hour-marathon were categorized into several different groups: general assemblies held every day at 14h, short presentations of concrete artistic practices called tactic talks, thematic blocks and panels hosted by guest curators, a series of recurring events such as yoga and screenings, an open marathon of “non-curated” contributions where anyone could sign up for a slot, and a series of durational projects like a hair salon and a media archive that were present over the duration of the marathon. The central program points were kept to a rigid and strict timeline, with a so-called “continuing room” existing as a space where conversations could spill over the allotted time limits. (Steirischer Herbst n.d.-a)

One of the key criticisms of the event’s format addressed by the organizers was the extent to which this project was simply yet another example of spectacularized over-production, meant to feed the neoliberal knowledge machine rather than foment resistance. To this Malzacher argued that the project was, as opposed to the interview marathons of for instance Obrist, designed to be impossible. Similar to Enwezor’s Documenta 11, which displayed more video material than one could have ever realistically consumed over the entire opening hours of the documenta, *Truth is Concrete* offered more activities than one could ever hope to consume. The goal was thus not to canonize a certain selection of voices, but rather to present a great deal of them, and let the participants navigate their own way through it, in this way allowing them to each make their own version of the marathon, making it more participant-driven. This lack of a clear structure was Malzacher’s way of making the marathon difficult to commodify, and positioned the whole as an offering to be taken as needed, rather than to be force-fed content as in Obrist’s marathons. (Malzacher and Warsza 2017; 37–39, 132)

Among those involved in the event and its subsequent documentation were many names that have today well-established practices that operate in-between art and activism, including many who have now become the usual suspects on that circuit, including The Silent University/Ahmet Ögüt, Slavoj Žižek, Rabih Mroué, Center for Political Beauty, The Yes Men, raumlaborberlin, International Institute

of Political Murder, Ultra-red, Forensic Architecture, and Pussy Riot, to name just a few examples (Steirischer Herbst n.d.-b).

Saying “participants” leads to a key component of the project, namely that because of its nature, with its close living and working quarters over a prolonged duration, and its concerted attempt to merge living with artistic practice, it dissolved these boundaries between actors and spectators. The goal was to bring together these people from many different backgrounds into a common space for creating, thinking, and living together, making everyone in some way a participant, rather than dividing into a system of “passive” spectators and “active” actors. The format of the marathon was such that the usual steps of production, presentation, and perception were so intensely interlinked due to the proximity and spatio-temporal concentration of the everyone involved in the project that their normative division was short-circuited. This transgression was part of the premise of *Truth is Concrete*, as it was exactly this deconstruction of the infrastructure of artistic practice in search of more effective ways of asserting art’s role in political activism that Malzacher sought out.

This dissolution of the spectator/actor divide allowed for *Truth is Concrete* to take on a permeable relationship to the reality that it wished to interact with, in that it became a place for the exchange and even application of knowledges, a knowledge-machine for artistic activism, between everyone involved. It functioned as a place that was at once connected to but yet separate from the world around it, a mirror of society and its problems, but still somewhat a secure, stable, and separate place to negotiate these issues and develop responses to them. This would fit into what Malzacher views as the function of theatre, as a space “in which societies have long explored their own means, procedures, ideals, and limits” (Malzacher 2014b, 38): the theatre as a laboratory to develop answers to society’s challenges.

In her reflection on being a participant in the marathon, curator Maayan Sheleff relates how she felt that the eliciting of this multiplicity of approaches and outcomes allowed for the project to move beyond the sole authorship of the individual organizers, becoming more of a group articulation (Malzacher and Warsza 2017, 135). She relates as well an interesting anecdote that helps illustrate this, explaining that a couple of days into the marathon, a protest march was organized by some of the participants against a museum in Graz and its sponsorship by a bank working with a polluting oil company. She points out that the same bank also was a sponsor of the festival, but that at no point did the organizers of *Truth is Concrete* try to intercede in the organizing of the protest rally. The action culminated in a march into and disruption of the museum’s lobby and pouring (vegetable) oil onto its couches (133–134).

The anecdote shows two things. The first is that the form of Sheleff’s analysis and reflection on the project mirrors also the self-organizing approach of the larger project she was involved in. Taking on an “outsider” or observer position would

have missed the point of the marathon—and would have furthermore been largely impossible. One had to involve oneself and participate. The personal anecdote is then the only possible way of reflecting on the marathon, as once again there was no vantage point that you could observe it from in its totality, rather only individual personal experiences of it.

Second, this small protest action organized by the participants is evidence that the marathon week could also be a place to enact “concrete” change in the world around it, existing then not just as its own bubble, but rather using the protected space of the theatre project to foster and catalyze action. The protest, though small, showed that the marathon was even able to go against its own self-interest, criticizing one of its sponsors, and in this way effectively generating a genuine line of flight away from the contingencies of its constituent parts (in Deleuzian terminology, becoming a body without organs).

A more ideal outcome than this Malzacher could not have hoped for. Much of his approach to theatre leans on the post-Marxist writings of philosopher Chantal Mouffe and political theorist Ernesto Laclau’s concept of agonistic pluralism, a position that he frequently comes back to when describing his view of how the theatre can be a space for experimentation and politics, exemplified here. Mouffe argues for a conception of democracy that has its basis in conflict tempered by mutual respect and a common framework for debate, eliciting a play of ideas that allows differing opinions to be voiced and a diversity of actors to be heard from.

The commonality between Mouffe’s agonism and the theatrical format for Malzacher is the elicitation of true conflicting ideas presented within a clearly-defined *arena* with certain mutually-agreed-upon rules. This allows for debate and for a diversity of different actors to be involved in the process of debating social issues. He points out that the concept of *agon* from their term is related to the ancient Greek concept of contest and argument, used to describe sport, but also the debates between protagonist and antagonist in Greek tragedy, demonstrating the suitability and aptitude of the theatre as a space for eliciting such debates.

Not only was this concept of agonism exercised in the curatorial framework of *Truth is Concrete*, but significantly the very notion of confrontation and provocation was also present within the artistic practices of those who were invited to participate in the conference. The central concern for Malzacher was that the issue of the relationship between art and activism, and the nature of the relationship between art and politics, its role in communities, be once again opened up for debate.

With the project, Malzacher makes a large-scale (through the project’s size and number of participants) claim that the relationship between art and politics must be rethought, for the current paradigm has lost its connection to contemporary reality, arguing that a “homeopathic, second-hand idea of political philosophy and art has become the main line of contemporary cultural discourse” (Malzacher 2014b, 14). For him, the classic leftist idea of 1970s-era thinkers and practitioners that ac-

tivism can be a private, micropolitical struggle has lost its efficacy and must be reimagined. In his curatorial practice for this conference, Malzacher used the practices and tacit knowledge of staging theatre to organize an arena for debating the role of art in activism. In the same way, his position towards the artistic practices he hosts is that art must be made *useful* through using its tools and techniques to be subversive and create actual change in the world.

Malzacher's understanding of "usefulness" is obviously deserving of some scrutiny here, including the question of its alignment with the concept of a curatorial responsibility towards critical knowledge production. He is careful to position his understanding of usefulness as a characteristic fundamental to art's broader relevance for society more generally, writing in his contribution to the book on *Truth is Concrete* after the conference that

[o]bviously the claim for "usefulness" is problematic—it seems to agree with the social democratic instrumentalization of art as a mere tool for social work and as an appeasement strategy. Especially in recent years, ... the idea that the positive effects of art should be measurable has become a common trope. Art should either fit seamlessly into governmental concepts or it should stay in the realm of symbolic gestures... (Malzacher 2014b, 25)

In place of this safe and subservient notion of "useful" art, Malzacher positions a more engaged definition of art, arguing that the most useful works are ones that

offer no easy answers, they give no easy comfort. They are useful not only through their direct engagement, but also through—subtly or polemically—their critique of the capitalist status quo. (Malzacher 2014b, 25)

Malzacher then points to many activists like Pussy Riot and their action in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, or Schlingensiefel's *Please Love Austria* as instances of this differently useful art practice. They are carefully-planned provocations, meant to elicit a response, and meant to set off a debate not unlike that which Malzacher tried to create among the participants in the project. In this way, the project significantly manages a striking symmetry of form and content, in that its organizational framework, in creating an arena for subversiveness and action using the practices of art effectively mirrored Malzacher's thesis that the artists and activists he invited also did just that, creating modest but actual moments of change using artistic strategies.

The approach that Malzacher takes towards *Truth is Concrete* is significant for understanding what has come to be understood as curatorial practice within the field of theatre. While Malzacher's official title for Steirischer Herbst was Chief Dramaturg, he would later come to frequently cite *Truth is Concrete* as an instance of a *curatorial* practice in theatre, and furthermore (and this is not necessarily a given) as an example of him working as a *curator*.

Though sometimes falling back on the notion of curating as a collect-all for mediation of all kinds, Malzacher in his writing subscribes more to a view that the name you give to a mediating figure largely does not matter, rather that the usefulness of the term curator is as a “self-provocation” (Malzacher 2017, 17). He explains that calling his practice curating is not just exchanging one term for another, but rather demanding a different approach from oneself, a way of questioning one’s mediating practice through a change of title.

The word itself is not Malzacher’s main focus, it is more the resulting projects that matter. Curating is just one way of challenging oneself, of trying to “come up with something new” (Malzacher 2017, 32). This is an approach that coincides more closely with Rogoff’s call for creating new concepts, rather than expanding old ones, despite still playing in the field of old terms. The fluidity with which he moves between terms to describe his practice also speaks to a mindset oriented towards establishing new terms, in that the fluidity and emphasis on questioning both point towards a practice of analyzing the current field of power relations, and intervening in it to affect change.

As outlined in section 3.2 and argued in section 3.3, curating in the performing arts must be sensitized and interact with the disciplinary histories of the various practices that come together in curatorial projects. This can be seen in Malzacher’s approach to curating theatre, in that he emphasizes the use of the discipline-specific knowledge of theatre, namely understanding it as the art of establishing an agon, an arena for debate, after his reading of Chantal Mouffe. He roots this approach in the historical developments of the theatre, as well as in his own background in creating theatrical projects. Theatrical practice (and his knowledge as a dramaturg) becomes then for him the knowledge of how practically to create this arena. In an interview with theatre scholar Tom Sellar about *Truth is Concrete*, Malzacher gives some insight into how he sees theatrical practice being applied in this way:

I want to ask, what does it mean when we spend time together? Can we enforce this? ... When you invite people to stay for [170 hours], you have to think about what time means. What does it mean when people spend time together, when they become a collective? When they get annoyed with each other? What group dynamics kick in? That’s what I think is specific for the field of theatre... [t]hinking from the specificities of theatre itself—that’s the interesting part. (Malzacher 2017, 18)

Malzacher in this quote recasts theatre as a knowledge of how bodies move in space, one that can be used in order to design the context, the arena, of the performative event. In *Truth is Concrete*, it was visible how this seemed to function very well. The point was not to control or overdetermine every aspect of the lives of the participants for a week, but rather to set up a frame where things could happen that went



beyond what the organizers could predict, a space where they could discuss and debate their similarities and differences. In this way, *Truth is Concrete* was a way of producing an arena for debate and action using the specific knowledge of theatrical practice to do so. Building on the conclusion of section 2.3.3, the project once again is designed to be an event of critical knowledge production, with an approach that is determined by the background and history of the discipline(s) being employed.

Putting this together with his position that calling oneself curator should be a self-provocation to do something new, Malzacher uses the *methods* of theatre in order to achieve the *ethos*, the moral character, of curating.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter began by using the approach to interdisciplinary arts scholarship of Shannon Jackson to argue for a receiver-centric understanding of the art encounter. Theatricality here is understood as a characteristic inherent to every encounter with art, be it performance or an object, because every such encounter is an event, constituted by a number of factors. The way that curating fits into this constellation is by understanding it as a practice of taking responsibility for at least a portion of these factors, and attempting to shape them so as to produce an event of critical knowledge production for the audience. Taking this broad theoretization, this chapter then explored ways that curatorial thinking, understood as an undisciplined practice, has found its ways into the performing arts of dance and theatre. In contrast to music, these are areas where extensive and thorough scholarly and artistic commitments to curatorial practice have taken place, and as such help to form a collection of curatorial practices in the performing arts that can be referred back to in the consideration of curatorial practice in music as will be examined in the following two chapters.

What this chapter has shown is that, far from being a specific set of practices and definitions, curating in the performing arts, just as in the visual arts, is a site- and situation-specific task, acting at the nexus of so many stakeholders. This means that curating begins with a knowledge of its connections, and is *not* material-agnostic. While Jackson's theses helped approach these in a more nuanced way at the beginning of the chapter, how curating has intermingled with dance and performance, in particular in the context of dance in the museum, has also shown how engagement with specificities of a disciplinary practice can lead to new forms of mediation, as in Bishop's concept of the grey zone, or Malzacher's concept for *Truth is Concrete*.

In the field of theatre, curating has had to be differentiated from the related practice of dramaturgy, with which it shares many similarities. While the two fields conceptually are highly similar, the professional profiles of the curator and dra-

maturg are differentiated by the former's history of hypervisibility, as well as the tactics that artists have over time developed to resist these forms of singular authorship. This goes beyond just its field, and spills also into neighbouring ones, in such a way as to tend to pull practices experimenting with the format of theatrical presentation also towards the terms and discourses of curating. However, it has also been shown that performance curating is not simply an importation of theories and concepts from another field, but rather that these contribute to informing a kind of new curatorial *ethos*, one that is grounded in discipline-specific practices of mediation that retain (and reimagine) specific disciplinary histories, while also forming the methodological basis for performance curating.

Having now seen several ways in which curating has come into contact with the performing arts, sufficient basis has been established for examining two case studies in music from a new perspective that will help illuminate previously obscured areas of their practice.



## 4 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater

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### 4.1 Introduction

The Munich Biennale for New Music Theater (German: *Münchener Biennale für Neues Musiktheater*) is a festival for experimental music theatre performances that takes in and around the Gasteig and Muffatwerk cultural complexes, as well in other theatres and venues in the city of Munich. It was founded in 1988 by the composer Hans Werner Henze (\*1926–†2012), and taken over by Peter Ruzicka (\*1948) in 1996. He would continue to lead the biennale until 2014, with the current directors Daniel Ott (\*1960) and Manos Tsangaris (\*1956) taking over as of the 2016 edition.

The focus of this chapter will be on the current biennale leadership and their approach to running the festival, with particular attention placed on the relationship between their processes of commissioning and the music theatre productions that the biennale produces. In the interest of contextualizing the festival within a historical perspective, this chapter will also examine key features and characteristics of the earlier two directors and their approaches to the festival.

The historical context of the biennale begins by examining the compositional style of its founder, Hans Werner Henze. Known already for his music theatre works, the founding director of the biennale would create the festival as a place to foster new music theatre works among a younger generation of composers who he saw as moving away from the genre, as well as present new music theatre works to the Munich public. The biennale during this era would program a range of different approaches to music theatre, including puppet theatre, with its programmatic focus on linear, dramatic, narrative-based librettos. The composers' task during this time was clearly delineated within the theatrical apparatus, producing a score to be performed, and overseeing the realization of the work.

As Peter Ruzicka took over the festival as of 1996, the festival's focus would gradually shift towards a more post-dramatic style. This meant not just non-linear, fragmentary librettos, but also an acknowledgement that the libretto was only one aspect in the constitution of the performance, meaning that music was no longer understood as subservient to the drama, but rather able to deliver its own sense.

This turn in the biennale's programming fit with Ruzicka's own post-modern compositional practice, itself focused on a fragmentary aesthetic.

Unifying the two first directors is a persistent belief in both the operatic and Western classical music traditions, as well as in the opera stage as the main place that further works in that tradition should be performed. Both understood the commissions they would organize as in different ways fitting into and continuing this tradition. While for Henze, it was an interest in promoting the accessibility of music theatre for the audience as a contrast to the Darmstadt school, for Ruzicka the focus lay more on updating the Western musical tradition with both works and a musical language adapted to the demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The change to Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris (abbreviated "DOMTS") as co-directors of the festival brought an approach to music theatre that was more influenced by a rejection of operatic trappings in favour of an emphasis on the spontaneity of the moment of performance. This style can be traced to the compositional practice of the duo's teachers, Nicolaus A. Huber and Mauricio Kagel respectively, who both had been influenced by the performative turn in the arts in the 1950s and 1960s.

Daniel Ott's own compositional work employs scores, though these work more as collectively-decided documents that coordinate large-scale music theatre projects with a variety of diverse actors. Ott's practice is more about moulding and shaping pre-existing materials and skills, shaping them into a collective musical expression. Manos Tsangaris conversely works often on a smaller scale, using notation as a way of coordinating the entries and exists, ons and offs, of all manner of musical and non-musical material. More than music works, he creates immersive situations that play with the audience's perception and sense of expectation.

For both composers, their works often centre on the designing of a somewhat unpredictable system or situation then letting it all play out in the performance. They take a similar approach to the biennale, and in doing so come up with an unorthodox way of programming its productions. The majority of productions for both the 2016 and 2018 biennales have been the result of a series of what DOMTS call "Biennale Platforms." These are workshops set up by the biennale where commissions are developed collectively by groups consisting of composers, but also musicians, stage designers, visual artists, etc., all working as a team. This has been part of a strategy of reconnecting the biennale to its original goals of supporting younger composers as well as creating a strong and significant festival experience for the audience.

What both the results of the biennale platforms and the rest of DOMTS' commissions for the biennale have in common is the emphasis they place on experimenting with the presentation format of music theatre works: From music theatre as installation to performances for a single audience member in a bathtub, pro-

ductions share a heterogeneity and novelty of approach. They are in turn the result of DOMTS' wanting to present as wide as possible a variety of music theatre approaches in the biennale as possible. As with the unpredictability of their own performances, these capricious forms of music theatre are not a scattershot hoping to find the next big thing, but rather are symptomatic of a shift to productions whose form of presentation is intended to be an extension of the artistic expression of its organizers.

It will be argued that DOMTS have placed their focus on the development and commissioning of individual productions for the biennale, rather than on the precise "composition" of commissions during the time of the festival. The tendency to compose situations out of heterogeneous elements visible in both composers' individual artistic practice seems to have been applied to the development of works, with the end results of this experimentation being presented at the festival. What this represents is an unusual and interesting shift for DOMTS towards festival administration using the know-how of their respective artistic practices, argued to be a form of music curatorial approach to the festival.

While in the older biennales led by Henze and Ruzicka, commissioning and assembling the programme occurred largely along established lines, DOMTS make the process of commissioning into their main form of artistic expression as leaders. Rather than produce compositions, they choose artists.<sup>1</sup> In order to understand the connotations of this hybrid form of practice between management and artistic creation, comparisons are drawn to the curatorial discourse in order to reveal some of the implications of this shift in their artistic practices. The investigation in the previous chapter on curating in the field of theatre will also prove useful, as the translation of curatorial practice into theatre practiced by Florian Malzacher and others can serve as a useful model for understanding curatorial practice beyond its basic understanding as concert dramaturgy in the field of music theatre.

## 4.2 Hans Werner Henze

### 4.2.1 Henze's Compositional Practice

Hans Werner Henze would position his compositional style consistently within the "grand" European tradition (Petersen 2012, 2). As he would describe his stylistic approach, he still saw many possibilities left in "the path from Wagner to Schoenberg," something that can be clearly heard in his music as well. Despite the influence of the Darmstadt school, and his adaptation of dodecaphonic technique, and while

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1 Claire Bishop notably formulates a similar idea while discussing relational aesthetics and changes in curatorial practices in the 1990s (Bishop 2014a, 244).

integrating changes in compositional techniques such as aleatoric principles and electronics, this link to tradition would remain visible throughout Henze's career. In describing this relationship between the compositional developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how he relates them to the grand European tradition, he says that

in my works for the theatre I have therefore never completely left tonality, not even in the earliest ones. My music is nourished by just this state of tension: the abandonment of traditional tonality and the return to it. (Henze quoted in Palmer-Füchsel 2001)

This is seen for instance in his dodecaphonic technique, which was often heavily inflected with tonal implications in his choice and manipulation of rows, often leading to works having a neo-classicist/neo-tonal sound. This mix of and tension between dodecaphony and tonality would define Henze's musical "engine" throughout his career, but would often later on be accentuated by other influences or new compositional techniques.

Henze has produced various forms of musical output, including orchestral works, vocal music, and chamber music, but it is his range of music theatre productions (opera, ballet dance drama, vaudeville, show, radio opera, etc.) for which he is perhaps best known, and which are of greatest interest here. These include works such as *The Bassarids* (1964/65), first premiered in Salzburg in 1966, which remains one of his best-known. It also includes works that are more experimental and explicitly political in their subject matter, like in *Der langwierige Weg in die Wohnung der Natascha Ungeheuer* in 1971, which bears the influence of Henze having participated, at least superficially, in the 1968 revolution. Based on texts by writer Gastón Salvatores, it tells of a student who sets out on an odyssey across Berlin to participate in the promised revolution—an ultimately unfruitful venture.

#### 4.2.2 Henze's Biennales

Henze initiated the first edition of what was then called the Munich Biennale: International Festival for New Music Theatre [*Münchener Biennale: Internationales Festival für neues Musiktheater*] in 1988. The festival's main goal was to function as a laboratory for young composers to experiment with the production of new music theatrical works, which emerged from Henze's view that there was a widening cleft between the musical avant-garde and the theatre. The idea was that by commissioning and working with young composers, giving them the time and resources they needed to familiarize themselves with the genre, this gap could begin to be overcome.

The biennale established itself as an institution to develop small, flexible operas that could both adapt to a variety of halls, and also eventually make their way into bigger opera houses. Rather than focusing on sure hits, the biennale was intended

to take programmatic risks, and explore new possibilities for the development of a compositional music theatre aesthetic suited to overcoming this gap. Stylistically, though open to experimentation, the festival strove to make music theatre more popular to a wider audience, including especially young people and the underprivileged, in fitting with the composer's aspirations at a future synthesis of the avant-garde and populist styles. He specifically names the English Opera Group (later the English Music Theatre Company), founded by Benjamin Britten and others in 1947, as the model for the early biennales (Henze 1988, 7). The group's stated manifesto was to "encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage, also to encourage poets and playwrights to tackle the problem of writing libretti in collaboration with composers" (Archive of the English Opera Group). The significance of the group for Henze was that it used simple means and small ensembles to put on interesting productions, allowing them to be flexible and adventurous in their programming (Henze 1988, 7). This mix of approachability and relative simplicity of means would be a defining feature of many of the early biennales.

Henze's introduction also reveals his unsuccessful plans to perform a staged version of Berg's *Wozzeck* at the first festival. He regarded the libretto as exemplary of a realistic treatment of social issues, and saw Berg's musical language as an ideal fusion of classical forms and a dodecaphonic musical language that did not completely reject tonality, in fitting with Henze's striving for a musical style synthesizing these different genres. As further evidence of the extent of *Wozzeck*'s influence on Henze, he writes that despite the work itself not being performed, "in any case, almost every one of our premieres [during the Biennale] stands in the tradition of this work" (Henze 1988, 8; translation added).<sup>2</sup>

In the editorial to the second Biennale (1990), Henze becomes more specific about his vision, as well as about what it implies for the composition of music theatre:

Composing for the *theatre* means regarding music as something physical, communicative, spiritual as well as something with which we can artificially produce good or bad weather, sadness or happiness ... A plot, a stage, lighting and poetry are necessary to help to transport the *dramatic* events and content which are the composer's main concern, and to clarify the *semantic intentions* of the music, to place that which is intended in an unmistakable light, to make the invisible audible, the inaudible visible. (Henze 1990, 10; emphasis added).

For him, music plays an important role in communicating the work's affective message to the audience, "clarified" by other elements in the theatrical apparatus. The

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2 "Aber nichtsdestotrotz steht fast jede unserer Aufführungen in der Überlieferung dieses großen Werkes."



music theatre productions during Henze's leadership of the biennale largely conformed to a linear dramatic narrative: this means that they maintained the understandability and accessibility of works for a wide audience, in fitting with his populist compositional approach.

The *text* of the story and its narration or description is for him the driving force, moved forward according to a progression of clear signs with a discrete meaning. Text is meant in the sense of a *shared* text that is established between the stage and the public, even in moments when no literal text is being spoken, as evidenced by when Henze claims that the composer's main concern is to unambiguously represent the libretto's semantic intentions.

This concept of a shared text is borrowed from theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann, who identifies it as a key characteristic of dramatic theatre. He writes that

[theatre] wanted to construct a *fictive cosmos* and let all the stage represent—be—a world ... abstracted but intended for the imagination and empathy of the spectator to follow and complete the *illusion*. (Lehmann 2006, 22)

Adding that

even where music and dance were added or where they predominated, the "text," in the sense of at least the imagination of a comprehensible narrative and/or mental totality, was determining. (Lehmann 2006, 21; emphasis added)

The addition of music to the work does not in other words change this core definition, as it aims at a more fundamental conceptualization of the centrality of a singular textual *logos*, communicated through the various media at the theatre's disposal. The composer may be central when it comes to commissions, but the creation of meaning is left up to the libretto, in other words to the textual frame of the work. Though composers do of course often themselves compose, choose, or have influence on the text, the point is that the text, not music, is the final arbiter of the work's meaning.

Furthermore, in Henze's understanding of music theatre, practitioners take on clear, separate, and distinct roles during the process of production, in following the classical model of operatic production. This meant that first a libretto is created (sometimes by the composer themselves), then is set to music in the form of a score produced by the composer, and lastly realized in production by a director and dramaturg. Though it is possible for one physical person to occupy several of these roles, it shows nevertheless a system of production analogous to the traditional operatic form, centred on the play text. Henze's own music theatre productions carried many different genre identifications, but always had in some way a dramatic libretto, even in his most experimental phases. With the biennale on the other hand, there are productions that adhere less to (without however completely

foregoing) dramatic form, which as a result are given other identifiers under the larger music theatre umbrella.

This can be seen in the organization of the second biennale in 1990: while the first biennale's productions seemed to have been made to be in *Wozzeck's* image, the second biennale appears to have adopted a broader understanding of music theatre. Its program was divided into four categories of productions, the operas proper with their pride of place, the *Figurentheater*, concerts by the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and the *Musica Viva* concert series, and last, in the ignobly-named "Miscellaneous" category, further music theatre productions that did not fit the criteria for being called "opera." This included a jazz-based production from England (*The Wizard of Jazz*, 1990), a "school opera" performed in part by school children (*Absences*, 1990), a ballet on Marienplatz together with IRCAM (*Träume vom Fliegen*, 1990), and a likely more performative piece on the oppression of women (*Miriam*, 1990), among others.

Despite this seeming diversity of approaches, the staple of the biennale remained the main section of commissions in the tradition of the literary opera—a genre to which also the majority of Henze's own operas could be attributed. Though to an extent the wider umbrella of music theatre productions was present in his biennales, particularly towards the mid-1990s, literary opera was nevertheless still the dominant genre. Henze's emphasis on a plurality of approaches, as well as on the exposure to new music theatre and operatic productions would still however set the tone for the festival's future editions.

A year before the fifth biennale in 1996, Henze asked his colleague Peter Ruzicka if he would like to take over the festival, citing his pending retirement (Ruzicka 2014, 8). Though officially run by Ruzicka, the fifth biennale was a collaboration between the former and current directors, representing a gradual transition from one to another, an approach which was also felt in the style of the productions themselves. While Ruzicka's leadership would change the biennale's aesthetic program in important ways, much of Henze's original impulse would continue to determine the biennale and its form over the course of its existence. The most significant shift with Ruzicka would be in the style of music theatre production that the biennale focused on.

### 4.3 Music Theatre?

In order to understand this stylistic shift that occurred between the tenures of Henze and Ruzicka, and as well in order to establish a framework for understanding these two approaches in relation to that of DOMTS, a closer look must be taken at various possible definitions of the "music theatre" in the festival's name. Taking

a longer view of the genre of music theatre, Matthias Rebstock understands it as an umbrella term for

all forms of theatre for which music plays [a] constitutive role. Those genres which fall under this term include opera, operetta and the musical, in addition to a spectrum of diverse genres like new music theatre, experimental music theatre, instrumental theatre, staged concerts, concert installations, musical performance and so forth. (Rebstock 2017, 527)

Though in the first two biennale editions, opera is prioritized over what are labelled “miscellaneous” forms of music theatre in the program, these proportions would come to shift and change over time, while still remaining under the umbrella of Rebstock’s broad definition of the practice. It is significant that, despite Henze’s clear prioritization of opera over other forms of music theatre, the festival has kept until now the more general term *music theatre* in its name and not called itself e.g. “Biennale for New Opera.”

Musicologist Christian Utz proposes a rough system of three categories of music theatre production in the Germanic context that can help bring an additional level of detail to some of the practices listed by Rebstock as existing under this rubric. They are

1. Classical libretto opera, the operatic repertoire in major opera houses, and contemporary approaches that model themselves on the same.
2. Music theatre that explicitly rejected the operatic style and institutions in favour of smaller performative works, influenced by performance art
3. “Alternative models” which attempt to create a synthesis between the first two categories, and which are often similar to post-dramatic theatre (Utz 2016, 408–409).

While hardly encompassing all forms of relationship between music and theatre, Utz’ framework can be useful when taken within the more limited and specific context of German-speaking music theatre practices in the New Music and classical traditions. These three broad categories in turn correspond to and can help shed light on, the various approaches to the biennale of Henze, DOMTS, and Ruzicka, respectively.

To the first category belong those practices that either restage or model themselves on the operatic tradition and operational requirements of the *Literaturoper* (literary opera) of the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These works are most often found in large opera houses specially equipped for their production, and works follow a linear, text-driven narrative. While the majority of these works are re-stagings and re-interpretations of the standard repertoire, to this category can also be ascribed those works that are modeled after the same set of exigencies as the traditional

opera (Utz 2016, 408). It was this partly this prevalence of older repertoire in large opera houses that Henze sought to change with the initiation of the biennale.

The works commissioned by Henze during the biennale years 1988 to 1994 can largely be counted among these type of works. Works took place with conventional staging, using dramatic logic, and a clear division of tasks between the librettist and the composer. When Henze spoke of re-invigoration, and intended to motivate more young composers who had moved away from composing for the theatre, it was to this line of tradition *within* the context of opera to which he was referring. The works of the Second Viennese School that influenced him so greatly were examples of how a dodecaphonic language could be reconciled with the style of Late Romanticism without resorting to what he saw as the dour serialism of the (rest) of the Darmstadt school.

More evidence of this can be found by examining Henze's own characterization of himself above as a composer who views *Wozzeck* as the thematic and musical ideal on which to model commissions for his biennales, seeks to counter the alienation of the public by the modernist avant-garde, and views many possibilities still left in "the path from Wagner to Schoenberg," all of which are attempts to preserve the music theatre lineage of literary opera.

Returning to Utz' categorization of three general groups of music theatrical production, he explains that by the 1980s, there had emerged a generation of composers who rejected this operatic approach, and whose compositions were influenced by the tradition of happenings, Fluxus, and performance art, which also became highly influential in the wider arts world around the 1960s. Characteristic of these works was their focus on intermediality; both sound and visual elements were seen as responsible for creating compositional meaning, as well as their emphasis on performativity, and the uniqueness of the fleeting moment of the event itself. Important representatives of this approach included Mauricio Kagel and Dieter Schnebel, as well as John Cage.

The compositional practices that emerged out of this kind of music theatre production often understood themselves in opposition and rejection to the traditional operatic regime, starting around the 1950s. Whereas opera focused on representation and narrative action, performative practices emphasized the performing bodies themselves and their bodily co-presence with the audience in the room. They no longer sought to communicate a narrative, preferring instead to act-with the literal, non-representative spaces in which they performed.

Manos Tsangaris, one of the biennale's two co-directors, studied with Kagel in Cologne, and had a music theatre practice that clearly emphasizes a similar performative approach to the "instrumental theatre" practiced by his teacher. The other, Daniel Ott, has a compositional practice also bears similarities to this category of music theatre composition, in that works are site-specific, and developed in collaboration with the individual musicians who will be performing it. As the current

directors are the focus of this investigation, their approach to the festival will be thoroughly analyzed in section 4.5.

Where the productions programmed by second Munich Biennale director Peter Ruzicka largely fit into this picture is in the *third* category that Utz draws, namely so-called “alternative models,” which are those approaches that merge and blend the operatic and performative approaches together. They integrate the criticisms of traditional narrative opera, but still make use of its apparatus rather than seeking out their own venues, as is often the case with performances of the second category. This aspect of a critical re-reading, a continuation-and-change to tradition will be shown in the next section to resemble the artistic/compositional project of Peter Ruzicka.

These alternative approaches to opera resemble what Hans-Thies Lehmann calls *post-dramatic* theatre, or performative works where a textual *logos* no longer drives the performance, replaced by an emphasis on the sharing of a common experience and creation of affect in the space itself (Lehmann 2006, 14). This does not mean that there can be no text at all, but rather that it is not the central driver of the work, becoming only one element among many others.

## 4.4 Peter Ruzicka

### 4.4.1 Ruzicka’s Career

Peter Ruzicka was born in Düsseldorf in 1948, and has worked as composer, arts administrator, and conductor for a host of prominent cultural institutions in German-speaking Europe. His first major appointment was as director of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra between 1979–1987, followed by the artistic directorship of the Hamburg State Opera and State Philharmonic orchestra between 1988–1997. In 1996, he began his tenure as director of the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater. His first edition in 1996 was a collaboration with his friend and colleague Henze, ensuring a smooth transition from his friend and colleague. After ending his tenure in Hamburg, Ruzicka would focus on the Biennale until 2014. During that time, he also worked as director of the Salzburger Festspiele between 2001–2006. Serving only one 5-year term in Salzburg, Ruzicka’s departure was mostly due to the behind the scenes political imbroglio, but significantly can also be read in part as his insistence on his continued staying-on at the biennale (Kriechbaumer 2013, 38).

Compositionally, during the late 1960s Ruzicka was strongly influenced by Henze, even working e.g. in the summer of 1969 with the older composer (Sommer 2001, 1). Despite their later divergent creative trajectories, they would remain close, as is evident in the transition year of the biennale in 1996. His post-modernist approach to composition shows strong ties to pre-avant-garde repertoire,

in particular Mahler, a result of his concept of “second modernity” that will be discussed later. His compositional production declined significantly as of around 2000 as his administrative and conducting obligations, not least at the biennale, continued to grow, and increasingly kept him from composition.

Ruzicka’s citations of historical works, and interest also in the non-musical factor of works, point to a compositional language with similar considerations as his work as arts administrator and conductor. This means a sensibility for historical context, for the effect on and communicability of works on the audience, and for the “material” existence of the works themselves, in the widest sense ranging even to issues of copyright.

The latter can be seen in activities not normally associated with compositional activity as such, like his time as member of the supervisory board of GEMA 1989–93, or his 1976 dissertation entitled *The Problematic of an “Eternal Moral Right” for Authors: with specific consideration for the protection of musical works* (Die Problematik eines “ewigen Urheberpersönlichkeitsrechts”: unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Schutzes musikalischer Werke), which can be seen to combine knowledge from his studies in law and composition. Seemingly banal, these details show the importance Ruzicka places on supporting his artistic goals also through keen and efficacious administrative competence over the course of his career.

This chapter will outline the most important stages in Ruzicka’s creative development, in order to understand better the second director of the Biennale, and in turn also his approach to running the festival.

#### 4.4.2 Two Fragments

In the foreword to *In processo di tempo. Materialien* (1971) for 26 instruments and cello, Ruzicka writes that the forward march of New Music has come to a standstill (Sommer 2001, 6). In order to keep the revolutionary character of New Music, the persistent material innovation of the avant-garde would no longer be enough, he argued. What would be needed instead was a reflection on the current historical situation, in order to create once again a “critical music” (Schäfer 1998b, 6). The work itself he refers to as a “negative cello concerto,” whereby the soloist, who is normally supported and indulged by the supporting orchestra, is blocked by them at every turn (Sommer 2001, 6). In place of a cadenza, there is a minute of silence. The work is not just a portrayal of negativity or empty space, it is a form of negation taking distance from the materials themselves.

This approach filled with negation and blockage is a mirror for the wider compositional situation around 1970. If the avant-garde project of material innovation had indeed come to a standstill, as many around Ruzicka had also felt, how can one continue to compose music? A total stoppage of compositional work was for him not out of the question, and seemed to be an appropriate way to deal with

this breakdown in the historical telos and directionality (Schäfer 1998b, 6). This *musica negativa* rejected the Hegelian concept of the complete and finished artwork, supplanting it with fragmentation and montage in order to de/compose it and understand its inner workings, attempting to find a new way forward.

By the mid-1990s, Ruzicka had come to the idea to write an evening-length music theatre work, a genre that had now long been at the centre of his administrative activities, e.g. at the Hamburg State Opera and the Munich Biennale, but not yet of his compositional work. This interest would lead to the composition of the music theatre work *CELAN* (2001), with a libretto by Peter Mussbach based on the life and work of poet Paul Celan. The libretto does not use any original texts by the poet, nor is it to be understood as a musical telling of the biography of the composer.

Rather, the work is made up of seven “attempts” (*Entwürfe*) at illuminating Celan’s life and the trauma he experienced fleeing persecution as a Jewish person during WWII. Each attempt is an experiment in accessing the poet’s inner states and perception. Situations from Celan’s life are mixed with present-day events, creating situations that “spirals” around that core truth the composer wishes to communicate, but not name directly (Sommer 2001, 15; Albrecht 2001, 4). Material is presented and manipulated, illuminating it from a variety of perspectives, again creating a coherent but disorienting whole.

Ruzicka’s formal approach to *CELAN*, characterized formally by the use of a modified developing variation proceeding from recognizable musical “islands” connected to each other, and textually by the use of fragments of narrative connected to but not stemming from Paul Celan himself, both point to a shift in how Ruzicka understands opera in comparison to his predecessor at the biennale. For Henze, literary opera and a coherent narrative drives the drama, and underlies the form of his own productions, as well as those at the biennale. Ruzicka’s approach on the other hand renounces its claim to consistency in favour of fragmentation, as is evidenced in *CELAN* (Sommer 2001, 13–14).

Whereas with Henze, the model of *dramatic* opera is dominant, Ruzicka’s music theatre work, starting with *CELAN*, is clearly *post-dramatic* in the sense of Hans-Thies Lehmann, in that it is fragmentary (musical islands), associative (connected to but not stemming from Celan), and non-narrative (focusing on traumata rather than biography) (Lehmann 2006).

Musically, they also represent two very different approaches. Henze’s musical style, though sharing with his successor Ruzicka’s a rejection of the serialist music-historical narrative, was nevertheless still strongly informed by a modernist grand narrative of progress. This was in his case the ultimate synthesis of popular (traditionalist) and new (serialist) styles using his brand of dodecaphonic technique. Ruzicka, a generation later, rejected this grand narrative of ultimate synthesis through a post-modernist “editing” of works of the past, updating them for present-day audiences, and searching in them for a new way forward (Hiekel 2016, 521).

Around the time of *CELAN*, it becomes clear that Ruzicka's conducting, directing, and administrative responsibilities were leaving less and less time for compositional work. Though Ruzicka's music theatre productions continue with *Hölderlin* (2008), another music theatre work addressing a poet, which could be analyzed here, a more interesting direction to continue studying Ruzicka's practice is to look at it from a different angle, namely the way in which his careers as composer, conductor, and director were related by a common direction.

As obvious as it may sound that these different tasks should be related, being as they are united in one person, surveying the literature on Ruzicka, it is clear that it falls into remarkably separate categories. The first are composer biographies of Ruzicka like those put together by musicologists Uwe Sommer or Thomas Schäfer. These deal with his compositional works, and examine that output exclusively. Otherwise, they are texts that talk about his role as artistic director of major festivals, or about issues of cultural management.<sup>3</sup> What is remarkable is that apart from mentioning that there *could* exist a connection (see Schäfer 1998b, 4), there is a lack of scholarship on the interrelationship of these aspects; while it is suggested (and doubtless the case) that his compositional and administrative functions informed each other, these are conceived of as separate worlds that can only "influence" each other, but surely never merge (as will be the case in understanding Ott and Tsangaris' approach to biennale administration, for instance).

Only recently has scholarship on Ruzicka has begun, likely due to a shift in scholarly norms towards interdisciplinarity, to grasp his work as a whole: In a commemorative publication from 2018 on Ruzicka, musicologist Jörn-Peter Hiekel calls Ruzicka a bridge-builder, someone who worked across these respective different fields of activity to support a variety of musical practices that were often, at least rhetorically, at odds with each other (2018a, 158). He argues that his most important bridge consisted of one spanning the gap between pre- and post-war musical avant-garde, termed by Ruzicka "second modernity" (157). Ruzicka's understanding of this term was as a critical re-reading (but a re-reading nonetheless) of the modernist project, akin to the Lyotardian understanding of post-modernism. This more questioning, relativizing approach to the post-war musical avant-garde would help soften embattled ideological positions within New Music (embodied in Darmstadt school dogmatism) in favour of a less linear understanding of music history that would carry with it a pronounced—again, post-modernist—relativism.

Ruzicka's "second modernity" can be seen as manifested in his fragmentary aesthetic and his "music about music" explored above. It should also be understood as

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3 See Kriechbaumer 2013 for a discussion of Ruzicka's leadership of the Salzburger Festspiele. For insight into how Ruzicka sees his own approach to cultural management, see also Ruzicka 1993. Remarkable about both of these texts is their only passive acknowledgement of Ruzicka's compositional work.



a broader aesthetic program, one that would influence his programming decisions at the various organizations that he would lead during his career, such as the New Music concert series “Passagen” [Passages] at the Salzburger Festspiele in 2005.<sup>4</sup> “Second modernity” has also been a driving force in Ruzicka’s insistence, even at large, conservative, and cumbersome institutions like the Hamburg State Opera and the Salzburger Festspiele, on the programming of new work (Hiekel 2018b, 155).

Ruzicka’s talent is how he applies this approach to programming, while also balancing it with efficacious leadership strategies. An example of how he integrates aesthetic approach and administrative strategy can be seen in his text *Administrative Probleme des Musiktheaterbetriebes* [Administrative Problems in the Music Theatre Business]. In a section on the challenges posed by the design of yearly opera programs, he attempts to articulate the balance that must be achieved between fulfilling the immediate desires of the audience and creating a musical offering that challenges them:

A yearly opera program that is too close to what the public wants creates problems for later administrators interested in programming more contemporary opera. Rather than requiring a fixed amount of income that should be made by the theatre, the director of the theatre should leave space for a balanced program. This would mean a program that also aspires to something, and that demands “aesthetic curiosity.” ... The engagement for New Music, for until now undiscovered works from the opera repertoire, and for innovative stagings of the familiar opera repertoire should not be made impossible by barriers put in place because of the requirement for high levels of profitability. (Ruzicka 1993, 266; translation added)<sup>5</sup>

This quote shows the extent to which Ruzicka is dedicated to the support of new operatic works, while also highlighting the extent to which he also values *how* exactly to achieve this goal. It shows the way in which he takes a position to realize his aesthetic values *through* the use of his administrative competencies. Here it involves a discussion of the financial targets that should be set by opera houses in order to remain viable, which takes place in the text within a larger discussion

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4 See section “Salzburger Passagen” at <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/archive/j/2005> for the series’ complete program. Accessed 05 December, 2018.

5 “Ein ausgesprochen publikumsnaher Opernspielplan setzt Richtwerte, die für eine der zeitgenössischen Opernproduktion aufgeschlossene spätere Theaterleitung zum Problem werden können. Die Festschreibung eines Einnahmesolls hat dem Theaterleiter Spielraum zu lassen für einen ausbalancierten Spielplan, der auch Ansprüche stellt und »ästhetische Neugier« voraussetzt ... Der Einsatz für zeitgenössische Musik, für bislang unentdeckte Werke des Opernrepertoires und für innovative Regieansätze bei den Werken des vertrauten Opernrepertoires darf nicht durch die Barriere zu hoch angesetzter Einnahmeverpflichtungen des Theaters unmöglich gemacht werden.”

of his view of the ideal operational parameters and business model to ensure an opera house's long-term financial stability—importantly *in the name* of offering this important service to society at large.

Significant too is the style of argumentation in dialectics, with Ruzicka pitting popular appeal and financial success of old and established repertoire against the less financially-successful New Music, which must be supported in the spirit of subsidizing the avant-garde that society will someday understand for its genius. He then creates synthesis through arguing for the “balance” between the two, one that achieves a harmony between the two differing positions.

This mixing of administrative competence and aesthetic direction for the field of music is an interesting notion that Ruzicka raises, and one that shows many of the same symptoms of a curatorial approach that have been explored in the previous two chapters. Earlier in the same article, he more explicitly states his view on the direction that music institutional leadership should take, writing:

Theatre operations are navigable when management challenges itself with solving the many administrative challenges that may arise, rather than implementing these as effective barriers to achieving the institution's artistic goals as effectively as possible. This kind of management style most constantly orients itself towards the artistic direction of the house, and do its best to realize them ... Without a doubt, the theatre also needs a competent artistic direction ... It appears today to be the ambition of the theatre to have theatre directors who *unify these two competencies in one* (Ruzicka 1993, 257; emphasis and translation added)<sup>6</sup>

Encapsulating the split between artistic and administrative duties, Ruzicka emphasizes that the theatre must have a director that is capable of understanding both the theatre's administrative needs, as well as its artistic goals, which should stand at its centre. The theatre director must use modern management methods in order to achieve their artistic goals. Note again the dialectical mode of argumentation employed by Ruzicka, with their synthesis in the institutional administrator. This position fits with first-hand accounts of him being a very effective manager able to focus attention on productions instead of internal strife in the organizations in which he works, and able to mediate between administrative and artistic considerations (Kriechbaumer 2013, 35; Koch 2014, 32; Czernowin 2014, 39).

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6 “Theaterbetriebe sind führbar, wenn sich Theaterleitungen den vielfältigen administrativen Aufgaben stellen und diese nicht grundsätzlich als Barrieren künstlerischer Zielsetzung so effektiv wie möglich einzusetzen. Ein solches Management muss sich daher stets an der künstlerischen Zielsetzung des Hauses orientieren, diese zu ermöglichen versuchen. ... Das Theater benötigt ohne Frage eine kompetente künstlerische Führung ... Das Theater braucht aber genauso eine organisatorisch-administrative Steuerung, und es erscheint heute als ein Desiderat, dass der Theaterleiter beide Fähigkeiten in sich vereinigt.”

It also shows symptoms of a curatorial approach to running cultural institutions. As has been argued in the previous two chapters, the mediation of cultural practices must occur with both a knowledge of the specific practices being mediated and their histories, while also intervening in/with the material in the name of a specific ethos. The ethos of a second modernism of Ruzicka does not quite align with the understanding of curating put forward in Chapter 1 though: They diverge in that Ruzicka continues to make quite clear separations between his leadership and compositional approaches, whereas curatorial thinking sees them as distinct areas each with their own challenges, but inseparably entangled. This is also surely symptomatic of the differing aesthetic conceptions of the two practices. Ruzicka's dialectical understanding of arts practice and administrative practice is underwritten by a more modernist philosophical approach than curating's more contemporary, network-based understanding of the same.

### 4.4.3 Ruzicka's Biennales

Henze asked Ruzicka to take over the music theatre biennale as of the 1996/7 edition, which resulted in both composers working together on developing the program, which was divided into three separate production periods (i.e. a stagione system) as a cost-saving measure. The following section provides a contour of Ruzicka's editions of the Munich biennale, looking at how administrative strategies and individual festival themes intersect with the works that were programmed. Examining these examples, the approaches to composition and music theatre that Ruzicka developed in his own composition will be brought into relation with his programming choices for the biennale.

#### 1996/7 and 1998/9

Though Henze and Ruzicka represent at their core two quite different understandings of opera, during the shared festival in 1996/7 and subsequent 1998/99 edition, a slow and gradual transition, rather than a radical change from, the older composer's focus on serialism and literature opera can be seen.

Works during the first festival together in 1996/7, such as Egger's *Helle Nächte* (1997), still bore a strong influence of Henze's modernist, dramatic opera style. This can still be seen here in Egger's persistence in composing serially, though with his own modifications (Koch 2014, 34). The 1998/99 edition, under the title "Dialog der Kulturen," remained largely in this same traditional mode as well, despite being the first conceived entirely by Ruzicka. Toshio Hosokawa's *Vision of Lear* was a cooperation with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki, integrating also elements of Nô and Japanese instruments, but nevertheless still adheres to the structure of Shakespeare's original play. Sandeep Bhagwati's opera on the Indian mathemati-

cian Srinivasa Ramanujan (*Ramanujan*, 1998) also followed this similar characteristic shape of the literary opera (Koch 2014, 34–35).

## 2000

The 2000 edition of the biennale carried the title “... über die Grenzen,” and claimed to focus on exploring the limits of music theatre and its capacity to affect the audience (Munich Biennale 2013a). The biennale only produced three productions in this year, commissioning however two significant works, Mahnkopf’s *Angelus Novus* (2000), and Czernowin’s *Pnima...ins Innere* (2000). Only as of the 2000 edition of the biennale did the style of the productions begin to bear a clear resemblance to Ruzicka’s aesthetic viewpoint that we have seen expressed in his compositions.

*Angelus Novus* is based on the short text by Benjamin about the angel of history, but the opera itself does not quote it, and does not contain text at all. Music, not narrative, is at the centre of the performance, a core characteristic of the post-dramatic style that would define Ruzicka’s aesthetic approach going forwards. Similarly, Czernowin’s *Pnima...ins Innere* (2000) renounces text and plot in favour of freely associative content. The work was inspired by David Grossman’s book *Stichwort: Liebe*, and addresses society’s grappling with the holocaust, connecting as well to Czernowin’s own history as a Jewish-Israeli composer (Czernowin 2014, 39). Without text, it does this using other stage components, with music as the driving force behind them. On a different level, the work was for Czernowin an important breakthrough in her career, playing a major role in helping her establish herself as composer. She relates her appreciation for how Ruzicka was willing to take a chance in giving her a commission, a move that affirms again the importance he places on also supporting new talent in the field (the results of which speak here for themselves).<sup>7</sup>

In the context of post-dramatic theatre, Hans-Thies Lehmann outlines the concept of *dream images* that fits to both these examples. As in a dream, the works of Mahnkopf and Czernowin retreat from synthesis and a definite thesis, forming instead in the audience a heterogeneous community of interpreters of the collage of images and sounds (Lehmann 2006, 142–143).

## 2002

The 2002 edition explored the implications of new media such as live electronics, projectors, and the internet on music theatre. Manfred Stahnke’s *Orpheus Kristall* (2002) carries the subtitle “Opera in two medias,” and is a good illustration of what this exploration looked like. The work is a reimagining of the classic Orpheus story

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7 Czernowin relates this in the text she wrote commemorating the end of Ruzicka’s tenure at the biennale in 2014. This view was also confirmed by the composer in a personal conversation with the author in Darmstadt in April, 2017.

for the internet age; the traditional split between our world and the underworld is reimagined as that between the real and the virtual. Orpheus must rescue his beloved Eurydice by braving the virtual world (rather than the underworld), turning her into a real experience. The work is also internet-connected: musicians in other parts of the world were connected to the performance in Munich, and were able to intervene in the actions taking place on-stage in the hall via a dedicated website—addressing the instant interconnectedness made possible by the internet (Munich Biennale 2013b).

The Orpheus story is significant because of its important place as the first genuine and surviving opera by Peri, and due to this, the myth's constant re-visitation by operatic composers, in particular reformers. Composing an Orpheus opera for “two medias,” and adapting it to the internet is an act of attempting to marry tradition with new media. It is an alternative model for the opera, working within its confines but suggesting a new way forward, a second modernism where operatic composition can once again become relevant.

Returning to Ruzicka's concept of a second modernity defined as a post-modernism that continues the modernist project, but with a critical perspective, and practicing a Lyotardian process of “editing,” strong parallels can be drawn here. *Orpheus Kristall's* claim to be an “opera in two medias” is a way of both connecting to operatic history, while also updating it to this important new media that is in the course of transforming society. It is a continuation of the tradition, while updating and revisiting it as well, in fitting with Ruzicka's aesthetic point of view.

Andre Werner's *Marlowe: Der Jude von Malta* (2002) similarly employs large amounts of projection and live-electronics as part of its staging. The inclusion of Marlowe's name before his play is a core part of the concept; it is the play itself, and not just its content, that is the focus of Werner's work. It focuses on the affects elicited by the work, as well as on the development of its characters (Munich Biennale 2013c). As with Ruzicka's concept of “music about music,” which led him to write works that broke down into fragments and re-assemble older works by Mahler, Haydn, or Schumann, shedding a new light on their inherent formal qualities, Werner's post-modern approach to *Der Jude von Malta* similarly strives to re-imagine an older work in order to produce a new perspective on it (ibid.). He revisits the play, and creates a new work out of it that is the result of a careful analysis of its formal features, being then both new as well as having a strong relationship to the historic play.

## 2004

The 2004 festival saw Ruzicka's productions tend increasingly in the direction of non-narrativity. For instance, Brian Ferneyhough's *Shadowtime* (2004) takes Walter Benjamin's suicide in Port Bou in 1940 as its point of inspiration. He uses it to

create a “thinking opera” whose textual element is comprised of a so-called “poetic-philosophical collage,” presenting it over the course of seven episodic scenes (Utz 2016, 415). *Cantio* (2004) by composer Vykintas Baltakas moves further away from the sense-giving component of language, employing it only for its structural characteristics rather than its content (Munich Biennale 2013d).

## 2006

The 2006 biennale represented a decade of Ruzicka’s leadership of the biennale. Structurally significant in this year as well was that its total of 8 main productions was the same number as took place during the first biennale in 1988, making it one of the largest editions of the festival (Brandenburg 2014, 154–157).<sup>8</sup> The biennale took place under the title “Labyrinth | Resistance | Us” (*Labyrinth | Widerstand | Wir*). The title comes from an observation by Jacques Attali, who Ruzicka says claims that the labyrinth is a necessary concept to understand the modern world, referring to the double role that its complexity, analogous perhaps to modern information technology, offers as both protection and prison (Munich Biennale 2013e).

Ruzicka in his 2006 editorial makes the first explicit mention of the biennale as a laboratory, connecting this with the concept of the labyrinth. The 2006 productions for their part show the beginnings of an increased amount of experimentation with the stage situation and the contextualization of the works. They however arguably still remain within the post-dramatic paradigm, in that they do not break with the theatrical setting as such. *GRAMMA* (2006) by José M. Sánchez-Verdú represents an example of this experimentation, in that it addresses the conventional stage situation by having listeners stand at lecterns with scores underneath a raised orchestra. Instead of a conventional “watching” situation, the audience is brought into a “reading” situation, encouraged to wander through the texts as if in a garden (Munich Biennale 2013f). Similarly, *WIR* (2006) recreates utopic visions of society sold to consumers by high-tech industries. The work is conceived as an evolving installation rather than having a development in a specific direction, an approach that challenges the traditional music theatre understanding of a temporal progression of a work (Munich Biennale 2013g).

## 2008

The 2008 biennale marked the 20-year anniversary of the festival in Munich. Looking at Ruzicka’s editorial, it emphasizes the careers it has helped establish, as well

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8 As of 2018, the largest festival was the 1992 edition by number of productions, with 10 main productions and 6 puppet theatre productions. The 2018 biennale comes in second and was arguable as large if not larger, with 14 commissioned productions. The 2006 edition had 8 main productions, 4 secondary productions, and did not have any puppet theatre productions.

as the international character of the Biennale over that time (which will be discussed in depth later) (Munich Biennale 2013h). Carrying the title “Foreign Proximity” (*Fremde Nähe*), it again contends to address the relationship between the digital/real divide, as well as the reality of living in times of rapid globalization. Robinson Crusoe is for instance portrayed by Erno Poppe in his opera as a modern man ripped from the civilization he knows, then growing accustomed to his new home; an analogy for globalization’s processes of mass migration.

Carola Bauckholt produced her opera *Hellhörig* (2008) for this Biennale. The work does not use any words or libretto, and takes place entirely in music. Sitting in a circle with their backs to the audience, the performers create an abstract play of noises, in an attempt at re-contextualizing them and manipulating the audiences’ perception (Munich Biennale 2013i). For Bauckholt, rather than tones serving to convey the drama, they take on traits and personalities themselves. She is a student of Mauricio Kagel, whose concept of *instrumental theatre* is important for understanding Bauckholt’s approach to the work.

The core conceit of instrumental theatre is the acknowledgement that there is no difference between the performativity of the actors onstage and the musicians that are hidden or in the pit of a given work. Instruments therefore should be brought onstage and treated in the same way as actors. This insight led, according to scholar Marianne Kesting, to two broad tendencies, visible also in Bauckholt’s *Hellhörig*: the first is the “theatricalization of music,” when the inherent performativity of musical instruments is emphasized by the composer. This is what is seen when the musicians onstage create a “theatre of noise” using their instruments as well as everyday objects in the work. The second is the “musicalization of theatre,” where musical performance is created inside of a fictionalized scene consisting here of the light and video projections onstage, which flow into and become an integral part of the musical experience. (Kesting quoted in Heile 2016, 289)

Bauckholt is an interesting inclusion in the festival. Along with Dieter Schnebel and his work *Utopien* in 2014, it demonstrates an anomaly in the festival’s programming during the aughts. Whereas with few exceptions, works for the biennale until Bauckholt had still been within the tradition of new opera and post-dramatic theatre, her work—along with that of Schnebel six years later—is situated within a distinctly different line of historical development of music theatre. Bauckholt’s compositional practice is more situated within the genre of Kagel’s instrumental theatre, which itself is part of a tradition of independent music theatre that has existed outside of traditional opera institutions since around 1960, finding its place more in the context of New Music, and heavily influenced by John Cage’s work, as well as happenings, Fluxus, and DADA. Though sharing aspects of post-dramatic theatre with other productions at the biennale, many of the underlying aesthetic premises of Bauckholt’s work pre-empt the changes in artistic direction that will take place under the next directors, Tsangaris/Ott, the former of whom was also a

student of Kagel's. The programming choice is an example of Ruzicka's programmatic openness to new kinds of music theatre practice, and itself shows the beginning of a trend in music theatre practice away from the more opera-like alternative models programmed by Ruzicka towards more performative approaches (see section 4.3).

## 2010

The 2010 biennale was given the subtitle *Der Blick der Anderen* ("The gaze of the other"). Citing its mandate to be an "international" festival for music theatre, the biennale wanted to address the rapid processes of economic and cultural globalization that had occurred during the biennale's lifetime. In his editorial, Ruzicka takes a cultural-essentialist, or "container-based" view towards the cultures of the world, saying that cultural exchange cannot happen as rapidly as economic exchange, and that we must see the world from the perspective of the cultural other in order for integration and understanding to occur (Munich Biennale 2013j). In thematizing the relationship to different cultures, Ruzicka further reifies notions of self and other, and his adherence to a still-modernist mode of thinking becomes more apparent.

The theme was addressed by the large co-production with the Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe (ZKM) entitled *Amazonas* (2010). The work consisted of 3 50-minute parts, the first being a music theatre work addressing the European colonist's perspective on the Amazon using text excerpts from discoverers' journals. The second part showed the perspective of the native Yanomami people, one of the largest tribes of the Amazon. This section tells the creation myth of the Yanomami through music that also integrates their traditions by the Brazilian composer Tato Tabora. The third section was a conference/performance organized by the ZKM and Peter Weibel, which featured a conversation between an economist, a scientist, a politician, and a shaman, who discussed together the future of the Amazon (Weibel 2016, 279–280).

Weibel's writings on the *Amazonas* project frame it as a continuation of the development of the operatic format. He argues that since Monteverdi's *Orfeo* the opera has itself been an inherently "multimedia" genre, combining music, movement, story, and visuals together into a coherent whole. *Amazonas* used many of the latest multimedial developments available in order to present its message in a way suited to the 21<sup>st</sup> century public. The work did not have any musicians, being composed solely for computers that controlled sound, light, and picture (280). This media-art music theatre project sees itself as a continuation of the operatic tradition, while attempting to update the format with new technological advancements suited to the present day. Weibel's formal, structural conception of music theatre as seen here is thus comparable in approach once again to Ruzicka's sec-



ond modernity, whose goal is the updating and “editing” of older formats to suit current audiences.

Another important work during the 2010 biennale was *Die Quelle* (2010), with music by Lin Wang and a text adapted from secluded Chinese poet Can Xue. The program notes explain that Wang’s musical style rejected the polystylistic trend in post-modernism, preferring to refer back to modernism (this post-modernist skepticism is however a trademark of more tradition-oriented post-modernist composers). Her integration of Chinese traditional instruments into the music are also characteristic of musical post-modernism, in that they are understood as an innovation in material. (Munich Biennale 2013k)

Both these works show an engagement and interest in topics and musical genres outside of the limited sphere of New Music, fitting with the topic of “the gaze of the other.” What remains an issue is the lack of reflection on the constitution of one’s “own” gaze, and the fundamental belief in European art music as a universal and superior aesthetic category instead of only one musical culture among many.

## 2012

2012’s festival bore the subtitle *Der Ferne Klang* (“the distant sound”) in reference to Schrecker’s opera of the same name that premiered in Frankfurt exactly 100 years prior. In his editorial, Ruzicka makes a link between Schrecker’s historical opera and the productions for the biennale, arguing that that year’s composers focused on generating music out of the content, rather than allowing it to be determined by any exterior system (Munich Biennale 2013l).

The 2012 edition is perhaps most notable for the series *Nuclei*, which featured a series of 8 mini operas that each attempted to ask the question as to what the core or nucleus of opera is. The format, contrary to DOMTS strategy as of the 2016 biennale, was not to only invite young people, though structurally it pre-empts their platform system. Where it differs is first in its focus on individual, older composers rather than groups of practitioners, but second importantly also in how it is framed. Ruzicka’s description emphasizes once again very typically post-modernist values, in searching for a “quintessence” of opera, but without having a clear idea of the exact way forward, and therefore setting up this kind of “experimental” approach, seemingly producing a great deal of operas in the hopes that one will be the “seed” for a new beginning (Munich Biennale 2013l).

## 2014

The 2014 festival would be Ruzicka’s last; Tsangaris/Ott had already been nominated to take over the festival leadership in October 2012. Perhaps echoing the administrative changes on the horizon, this final edition carries the title *Außer Kontrolle* (“Out of control”). Having now taken a quick look at every biennale under Ruzicka’s

direction, this final snapshot of his programming choices can be contrasted with his first festivals, and compare what aspects changed and what stayed the same over the course of his 18 years of leadership.

Sammy Moussa's *Vastation* (2014) takes place in the final stages of a political campaign for president of a fictional country, where the incumbent president must stage a crisis in order to portray themselves as the country's saviour and ensure their re-election. It is active in taking a position towards political topics, but does not go over the edge of art and become a kind of activism: the country remains fictional, the president is not an obvious foil for any real figure (Munich Biennale 2013m).

With perhaps the exception of the engaged *Amazonas* project, there is a clear tendency of biennale works to address and somehow be relevant to actual societal debates of the day, but while still retaining a relatively high level of distance, and not venturing too clearly into overly activist practices. Contrasting this with initiatives such as by Florian Malzacher with *Truth is Concrete* from two years earlier highlight the stark contrasts in style and aesthetic outlook that still remain between the disciplines (see section 3.4.2). It also highlights the different understanding of both the work and this biennale's relationships to their publics to biennales happening in the visual arts and in theatre/performance/dance. While *Vastation* and the Munich Biennale until this point seem to only strive for a representation, a mimesis, of current events, in many other related fields more direct involvement can clearly be seen.

*Utopien* (2014) by Dieter Schnebel for the Neuen Vocalsolisten Stuttgart was another of the five premieres of the festival. This work significant in the same way to Bauckholt's piece from 2008, in that it shows the gradual acknowledgement by the director of an approach to music theatre that historically has been antithetical to the operatic genre. The inclusion of this work in the final biennale can be taken as evidence of the extent to which performative approaches to music theatre had already begun to rise more in prominence in the New Music field more generally.

In *Die Befristeten* by Detlev Glanert (2014), contrasts emerge with the biennale's earlier editions. Glanert was commissioned to create a work for the very first Henze biennial in 1988. This means that his first commission came when he was 28, the second when he was 54. The biennale was originally intended as a laboratory for young composers to create their first experiments in music theatre, but by the end of Ruzicka's tenure it had clearly developed into a space for more highly professionalized productions by older and experienced composers (see also section 4.8.1). Ruzicka's emphasis on brokering efficacious co-productions with opera houses has been given as one reason for this gradual drift upwards in average age and career status.

Examining the descriptions of Glanert's opera also shows that working methods had also changed significantly. They explain that Glanert brought only one

minute of composed music for each of the work's 21 scenes. This material was then developed in collaboration with the performers into what would become the final work to be performed. This is a working method significantly removed from those that would typically be found in productions for the opera house, and point to the biennale's gradual embrace of, and participation in, the field of what music theatre scholar Matthias Rebstock calls "independent music theatre," in that it focuses on a production process that is not found in opera houses, and which uses a "lighter, more flexible apparatus" in order to realize the performance (2017, 533).<sup>9</sup>

Ruzicka's tenure at the Munich Biennale has revealed the importance that he places on music theatre productions searching for alternatives to the operatic form, but still take place within the established theatre setting. His fragmentary approach deconstructs and weakens narrative continuity; It creates montages, as discussed with CELAN (2001), that address the audience in a post-dramatic way. The biennales that he led can thus themselves be understood as montages of approaches. They did not prescribe a way forward, but rather put out a great deal of plausible answers in the hope of finding a solution. Contrary to what will be argued with DOMTS later, this still importantly means that theoretically a solution *does exist*.

More fundamentally, his approach does not give up its core belief in the opera as a place where future music theatre works can be created; it is an attempt to remain within the context of the institution of opera, but innovating, adapting it to suit the needs and expectations of a contemporary public. Ruzicka sought to present audiences with productions that address current issues and technological possibilities, but still keep the link with a modern tradition of opera-making. The director's concept of second modernity means remaining faithful to the spirit, not the letter, of the aesthetic lineage that still exists in the opera repertoire, and ultimately also in its building and infrastructure itself, which in its design contains certain assumptions about the orchestra, the audience, and the stagecraft that are available to be used to make new works.

#### 4.5 Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris (DOMTS)

Rather than an approach based on or reacting to the traditional operatic genre, whose influence on the biennale has been shown under the tenure of both Henze and Ruzicka to still be significant, Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris (together

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9 Rebstock defines independent music theatre as "all forms of music theatre on a professional level that are not produced in publically [sic] funded houses and that do not pursue purely commercial interests" (533). Glarnert's work was produced for the Residenztheater in Munich for the city-sponsored festival, and thus does not fit this narrow definition. However, this situation does point to a gradual shift in publicly-funded festivals to similar ways of working, one that is very apparent in the case of DOMTS' approach to the biennale.

DOMTS for short) are currently working towards a new definition of music theatre that is more *transdisciplinary* in its approach (as opposed to the interdisciplinary work of traditional opera), prioritizes experimentation and the concept of the “laboratory” as important aesthetic values, and whose music-historical precedent lies in artists and composers who emphasized the performativity of their works, such as Kagel and Schnebel, but also performance art, happenings, aleatoric, etc.

This section will look at the artistic practices of Manos Tsangaris and Daniel Ott, as well as examine the relationship between their respective careers as composers and their approach to running the biennale.

#### 4.5.1 Manos Tsangaris

Manos Tsangaris is a German composer, percussionist, and installation artist. He notably studied music theatre with Mauricio Kagel in Cologne, and has since the 1970s worked in a range of musical formats and situations. This comes out of the importance that the composer places on not just constructing the work, but also as an integral part of it the situation in which it will take place. This does not mean always building entire new installative worlds to inhabit, but rather that the composer engages in what can be called a composing *with* context, in that he is aware of various constitutive elements of the situation, be they lighting, setting, staging, etc., and either intervenes in them directly, or adapts works to suit the particularities of a given situation.

Tsangaris' station-theatre work *Mauersegler* (2013) for instance takes place over the course of three stations in public space in the car-free zone of Witten. The work begins with the public sitting in a shop window, looking out into the street. Interviews with passers-by inquiring into their plans for the evening and how they understand the concept of “free time” are broadcast into the room. The public is both given a vantagepoint over the street, but due to it being nighttime and the lights in the space being on, they are also put on display and become a kind of window-dressing, destabilizing the separation between audience and performers.

The work continues with the group walking down the street while a singer recites texts, and interventions like musicians playing from a tram bring the audience into a state of guessing what part of their experience belong to the work and which do not. The actions themselves have not been left up to chance, mostly being carefully notated by Tsangaris in advance in a score, “orchestrating” the entry and exit of various elements from the scene. This is of course only partly possible, as *Mauersegler* takes place in public space, with its high possibility of unintentional elements influencing the event, such as weather, curious passers-by, sirens, or any number of other chance happenings. There is also no backstage or proscenium arch, no way to create an illusion of something sealed off from the rest of the world. Rather, the work fluidly engages with its surroundings, not suffering

from them but rather latching on and being enriched by their inherent layeredness and complexity. In this engagement, *Mauersegler* understands the constitution of its own urban stage as an artistic act in its own right, showing a kind of artistic expressivity in the assertion of its musical form within the medium of the city.

As musicologist Jörn-Peter Hiekel argues in his analysis of the work, *Mauersegler* as a whole thus manages to go beyond its heterogeneity and pluralism, creating finally a specific music theatre experience conceived of by the composer, one that reflects on the specificity of the musical idiom (2015, 33–34). Tsangaris, composing a musical assemblage out of heterogeneous materials—here a city tram, the reading of texts, timing how long it takes a group to walk down the street—maintains an approach that is still distinctly and rigorously based on the musical score. His familiarity and skill in notation allow him to adapt it to his needs in often-irregular contexts, working-with various materials in order to craft the performative event.

Philosopher Dieter Mersch argues that these assemblages set up by Tsangaris are what he calls “experimental systems,” in that they are constructed such that they work as engines for producing singular, unpredictable experiences for the audience (2015a, 15). There is for Mersch no “end result” of this kind of system, save for that experience (*Erfahrung*) of it that only exists in the moment of its performance (*ibid.*).<sup>10</sup> Tsangaris for his part describes this compositional approach in a similar way, writing:

The viewer is in the image [*Bild*]. Their perception, their levels of sense and speech, are brought into motion and into relation with each other. What emerges are works where music, theatre, the spoken word in music or in theatre, are not what are thematized. Rather, it is the dynamic, the manner and method that people [*Menschen*] experience [*erleben*] the same room from so many different perspectives. This experiencing is part of their process of perception. (Tsangaris 2015, 186; translation added)<sup>11</sup>

Tsangaris’ work understands itself as existing together with both the audience who perceives it and the situation in which it takes place (here the city of Witten). The composition is uniquely tailored to play with and emphasize specific aspects of a situation, or to manipulate and distort certain aspects of what is present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), foregrounding certain specifically-chosen aspects of what is “merely”

10 Mersch uses the German concept of *Erfahrung* to describe the experiencing of the experimental system. *Erfahrung* carries with it the connotation of making a *Fahrt*, a passage, in the sense also of a *methodos*, i.e. methodology, a pursuit.

11 “Der Betrachter ist im Bilde. Seine Wahrnehmung, seine Sinnes- und Sprachebenen werden in Bewegung und ins Verhältnis gesetzt. Es entstehen Werke, in denen nicht die Musik, das Theater, das Wort in der Musik oder im Theater thematisiert sind, sondern die Dynamik und Art und Weise, wie Mensch den einen Raum aus unterschiedlichen Wahrnehmungsebenen konvergiert, erlebt. Dieses Erleben ist Teil seines schöpferischen Prozesses.”

there. This resembles the theoretization of a network-based model of perception within interdisciplinary performing arts practices that was presented in section 3.2. Arguing with interdisciplinary arts scholar Shannon Jackson, the artistic event must be viewed from the perspective of the audience, who untangle for themselves the complex webs of references based on their own disciplinary backgrounds, but also how the work itself forms and informs this same reception in a kind of cooperation. In this understanding of the event of artistic practice, the curator, or in this case the artist, becomes only one node within the network of connections, albeit one that takes responsibility for composing the context of a particular frame within a larger network.

In a text called *Schalte Zelte*, Tsangaris addresses this form of composing with context through the concept of focusing on staging a “scene.” The word, Tsangaris points out, is related to the Greek word *skene*, meaning tent, hut, or stage, in that before Greek theatre took place in stone theatres, it took place in tents. Tsangaris composes contexts, but at the same time acknowledges the complexity of that proposition, solving it through the concept of delimiting a “tent” in which he works. The metaphor captures well those limited spaces where some degree of control can be exerted; it allows for understanding how, within an immense and complex interconnectivity, a certain positioning within this web can be taken and held by an artist. (Tsangaris 2015, 184–186)

This concept of a scene or tent differentiates itself from the earlier position on the purity of media seen with Fried and Greenberg in that it acknowledges the conceit of its fictionality within a very narrowly-defined situation. A work like *Mauersegler* is aware of, and plays with, the absurdity of “pitching” its tent in the middle of the city. It sketches a pre-composed experience for the audience, but allows for the boundaries of that experience to bleed into all manner of other things at its edges. Furthermore, as has been argued with W.J.T. Mitchell, it is a music theatre whose medium is also inherently mixed. It consists of all manner of elements chosen for how they affect the receiver, rather than their perceived medial purity.

#### 4.5.2 Daniel Ott

Daniel Ott is a Swiss-born composer whose influences include John Cage, Dieter Schnebel, and Mauricio Kagel. A driving question of Ott’s practice could be said to be “why do I write music and for whom?,” arising from his studies with composer Nicolas A. Huber. Running through Ott’s practice since his student days has also been an emphasis on using composition as a tool for instigating and catalyzing performance by the musicians he views as his co-collaborators, rather than understanding it as a solemn text to be interpreted. Musicologist Christa Brüstle puts

forward that Ott's works emerge from *teamwork* with others, and in relation to a specific place, saying that Ott believes that

composition does not start with one's own constructive activity: when composing his musical pieces and music theatre projects, what is there is much more the starting point and field of work at one and the same time. (Brüstle 2012, 260)

Ott's starting point is already the specific what and whom of the performance situation. Here, the same kind of permeability and openness of works seen with Tsangaris can be glimpsed at again with Ott's working method. His work is not built on a *tabula rasa*, but rather acknowledges and works-with its relations to its surrounding contexts and influences, suggesting a more horizontal understanding of the compositional process, rather than one based on the immutable purity of a score created first under the pretense of ideal conditions of presentation.

This can for instance be seen in his pair of works *Hafenbecken I & II* (2005/6), composed for a specific decommissioned warehouse on the Rhein in Basel. The works, while composed, were based on the specific sonic landscapes that existed in the warehouse as a product of their surroundings and acoustical properties. The work was also a team effort, involving also a costume designer and light designer in the creation of the event. (Ott 2008, 271–273)

In a 2001, manifesto-like text entitled *Voraussetzungen für ein Neues Musiktheater-Gesamtkunstwerk* ("Conditions for a New Music Theatre Gesamtkunstwerk"), Ott lays out a series of his aesthetic principles that detail his approach to the composition of music theatre—many of which resonate with how he also conceives of the music theatre biennale today. Certainly Ott's choice of the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* (used also in the text's title) should be looked at skeptically here; it represents exactly the kind of closed work conception that Ott is decidedly trying to avoid. Nevertheless, focusing on the spirit of the text, what becomes clear is that music theatre is for him a space where music undoes its specificity and acknowledges that it is always already a mixed medium, and from that perspective approaches the concept of the total art work.

He argues that the music/theatre relationship is one that must always be figured out anew in each project, answered through the unique and specific way that a particular team's skills work together to create a whole. This implies a consistent challenging of pre-established disciplinary categories on the basis of the performative act of composing-together. Music theatre must then always be thought of as work together with the various performers and other artists that work collectively on an inherently interdisciplinary product (Ott 2001, 50–51).

This view is supported by Ott's further comments as he attempts to describe the role of the interpreter/performer within the concept of music theatre that he is advocating. While relating the story of a performance by a Bolivian theatre group, he remarks that the group made no division between musicians and actors among

their ranks, and that for them, “theatre becomes audible and music becomes visible” in a kind of productive ambiguity between these disciplines that he found to be exemplary (Ott 2001, 51; translation added).<sup>12</sup> Most important for Ott is that these relationships between movement, sound, performing, etc. all be fluid, and thus at best renegotiated with each new performance, based on what is for the entire group the most appropriate and interesting way of composing them all together. It means a focus firstly on artistic ideas or concepts *before* focusing on their executability by the given constellation of people.

This demonstrates Ott’s approach to composition as being a collective activity. Starting from ideas means for Ott not just his own, but those of his co-authors working on the piece with him together, allowing space for performers to also contribute directly to the formation of the work through bringing in their own knowledge, insights, or particular viewpoint, expanding the work’s potential horizon beyond that of only the composer themselves. The score thus becomes permeable, consisting first of observations and ideas, questions that can be answered by the performers. The answers to these questions then can be reintegrated into the compositional process, which culminates in a score—made by Ott—as a kind of negotiated document and outcome of a collaborative process. The score then takes on the role of being both documentation of a working process, but also still the locus of musical meaning, and is always returned to during the process developing the performance. Returning to Brüstle’s writing on Ott’s practice, she highlights however a contradiction in this working method related to the scores he produces:

There is no question about the authorship of the works, however, as the artistic direction and organization of processes is in the hands of just one person’s (or a management team). (Brüstle 2012, 275)

While ideally it seems that Ott aims towards working methods that are collective, traditional compositional singular authorship over the work still prevails. In the end, though the composer for instance laments being cut off from the social world while sitting at his writing desk, there still exists an elision from authoring the final score to taking authorship over it (see also Ott 2001, 52).

Many of these ideas can be seen also in the composer’s leadership of the festival Neue Musik Rümelingen, near Basel, Switzerland, which he shares with a group of five other artists. Unique about this festival is the way in which its form is developed out of the programmed performances, instead of the other way around. If as Ott says, each performance is a new opportunity to reconsider the relationships between performers, then here that approach is applied to the festival as a whole, in that each new edition is an opportunity to reconsider the relationships between the works and each other, as well as the works and their audiences.

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12 “THEATER IST HÖRBAR UND MUSIK WIRD SICHTBAR.”



This means that the Rümelingen festival does not rely on a fixed venue, rather its leadership team (who rotate their positions) work out how best to bring a certain work to a given audience. This can involve performances that take place at night in an open field, as in the 2016 edition, or in a mini-concert hall in the town square, as in the 2018 edition (in Häusermann's *Tonhalle*, which originally premiered at the Munich Biennale).

Furthermore, because the festival so carefully tailors its presentation to the experience of the audience, it becomes a much more intimate and direct kind of experience. As with Tsangaris' experimental systems, the festival experience as a whole becomes only possible through its completion by the audience themselves. This effectively removes the "outside" spectator perspective from the audience, transforming them into participants whose view on the festival becomes a total perception consisting of their unique individual experience of the festival taken as a whole, rather than a pre-set frame for the experience of specific works.

### 4.5.3 Concave and Convex

Bringing these concepts together, a picture of Ott's artistic practice begins to emerge. His is a practice that composes (with the) community, and attempts to mould and shape the relations between musicians, audience, space, etc. through the practice of composition. This happens on a different scale to Tsangaris, making for interesting contrasts between the two composers in leading the biennale. In describing their differences, Ott uses the terms "concave" and "convex" as a simple shorthand to describe the differences between their two practices, which prove to be an apt way of highlighting the key differences between the two leadership styles.<sup>13</sup>

Tsangaris' works can in general be characterized by the concept of being "concave," curving inwards and being focused on the singular interaction and on the movement from the many towards the one. It can even be taken to its extremes by Tsangaris in pieces such as *Winzig* (ongoing, first version 1993) which consists of a collection of miniatures to be performed over the course of an evening in unconventional spaces for small groups of only a couple people at a time. Many of his pieces are targeted *at* the perceptive apparatus of the individual—going as far as definitive moments of hailing, such as pointing a flashlight at the audience, saying in effect "you, specifically" (as occurs in the miniature also called *Winzig*, within the larger set).

Ott characterizes his practice in contrast as "convex," going from the one to the many, as when one of his scores helps to coordinate and organize a large ensemble's movements and sounds through a vast open landscape in what he calls

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13 Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

a “collective landscape compositions” (*Landschaftskollektivkomposition*), such as *Der Klingende Berg* (2010). Such an interpretation also fits to Brüstle’s point from the previous section regarding his persisting adherence to a compositional authority. This one-to-many concept seems to fit there too; there is still an individual, still in the end the compositional work of a single subjectivity who in the end oversees the structure. What is clear here is the persistent necessity of a schema of authority moving from composer to performer.

What most closely connects the two composers is the emphasis on bringing together and adapting to *heterogeneous* materials into a musical assemblage, whether it be a festival or a composition. This means for both of them an emphasis on individual, made-to-measure organizational and staging structures that always produce out of the composition of various parts a particular attunement of their materials, one that reimagines the relations between audiences and their surroundings. This applies as much to Ott’s coordination of different musician groups in large open spaces as it does Tsangaris’ constitution of small and intimate situations targeted at the individual audience member.

By extension, rather than seeing the biennale as a fixed frame, a supportive administrative framework, DOMTS see this mediating step as itself also able to influence the meaning of individual productions. This is because be it through setting up an experimental system in public space with *Mauersegler*, or working with the soundscape of a warehouse with *Hafenbecken I & II*, DOMTS already have significant experience and know-how working on similar kinds of large-scale projects as composers, i.e. as artists. What this means is that they already possess the proficiency for working at this scale, with all the skills and challenges that brings, while realizing their artistic goals. How these goals shift with the change from working on large-scale compositional projects to a large-scale festival will be examined in the next section.

## 4.6 The 2016 and 2018 Biennale Editions

### 4.6.1 Overview

#### 2016 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater

The 2016 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater took place from 28 May to 9 June, 2016. DOMTS’ first biennale featured a total of 14 productions over the course of that 13-day period. The Gasteig complex and the neighbouring Muffatwerk cultural centre created a spatial concentration in which the majority of festival productions took place, with other venues either being within walking distance (e.g. Lothringer13, Einsteinkultur) or had their starting point at the Gasteig (as with the production *ANTICLOCK*). This first edition would feature also an academic sympo-

sium over the second weekend of the festival, inviting musicologists, philosophers, and also practitioners to reflect on the various definitions of music theatre, and what the festival was attempting.

The festival was centred on the theme and subtitle “Original with Subtitles,” or “OmU” in German, a term normally used to indicate films presented in their original language, but with German subtitles (instead of dubs) added. As DOMTS argue in their opening statement, the term creates a tension between original and interpretation (as translation), as well as produces discussion around the nature of the original work, or the “origin” of the work, in context of music and music theatre (Ott and Tsangaris 2016, 55). The concept of the original in music normally means a score or libretto, but thinking about the phenomenon of subtitling is a way of confounding the relationship between interpreter and author through the shift of medium and language (*ibid.*).

While they do not totally argue in their opening text for a rejection of the score in favour of other ways of doing performance, they position the score more as a tool for performers to work with in their realization of a music theatre work. DOMTS observe that it is “in the interplay of sound, scene, space, and audience” that work becomes perceivable, i.e. first in its performance, rather than in its existence as score (Ott and Tsangaris 2016, 55). This prioritization of performance can be seen as a link to their respective artistic practices as well, where in both cases the score is secondary to its realization in the world.

The prioritization of the performance is understood by DOMTS to extent to the audience as well. They claim that because of the way the festival has been programmed, each audience member will have their own experience of the festival and “[i]n this manner the member of the audience will become a co-author of an original work” (Ott and Tsangaris 2016, 59). This implies a shift towards the receiver as the final arbiter of the festival experience, positioning them and their individual experience at its centre. It however also hints at an understanding of the biennale as composed by DOMTS as a whole unit that is meant to elicit this co-authorship of the receiver, a connection to both composers’ earlier artistic compositions of music theatre events.

A further dimension of this approach is that a “subtitling” as a line of flight away from the “original” is a way of addressing the primacy of performativity without giving up using the score as an important tool for making music created by the Western classical music tradition. While the role of the score has been examined in the two composers’ respective practices, DOMTS together also discuss how it can co-exist with a performative approach to music theatre at the biennale, writing:

And as it is well-known that all translations are also inventions—because there are no explicit translations, not to mention translations faithful to the original version—the transmitters in the genre of music theatre are always co-authors who

put the existing writing system through their personal comprehension filter and enrich it, comment on it, and alter it in accordance with the translation. ... [This is also the case] when composers in the course of a so-called “scoring” transform non-musical contents into their staves. Even more so, however, in such cases where scenic or spatial considerations should be translated in to a musical system of symbols. (Ott and Tsangaris 2016, 57)

In this quote, both the translations of music theatre performers who interpret scores in their own ways, as well as the translations of composers who score non-musical contents on staves are touched on. In both cases, the translation is understood to be subjective and situated—implicitly distancing itself from the understanding of the score as absolute and immutable (see also Ott and Tsangaris 2018a, 72). However, the score is not let go of entirely, its usefulness and position within the Western music tradition is nevertheless acknowledged as an important part in the formulation of new forms of music theatre.

Further evidence of this approach can be seen in the Biennale’s decision to dedicate the entirety of its 2016 catalogue to a glossary of terms related to music theatre, compiled by writer Ann Cotton. DOMTS state in their introduction to the glossary that it is intended for

visitors ... who want to assume that the masonry is fragile and allow new species of music theatre to find nesting holes and niches. Reciprocatively bowing, compositional thinking and its terminology clear the stage for one another, watching each other closely, expectant of new moves (Münchener Biennale et al. 2016, 4)

They emphasize in this quote from the introduction to their glossary a movement back and forth that should exist between compositional practice and reflection, and writing on the same. This is an indirect but constructive criticism of the traditional primacy of both the original score, and also a musicological apparatus that is often more descriptive than receptive of artistic practice.

## 2018 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater

The 2018 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater took place from 2 to 12 June, and presented a total of 15 productions over a variety of different venues both in the festival’s traditional home in the Gasteig complex, as well as across various other venues across the city of Munich. This second edition of the festival under DOMTS was given the theme “Private Matters,” continuing from the first festival’s theme, “Original with Subtitles (OmU).” For their second festival, the artistic directors decided to put a greater emphasis on the adherence of individual productions to this theme. This meant that productions coming from the platforms that they ran had

to clearly relate to this theme than in the previous year in order to be selected to receive a commission.<sup>14</sup>

While the theme of the first biennale focused more on internal issues within the field of music with its emphasis on the relationship between score and performance, the second biennale's theme was more explicitly political, or relating to broader social issues. The issue of private matters was meant to address the shifting definitions of privacy and identity in light of digitization and the advent of big data. DOMTS argue that an effective way to grasp these highly complex changes to our daily reality is through the lens of artistic practice, which specializes in "abstraction and sensualisation" in ways that make these changes graspable and understandable to those they affect.

Their programming is still ultimately developed as a response to the realities of the New Music community though. As they write:

While the fine arts, cinema, documentary films, literature, and acting in many places are dealing intensively with the subject, up until now original projects in contemporary music theatre dealing with the rich impact of the metamorphosis of "private matters" have to be searched for with a magnifying glass. We would like to work against this situation with the coming biennale and therefore we are conceiving this festival as a musical-dramatic research space for researching a "private matter." (Münchener Biennale et al. 2018, 9)

While the number of projects from the other artistic traditions listed dealing with issues of privacy and/or big technology companies are too numerous to count, contemporary classical music (CCM) practitioners that create works that address these kinds of topical issues are basically non-existent.<sup>15</sup> As a way of addressing this issue, DOMTS thus understand their role as artistic directors of the biennale to program works that will in their view fit better into the wider artistic field's engagement with topical issues.

Apart from the choice of this thematic direction, a more tangible way in which the topic was addressed structurally was in the biennale's decision to present works for very small audiences, making performances more intimate and "private." This was compensated for by raising the number of performances of each production,

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14 Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

15 To name just one exhibition, see the large group exhibition "Globale: Global Control And Censorship" at ZKM Karlsruhe that dealt with these issues, which ran from 03 October, 2015 to 31 July, 2016. Of course examples of CCM practices addressing these issues do exist, the point is that they are however extremely few. One music theatre work dealing with the issue of the private sphere is *iScreen, YouScream* by Brigitta Muntendorf premiered at the ECLAT Festival in Stuttgart in 2017. NB Muntendorf also presented a production at the 2016 Munich Biennale, *Für immer ganz oben* (2016).

as well as keeping the average length of performances short. This meant that festivalgoers each had to navigate their own way through the labyrinth of presentations spread over the city. Additionally, as each venue was used only once, there was a lesser (spatial) concentration of activity around the Gasteig complex. Interestingly, this led to a weakening of the biennale's "festival community," in that because festivalgoers were so spread out and involved in their own (private) itineraries that they had to book in advance, it became more difficult to participate in a larger community of people all seeing the same works and discussing them during intermissions, as the festivalgoing experience was so fragmented.

#### 4.6.2 Biennale Platforms

Both with Henze and with Ruzicka, productions mostly consisted of a chain of collaborations between specialized actors beginning with the commissioning by the festival of the composer, and ending with the performance during the biennale. This represents an interdisciplinary approach to music theatre production, in that specialists with several different kinds of expertise work together to create a coherent whole. Their interrelationships remain limited though: an essentialist, "container model" of disciplinary expertise is maintained, and the division of labour is not transgressed in any meaningful way. The score and the composer, its author, lie at the nexus of these interrelationships, and legitimate them.

A new characteristic of the revised festival has been a so-called "platform" format for developing productions. Platforms have taken place in at least 8 cities beginning already three years before the first biennale began, including twice in Munich, as well as in Stamberger See, Bern, Rotterdam, Buenos Aires, Lima, Hong Kong, and Athens (Munich Biennale n.d.). For each platform, DOMTS first invited a group of young creative talents—not just composers, but also writers, directors, dramaturgs, scenographers, etc. There is no application process, rather the directors rely on their own networks, as well as those of their contacts in the respective cities the platforms take place in to be referred the names of a number of artists who will probably stand to profit from the exercise, preferably within the target age group of potential participants of around 25–35. The goal is to have artists that know each other as little as possible beforehand condense into groups over the duration of the platform, which then have the possibility of being picked by the artistic directors to be supported in making a production for the biennale itself. The directors conceive of the platforms as a kind of laboratory, or an invitation for collaborators to come and experiment through their provisioning of a frame in which to do so.

Tsangaris has recounted in an interview with the author a rough outline of how the platforms work, though DOMTS point out that the format is constantly being adapted: A given platform begins with two days of introductions and input

on the festival topic by the artistic directors. This means getting often into technical or theoretical discussions, forming common definitions, and establishing a solid foundation for working together. Subsequently, the artists are given three days' time to interact and experiment with one another. These unstructured days are only punctuated by common plenum sessions in the evenings that focus mainly on practical considerations, such as the acquisition of necessary materials.

After this period, another group plenum session takes place, and Tsangaris says that in his experience so far, groups have always formed by themselves. Normally, around this time the platform participants have created the preliminary sketches of somewhere between two to four projects. These projects are then further supported by the biennale for a further four months, after which time there comes an internal showcase of the sketches the groups have developed. The artistic directors at this point select a certain project to be included in the biennale, though they encourage all groups to continue their work together, even if not selected.<sup>16</sup> Selection criteria for what progresses past this stage have, according to the directors, varied over the course of the different platforms, but are based on several criteria, including the potential that DOMTS see in the project, its relevancy to the yearly theme of the biennale, and programming a diversity of different approaches and styles for the biennale. For the second biennale in 2018, the relationship of the productions to the overarching theme of the biennale played a greater role than in the first iteration. Daniel Ott says that fundamentally though, there is an interest in supporting as wide a range of projects as possible, with decision-making seeming to happen more in terms of a general feeling of quality of the group.<sup>17</sup>

The format of the platforms is not something stable that the directors are realizing in different cities with a fixed methodology. There also does not seem to be a desire among the directors to solidify it into a fixed and exportable format. Rather, the approach is one of exchange with local partners, and adapting to the needs of the particular local contexts and music theatre communities with whom they are working. The platforms are also visibly changing as the directors gain more experience doing them.

The first platforms for the 2016 biennale were very large, with the first having 30 people, an enormous number to work with, that was then reduced, particularly in the platforms for the 2018 biennale, which have been in general with much smaller groups. In another instance, after feeling that the first platform had too many directors and not enough composers, they invited no directors for the second platform, before realizing that they needed more than that, and invited more

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16 Manos Tsangaris, interview by the author, Berlin, 03 May, 2017. He adds that some groups in Athens continued working together despite not being selected.

17 Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

for the next iteration of the platform: the platform format is constantly being fine-tuned, and adapted to suit the creative goals of the directors.

This approach offers DOMTS an alternative to the traditional programming of a fixed combination of composers, librettists, and directors set in advance of knowing what will come of it. To program through commissioning often limits directors' ability to sculpt the content of their festival and its adherence to its stated theme, which has been usually set in advance. The pair work around this limitation by pre-screening first a large pool of artists, and then inviting them to work together (in the aforementioned week-long intensives), during which time several sketches emerge. DOMTS are then able to exercise a larger amount of thematic control over the biennale through the internal showcase stage of the platforms. The groups that are formed over the week-long intensives, and who have had 2–4 months to prepare a sketch together, are then subjected to a second round of selection. This approach of delaying the official commissioning of works is unique, and allows the pair to have a better idea of the commissions before they are finalized, giving them also the opportunity to more closely tailor these to their vision of the upcoming festival. In an interview with David Roesner, Daniel Ott says that this decision was to avoid

sit[ting] at our desks with lists of names to match up in some way—let's put librettist x with composer y and stage designer z and see if it works—but instead [to] invite people to workshops ... and see who gets on or who rejects each other.” (Roesner 2017, 92)

These platforms thus put emphasis on team-building, interpersonal skills, and capacity to collaborate rather than the highly-individualist mindset of much of the older style of music theatre work, or decisions made from above. The traditional division of labour that Ott mentions above between composer, librettist, stage designer, etc., is accompanied by the mystification and essentialization of these roles, in particular those of the composer and director. Often associated with individual geniuses, they do not give insight into their working methods; they are black boxes, with clearly-defined inputs and outputs.

Thus, the decision to make platforms instead seems risky but potentially highly interesting: involving all actors throughout all stages of the production process makes it difficult to fall back on these older divisions of labour. There is a process first of working together, pooling available competencies and resources, and working as a group, rather than a clear methodology for producing performances (as in the interdisciplinary model above).

What this implies is rather radical. It means that the music theatre production has no specific blueprint for how it is created, i.e. does not always start with a score, or with a libretto, or with a staging, rather all these aspects are conceived of together by a group of people, rather than an individual. This has resulted in biennale productions often developing novel and idiosyncratic formats for presenta-



tion, for the most part rejecting the traditional operatic regime and infrastructure in favour of independent music theatre (as defined by Rebstock 2017, 523ff).<sup>18</sup>

In the 2018 edition of the festival, the work *München "Ø" Trilogie* by Trond Reinholdtsen is a decent example of this phenomenon, in that, while closely related to the traditional opera format, the relation was mostly through the means of commentary: operatic apparatus and tradition became the subject and premise of the work. However, its irreverent treatment of the same, combined with its multiple stations and level of audience engagement, mean that it should clearly be viewed as a rejection of the operatic approach instead.

Other productions consisted variously of such forms as a music theatre in the form of a developing installation over the course of an evening (*The Navidson Records*, 2016), or of a monstrous installation brought to sounding by two explorers (*Hundun*, 2016). There are also music theatre projects in the form of an exhibition and accompanying unannounced interventions in public space (*Staring at the Bin*, 2016), as well as in both a swimming pool (*Für immer ganz oben*, 2016) and a bathtub (*Bathtub Memory Project*, 2018). One took the form of an estate auction (*Nachlassversteigerung*, 2018), another reconstructed a state assassination (*Ein Porträt des Künstlers als Toter*, 2018), while yet another took place in a micro concert hall purpose-built on Max-Joseph Platz in front of the Bayerische Staatsoper (*Tonhalle*, 2018).<sup>19</sup>

Thinking about the platforms as a strategy to produce such a diversity of approaches to music theatre production from practitioners that include not just composers, but also many other kinds of artists, also from different parts of the world, can be compared with a similar situation in the field of dance addressed in Chapter 3. There, dance scholar Erin Brannigan argued that as dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century moved away from its external reference of ballet, and by extension its historical tradition and set of references, the art form slid into a perennial crisis (understood in the etymological sense of a constant state of having to decide, an enduring trial) centred around the question *what is dance?* which becomes as crucial to answer as it is impossible to answer systematically, only situatively. Dance scholar Sally Gardner was also quoted, adding that "in ballet the ultimate point of choreographic reference is always the externally generated norms or ideals of the ballet style – what [dance scholar Laurence] Louppe calls an 'absolute reference'" (Gardner 2008, 58). The rejection of this absolute reference would take the form of so many individualized dance practices, situated in particular bodies and contexts. Far from being

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18 While opera houses count among the co-producers of some biennale productions, they have been performed at the houses' "experimental" theatres, not their main stages, e.g. the Neue Werkstatt (Staatsoper Unter den Linden) or Tischlerei (Deutsche Oper).

19 Names of the commissioned individuals have been omitted for brevity, please refer to the appendix for names as well as further information about the biennale's productions per year.

unhealthy, this constant answering has led to a flourishing of extremely interesting dance practices in past decades.

In this musical context, the “absolute reference” external to the work can clearly still be seen in for instance Ruzicka’s search for the “essence” of a new direction of music theatre work in the last era of the biennale. There is for him still a modernist logic of innovation and teleology guiding his strategy for commissioning works, searching for a new path forward when the old one no longer can be followed. His experimentation with the operatic format thus carries with it an undertone of the ends (finding a new way of making music theatre, a new take on the absolute reference) justifying the means (deviating from music theatre norms).

DOMTS’ approach does not have a master plan in this way; productions are more made to be answers to the question of “what is music theatre?”, which works still as a guide, but less as a map and more as an arrow. As Tsangaris has said in an interview, it is no longer an affirmative definition, but rather a matter of exploring possibilities.<sup>20</sup> The diverse, heterogeneous productions that result from the commissioning strategy are then all in their own ways answers to this question, without the pretense of ever being *the* definitive answer, rather just *a* situated, site-specific, time-specific answer. “Right here and now, with these things and people, at this place and time of day, this is music theatre.” This is because the question must be answered by practitioners in many different ways; a diversity of answers are therefore what the duo are searching for. The question works more as an engine for experimentation, rather than a methodology for eventually finding a music-teleological solution for how to go forward, as seemed to have been the case with Ruzicka and his biennales, as explored in section 4.4.3. The commissioning process itself is no codified or specific process or method, rather many contacts, conversations, demonstrations, tests, run-throughs that lead up to receiving a final commission are what form this system. This culminates in this aforementioned meta-narrative of heterogeneity; a diversity that runs across the field of commissioned productions.

Looking at the large number of different kinds of music theatre practices, from swimming pool to bathtub to documentary theatre, it also resonates again with the view put forward in Chapter 3 that this more situated answering of the question of what the term is or can do allows for it to better interface with the interdisciplinary performing arts sphere more generally. This is because by eliminating the need for external reference, for an adherence to a specific history and tradition prescribed by the festival, music theatre projects are (*finally*) given the freedom to exist as hybrid, transdisciplinary entities. What results is a flourishing of individual combinations, of partial, situated answers to the question of what music theatre can be.

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20 Manos Tsangaris, interview by the author, Berlin, 03 May, 2017.

A further aspect is the ability of this constellation to question the most fundamental assumptions about independent music theatre through the views of artists with different training and historical associations. This can be related to the concept of the productive outsider as elaborated by Marcus Miessen, described as someone who forcefully inserts themselves, as a dilettante, into a pre-existing debate, and thereby insisting on becoming an actor within a given constellation or set of stakeholders. Their outsider status means they have few internalized disciplinary norms, producing situations where knowledge is able to be created unpredictably, and where there is no care taken towards “preventing friction between certain agents in the existing force field” (Miessen 2010, 97). This allows for a “forceful injection of external knowledge” that has the possibility to produce unexpected forms of change (98).

This kind of insertion is not totally unforeseeable or alien however. Miessen continues that the outside status cannot be total, but rather that, in entering into this debate e.g. here on music theatre, they also agree to accept at least some of the rules of the game (Miessen 2010, 102). In the case of the biennale platforms for instance, the platform format and its outcome as some kind of music theatre production, however unconventional, are aspects that are to be agreed upon in advance. The mentoring role of the directors and their team, which can go so far as to intervene in productions, is further evidence that this questioning nevertheless takes place against the background of an “arena” with set rules. In other words, there are also certain conditions that are not necessarily productive to question in a particular instance, rather the focus is on the questioning of the parameters of the end product.

This system that is being described effectively enables non-composers to participate in the co-determination of the field’s future. This is a fundamentally more open system, one that resembles the transdisciplinarity of other performing arts fields, like dance and theatre, that have also begun to produce works in this way. Transdisciplinarity is understood here as that the artists are participating together in the development and constitution of the conceptual framework of the performance. They move across (=trans) the boundaries of their earlier training and associated division of labour, and focus more on holistic approach to conceiving of the work.

A similar definition can be adapted from philosopher Wolfgang Welsch’s theory on transculturality. He identifies two seemingly divergent ways of characterizing transculturality, namely the possibilities of *homogenization* and *diversification* (1999, 200–201). Homogenization would be that through this mixing of disciplines (which is replacing Welsch’s concept of culture here), as happens in the biennale platforms, the unique valuable characteristics of a discipline are lost as they move towards an undifferentiated middle. For instance, if the composer is not afforded complete creative control of their score, then they are no longer in control of the

area they know best (regarding instrumentation, harmony, etc.), and the end product will end up compromised; in other words, the composer composes better than the director. A tendency towards homogenization means that the uniqueness of the music theatre genre of the opera would thus lose the characteristics that make it special, and differentiate it from cultural offerings e.g. in the theatre or the art gallery (Welsch 1999, 200).

Welsch argues the contrary, holding that this pooling of heterogeneous competencies produces rather an *altered mode of diversification*. The singular mix of artists in e.g. a biennale platform vary in their inventory, and thus in their structure, making them unique, as stated above. Speaking of the result of these processes of self-determined alignment, he argues that they exhibit a level of complexity no less than traditional cultural models, existing simply on a different register. He writes that

it's just that now the differences no longer come about through a juxtaposition of clearly delineated cultures (like in a mosaic), but result between transcultural networks, which have some things in common while differing in others, showing overlaps and distinctions at the same time. The mechanics of differentiation has become more complex—but it has also become genuinely cultural for the very first time, no longer complying with geographical or national stipulations, but following pure cultural interchange processes. (Welsch 1999, 201)

Replacing here again transculturality with transdisciplinarity in this extended metaphor, Welsch can be read as arguing for forms of exchange that are less tied to predetermined disciplinary stereotypes, and related instead to the more complex inter-mixings that happen in the formation of artistic performances by groups of artists. Applied to the issue of music theatre, Welsch's approach allows for a self-determination of the relationship to various references, encouraging hybrid, differentiated, and highly individualistic identities for the artists. Rather than rigid distinctions driven exclusively by disciplinary traditions, and recourse to external references such as the history of the opera or Eurological music, a transdisciplinary, network-based approach is suggested. Significantly, it should be noted, this does not preclude affiliation to a specific artistic genre rich in ideas and references, it only emphasizes that this should occur non-dogmatically and in dialogue with a diverse set of other practices.

As argued in Chapter 3, the best way of navigating and approaching this network-based understanding of artistic practice is from the viewpoint of the individual receiver, who untangles the dense mix of references embedded in this web based on the situated reality of the performative encounter. These situated interpretations of music theatre works connect once again to the open, searching question *what is music theatre?* in that the plethora of partial answers to this question allow for a tailoring of answers towards the contexts in which they find themselves. This

is where the concept of curating as a practice of critical knowledge creation can be related to the directorial, organizational work of DOMTS.

This is because their approach to programming these platforms is with the goal of exploring the rich diversity of ways in which performances can be considered music theatre. They do this through inviting also artists from disciplines outside of music, productive outsiders, but also people like directors, who have experience staging music theatre but perhaps not conceiving of a music theatre idea themselves, as well as artists from different areas of the world, like Buenos Aires or Hong Kong, who for their part bring to the platforms the particular concerns and urgencies of their local arts scenes.

The many different forms of music theatrical result that this produces is the most important curatorial/critical act that DOMTS do with their biennale. This is because they are answering rich questions of definition and showing how many ways different answers can be created to it, provided one remains open to experimentation. These answers are situated within a variety of contexts, such as more from the direction of sound art, new opera, independent music theatre, etc.

They are also through their existence and presence at the biennale an attempt at provoking others to participate in this same productive crisis of definition. Presenting so many “what ifs” (in the sense of “what if this was music theatre”) within one biennale brings other artists, critics, and other receivers into asking themselves the same questions as well. This is because they are taking positive positions within the debate on the future of music (or thinking with Haraway, telling new stories about music’s future). Returning again to Miessen, the current historical constellation is such that nihilism is not enough, and the act of staking these fleshed-out positions within the debate, actually wagering something and risking it, can begin to solve problems (2010, 48–49). The way in which the biennale team do this is what is meant by shifting the frame, or creating a critical curatorial practice. However, this approach is one that is quite different from received notions of curatorial practice in music as an extension or expansion of concert dramaturgy. It is rather about setting up a specific infrastructure for music theatre works to occur.

## 4.7 Compositional and Curatorial Practices

### 4.7.1 Musical Means, Curatorial Ethos

It is easy to imagine how a work of station theatre like Tsangaris’ *Mauersegler* or even *Winzig* could serve as a methodological basis for directing a concert or festival; the various stations could e.g. be works by different composers that are chosen by Tsangaris and placed into relationship with each other using his skill in doing this in his own compositions. The composer of evening-length works of their own

devising would transform into the composer of evening-length “com-pilations” of other artists’ works, skillfully put together in order to discover weird, unexpected connections and relations between them. Because festivals also often last over several days, this would be expanded one level higher as well, with the composer then also considering how the different evenings relate to each other. It would become an extension of concert or music theatre dramaturgy to festival-size.

Were this most direct translation of compositional thinking to be carried out, it would seem to echo Daniel Buren’s famous criticism that Szeemann’s approach to Documenta was to use him and other artists as only “pigments” for the larger “painting” created by the curator(s), with works existing in a depreciated state in relation to the larger central thesis or moment of self-reflexivity (Buren 1972, 29, see also section 2.3.1). Artistic practice of the individual artists would then be subsumed directly into the authorial/artistic vision of the director.

While there doubtlessly does exist an overall strategy and direction to the biennale, as seen in DOMTS’ setting of overarching themes (“Original with Subtitles,” “Private Matters”) or their attempt to raise the concentration of biennale activities during the festival (see Figure 5), it will be argued here that a crucial facet of their curatorial work is not focused on this aspect of overall festival dramaturgy. Their approach, as explored in the previous section, is more focused on the process of production and development of the works than it is towards the specific design of their presentation during the time of the festival—obviously without diminishing the importance of this latter aspect.

Both directors clearly acknowledge the connection that exists between their compositional and organizational practices, while at the same time not forgetting to mention the important distinctions and shifts in responsibilities that come along with their turn to organization. Tsangaris for instance is weary of this easy link between his heterogeneous compositions and the works of the biennale. While discussing the heterogeneity of his own works, he distances himself from a direct comparison between his approach to curating and the biennale, saying that

the heterogeneity of the biennale plays out more like a meta narrative. I want that different aesthetic conceptions confront are presented in confrontation with each other. This means works that have more of an opera aesthetic can be contrasted with works from more of a performance direction. This kind of heterogeneity we [DOMTS] think is necessary, as music theatre creates an aesthetic window to the world, and should not be too limited.<sup>21</sup>

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21 Manos Tsangaris, interview by the author, Berlin, 03 May, 2017. “Die Heterogenität der Biennale spielt mehr als ein Metanarrativ ab. Ich will, dass verschiedene ästhetische Auffassungen miteinander in Konfrontation geraten. Arbeiten, die eher in Opernästhetik versus dingen mehr aus dem Performancebereich kommen. Diese Art von Heterogenität halten

Not discounting the impromptu nature of an off-the-cuff remark in an interview, this passage hints at the register that Tsangaris' artistic work is engaged on in his work on the biennale. The key here is to think about what the concept of "heterogeneity as meta-narrative" can mean for the biennale, and examine how it has manifested itself over the course of the past two editions of the festival. Tsangaris understands heterogeneity here as one of approaches to the concept of music theatre, with opera, or opera-like performances being only one category among them.

Daniel Ott similarly distances himself from a conception of festival leadership that would have a pre-set format for productions, e.g. all operas that the biennale produced being co-productions with opera houses, or concerts that take place in the concert hall, while suggesting that this is an uninteresting approach to festival leadership.<sup>22</sup> What he proposes instead is the concept that the biennale be instead a laboratory, a place for experimentation, which seems to imply experimentation with the *format* of works more than anything else.

Heterogeneity—fundamental dissimilarity, incongruity, in this case of productions, has been shown to be a characteristic traversing DOMTS' own artistic work. With their assuming leadership of the biennale, their creation of musical assemblages experiences a register shift. Neither Tsangaris nor Ott create an experimental system *for* the audience *through* the works, as was the case with their own artistic productions, rather it is *the system of development of productions taken as a whole* that creates the unforeseeability of productions. The heterogeneity of so many different kinds of productions is thus understood then as an *outcome* of this system. As has been explored in the previous section, this intentional striving for such an effect, together with the aspect of doing it through mixing artistic (compositional) and managerial competencies together, can be understood as a curatorial practice, according to the use of the term established in Chapters 2 and 3.

The way that they lead the biennale is through using the *means* of composition in their commissioning in order to achieve an *ethos* of curating. Just as has been shown in the case of Malzacher's approach to curatorial practice in theatre with his *Truth is Concrete* project, while leaders in the performing arts are drawn to the ideas and concepts of curatorial practice, they are faced with the issue of the *how*, the specific and situated way in which they can realize the goal of producing critical knowledge. While inspiration can be drawn and lessons learned from other areas of artistic practice, they in no way provide a recipe for curatorial practice. Instead, it is through the reimagination or repurposing of existing techniques, such as dramaturgy in the case of Malzacher, or music theatre composition for DOMTS, that curatorial practices are realized.

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wir beide für notwendig, weil die Musiktheater ein ästhetisches Fenster zur Welt bildet, und sollte nicht zu limitiert sein."

22 Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

An example of this Ott elaborates in his presentation with Tsangaris during the 2016 festival's symposium, when he argues that the organizational form of the biennale should be seen as itself a political aspect of theatrical practice (Ott and Tsangaris 2018a, 74). He details how the team attempted to work with changing hierarchies, so that "as a biennale-team, we tried to deploy our areas of competency in such a way as to ensure that the most clever person [*die klügste Person*] in a given context ... would be in charge (ibid.; translation added).<sup>23</sup> Returning to DOMTS' respective compositional practices, both are clearly structured as practices that organize and perhaps "orchestrate" the competencies of others to create their music theatre works, in a way that tracks closely with this statement about biennale-team leadership by Ott.

The point is to argue that DOMTS' curatorial practice should not be only understood as limited to a practice of juxtaposition and dramaturgical considerations of the festival event itself, but rather must also be understood as extending to the structures and operational procedures that they put into place in order for these productions to exist at all. Returning to the anecdote about Malzacher's *Truth is Concrete* project at Steirischer Herbst told by curator Maayan Sheleff in section 3.4.2, the organization for instance of a protest march against a Graz museum and their sponsors is not regarded as Malzacher's curatorial gesture on its own. Rather, such an action is an important incident that is part of a larger curatorial framework laid out by the organizer. What must be focused on is then is the formation of a context or framework in which the individual event or production is taking place, rather than, as has until now most often been the case, solely putting focus on the productions themselves.

When it comes to programming, as is the case both here and in much theatre curating, all mostly long and immersive productions in their own right, the task of curatorial work becomes on the formation of a context, on a different level, in which various concepts can co-exist in some way. Thus in the *Truth is Concrete* example, the overarching concern was with the relationship between art and activism, in regards to which a specific infrastructure and framework (of people, things) was created by Malzacher order to aim for possible answers to be produced.

The same can be said of the framework that was created by DOMTS in order to realize the biennale, before their programming of productions, visible both in Ott's quote above, and as well in the platform format detailed in section 4.6.2. They developed an idea, an approach, to programming that came out of their musical practices but was newly more broadly focused on the leadership of the institution as a whole, rather than on individual music theatre productions—even if they are evening-filling, immersive, collaborative, etc.

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23 "Als Biennale-Team haben wir versucht, Kompetenzen so einzusetzten, dass die klügste Person in einem bestimmten Zusammenhang ... das Sagen hat."



This is significant in terms of understanding the relationship between artistic production and curatorial practice. The curator, as the role has been detailed in section 2.4.3, is as a figure a foremost ambassador for work at the boundary between creative and economic production. Viewing DOMTS as curators in this way makes sense—the biennale is able to be seen in light of their artistic career trajectories as a kind of extension of their respective compositional practices, but also in the *management* of teams of artists in ways that connect to this artistic goal and are subjected to economic rationales relating to budget, planning, etc. This second aspect is important for understanding the relationship of curating to artistic practice; the difference is that curating not only involves itself in artistic decision-making, but also consists of an application of artistic and creative strategies onto economic and administrative concerns.

Whereas Ruzicka would argue that the optimal arts administrator would be one who unifies administrative and artistic knowledge together in one person, despite the forms and formats often being experimental, they were nevertheless fixed in terms of their division of labour (see section 4.4.2). The difference is that here, their creative practice is *applied directly* to the administration of the biennale itself. They are also however able to engage with the artistic content of the biennale, and in doing so establish themselves as in the role of the curator existing in an unclear, in-between relationship to administrative and artistic practices.

As curatorial scholar Beatrice von Bismarck argues, this unclarity produces a *double role*, a liminal zone between administrative and content-based work, one that rejects fixed positions in favour of temporary connections that must be negotiated, a position that sounds a lot like Ott's anecdote above about always trying to change their biennale's hierarchies so that the cleverest person was in charge (von Bismarck 2007a, 22). Continuing von Bismarck's position on this situation of subverting traditional divisions of labour, her argument is that one is thus able to slip in-between established codes and norms, in order to achieve a reframing of the art experience itself (*ibid.*). Her article is also relevant in its position that this approach to reframing or redefining should not be solely the task of a single curator who then becomes a kind of prophet figure, but rather that the various acts of mediation that are suggested can be distributed among those engaged in organizing an exhibition (23).

As has been shown in Chapter 2, a chronic problem of curatorial practice has been the fixation of such processes of critical mediation of an artistic event to one sole person, who then gains status by becoming the author figure associated with the curatorial process itself. Von Bismarck's view that not only is curatorial practice more of a state of undeterminedness to be negotiated, but also a set of operations of mediation not in the first instance connected to any one particular person, points out that they need not be connected to an author figure in order to be effective, and also aligns with the team-based approach that is on display in DOMTS' lead-

ership of the Munich Biennale. This allows for the temporary fixing of hierarchies, or as Ott says, a situation where “sometimes the hierarchies change in a matter of seconds, so that one says: Now we must follow the technician, and now we have to follow the artistic management [*Künstlerisches Betriebsbüro*]” (Ott and Tsangaris 2018a, 74; translation added).<sup>24</sup>

Said differently, in their being appointed to artistic directors, DOMTS set about applying an artistic vision to the administrative structure of the biennale itself, and in doing so making this artistic vision one that was also organizational, managerial. A major part of their success with the festival can be understood as existing as the result of opening up such a “constellation of operations” between artistic and administrative considerations, as von Bismarck calls it (2007a, 9). Being able to move between these with ease allowed them to e.g. apply their various experimental procedures of their commissioning system based on group-oriented experimentation in platforms in various cities (see section 4.6.2) to the process of production of works to be commissioned, and as a consequence call into question the established working methods for music theatre production. Offering alternatives to this usually hierarchical and top-down approach through the biennale platform format was a form of criticality towards that system, one that was only possible through this unique blend of their artistic and administrative knowledges.

#### 4.7.2 Education and Dissemination

In an article examining the social turn of the 1990s in the visual arts, curatorial scholar Claire Bishop identifies a kind of performative exhibition-making process whereby “the exhibition becomes one moment in a longer-term, expanded ‘project,’” in a process that is “open-ended, post-studio, research-based” (Bishop 2014a, 240). The emphasis on processuality and on the ambiguity of the “project” were all reactions to a stultified, work-obsessed art marked. Looking at both the interests of DOMTS of creating more politically active music theatre works, particularly with the second biennale, as well as the young artists at the biennale with a similar repertoire-weariness and hunger to engage in open-ended processes of exploration of new possibilities, the parallels between the emergence of the 1990s social turn and the current questions being raised at the biennale are striking.

Bishop’s article looks in particular at one project by French curator Éric Troncy, in which he invited a group of 22 artists to a villa for a one-month residency—a gesture reminiscent of DOMTS’ platforms. During this time, they were free to brainstorm ideas, which would then be presented in the exhibition. The artists ended up

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24 “Manchmal wechselt innerhalb von Sekunden die Kompetenz, so dass man sich sagt: Jetzt müssen wir aber dem Techniker folgen, und jetzt sollen wir dem KBB [*Künstlerisches Betriebsbüro*] folgen.”

agreeing on the idea of an exhibition as film, their works and performances becoming the film's protagonists (Bishop 2014a, 243). Analyzing the resulting exhibition, Bishop criticizes the outcomes of Troncy's curatorial concept, in that the final exhibition failed completely in its mediation to an outside audience. Interesting as the process may have been, there remained a difficulty in reconciling what she argues are the two audiences of the work, "the primary audience of participants ... and a secondary audience of viewers," the latter of which were largely forgotten in the considerations taken in organizing the exhibition (240). Troncy himself ultimately admits of these early experiments that "the viewer was subject to an experience ... of piecing together the show like 'fragments which enable the reconstruction of a crime'" (244).

Going back to the original motivation for the biennale with Henze that opened this chapter, if one of the Munich Biennale's central goals is the presentation of new music theatre work to the Munich public, then in light of this, extra attention must be given that they do not fall into the same trap of serving only their "primary audience" of the experimenting artist group, rather they must take an entirely different approach to audience outreach.

Successful productions are ones that do not leave their audience behind, that do not hope to be understood by some "future" public (in the literal sense of *avant-garde*), nor do their emphasis on process go so far as to force the audience to have to piece together the process that a work emerged from like detectives at a crime scene, as above. Rather they are productions that effectively engage and address the audience they are conceived for as an extension of their site-specificity. What this entails is a greater focus from the entire production team, from artists to directors, on rethinking the relationship to their audience(s) themselves.

The example of Éric Troncy's work shows how the solution to this problem is through a learning process in the steering of arts institutions. While DOMTS have, like Troncy in the 1990s, gotten a lot right in terms of an experimental, open working process that produces interesting results, also like Troncy they do not always succeed in mediating these experiments to their audiences.

Looking backwards quickly to Ruzicka's biennales, while also sometimes experimental when it comes to their production methodology (see *Die Befristeten* by Detlev Glanert [2014] in section 4.4.3), their focus was on the effective acquisition of co-productions and the establishing of composer's careers on the basis of successful commissions. Ruzicka's biennales, though themselves often experimental in a certain way, did not call into question the fundamental parameters of the systems in which they were operating, and as such were able to rely on the normative state of music theatre production; they did not need to develop a new concept for their mediation, they could rely on pre-existing norms.

DOMTS' tenure at the biennale can be characterized instead by a focus on creating a system to produce various forms of music theatre. As has been laid out in

Chapter 1 and 2, the concept of curating is a way of thinking about how people can take responsibility for the designing of an artistic event, such as a festival or biennale. This taking of responsibility extends to both artists that are being worked with, as well as other stakeholders, including the audience, who play their own important part in the festival assemblage. As argued with theatre scholar Tom Sellar in section 3.2, thinking about this responsibility to the audience is particularly relevant to the performing arts in this current moment, where they have become highly transdisciplinary in their references, a situation that strains their relationship to their public, and which often requires astute mediators to properly contextualize performative work.

This is the aspect of arts mediation that is both so crucial to successfully navigating these transdisciplinary music theatre experiments, but something which is not significantly present in the current conception of the Munich Biennale. While this kind of sensitive task of mediation is clearly visible in the aspects of music theatre *production*, the festival has changed what it is offering within the frame of its public offering without any equally drastic rethinking of music theatre *mediation* to their public in light of the fundamental shift that has taken place in how productions happen and what their focus is.

Mediation of music theatre does not mean here simply pre-concert talks, or an increased amount of awareness of the relationships between productions, though of course these can be two strategies among many. Just like the productions themselves, these solutions must be situated within the particular situations and sets of stakeholders that are unique to each production, meaning that no complete list can be made. Just like in the example of Troncy's "No Man's Time" above, caring for the production must be understood as a recursive practice manifesting itself at each stage of a project's progression, one that is also not just focused on the two directors themselves, but a broader project of outreach.

### **regno della musica—TERRA**

The example of the production entitled *regno della musica—TERRA* from the 2018 biennale can illustrate the beginning of what this kind of mediation could look like at the biennale. Unlike other biennale productions that had in the lead-up to the biennale prepared and rehearsed discrete productions that were then shown to the audience, this work instead spent their preparation time collecting ideas and materials, before using the festival itself as an opportunity to rehearse an opera, in effect bringing the platform format directly to the biennale's festival time itself; the performative act of creating a work was thus more explicitly thematized than in any other production, and effectively turning rehearsal into a form of performance. The two initiators of the work, Saskia Bladt, and Anna Sofie Lugmeier, explicitly reference the creation of a protected sphere in which to create free of worry about

outside pressures as a key aspect of their work (Münchener Biennale et al. 2018, 100). Their stated goal was to create with the project the definitive new way of making opera. This new way would be non-hierarchical, involve the entirety of the artists' lives, and be the expression of a free experimentation, unencumbered by outside influences.

Central to the work was its focus on the “oscillation between the roles of the private person and his [sic] multifaceted conditions of existence,” in that the artists not only worked but also lived, cooked, and slept together over the nine days (Münchener Biennale et al. 2018, 100). This was intensified by the apparent fact that these artists had not been, or not often been, in such an intense, intimate, or holistic project before. Therefore, many of the aforementioned coping strategies needed to be developed on the spot. What then happened during the realization of the work, i.e. during the nine days of open rehearsals at the biennale, was that this learning process took centre stage. For instance, in one interaction, a musician who was rehearsing complained about the difficulty hearing others in the rehearsal because of cooking sounds coming from the kitchen: the interaction suggested a mounting inner-group tension or grievance, as well as put on display the unintended dramaturgy of the marathon-length life/work performance that did not seem to be anticipated by the organizers.

The honesty of the rehearsal process allowed for the work to be genuinely constituted in the moment of its performance. *Regno della musica's* novelty existed in those small unintended divergencies from its stated goal—complaining about cooking noises—and inferring from them details of protagonists' (personal, private) lives and personalities. The production thus succeeded to an extent by putting its process of experimentation on display, rather than a “modest” result.

However, watching the protagonists develop their situated structures for collaboration was an aspect of the performance that existed in tension with the rhetoric and stated goals of the organizers themselves, who seemed to seek a new, *definitive*, and universalist answer, instead of focusing on creating a modest, situated and site-specific answer. This is the moment in the production where once again expectations have to be managed, and where it fails to live up to the (per se impossible) aspirations that it sets out for itself. Again here, the transdisciplinary format for creating the work ended up meaning that the end product would not be able to be realized with the same grandeur of earlier biennales, despite a seeming aspiration to the contrary. A new path for opera would not be found—rather the musicians would begin to figure out structures for work and collaboration together.

Nevertheless, perhaps because the audience was in this way inserted directly into the primary audience of participants, instead of, as was also the case with Troncy's exhibition discussed above, treated as a secondary audience of viewers, the aspect of mediation was addressed very differently. Greeted personally by the dra-

maturg with the offer of prosecco, audience members were invited to observe the processes of negotiation themselves as they were going on, as well as ask and discuss with the participants about their ideas, visions, and challenges. This seemed to help get the audience onboard with the sketched goals of this work-in-progress, and even give them some amount of space to participate in shaping it. These small gestures gave an honest and sincere impression of the creative effort being output by the group, and for them to share with the audience their vision of an opera-to-come.

While arguably this investment in interpersonal connections, in skills of experimenting and collaborating together in teams, are more sought-after for contemporary artistic production, the tension between this and the modesty of its end results remains: *Regno della musica* was significant in the fact that it was one of the only productions to foreground its processuality, instead of presenting the end result of transdisciplinary collaboration. The situation that this produced though is one where these interesting but often not yet fully mature works-in-progress are presented to the audience with a certain level of finality. This creates a disjuncture between the output from artists and the expectation from the audience. Because the festival has put an emphasis on transdisciplinary productions, which are inherently extremely slow because of having to re-establish together the structures of collaboration, commissions need to invest a significantly larger amount of effort to attain the level of professionalization and polish expected that is a remnant of the interdisciplinary working method of the previous biennales. To change this would involve also an increased amount of audience outreach and communication from the biennale.

### Trond Reinholdtsen's "Ø"

Such an example of successful outreach and mediation to the specific audience of the biennale itself can be found by looking at one of the productions that was not the result of the biennale platforms, but was rather a commission to the older and more established Trond Reinholdtsen (\*1972). For the edition of the biennale, the composer created the work *THE "Ø" NEO-HIPPIE-INTERVENTIONISTISCHE-ANTI-INTERNET-PERIPHERIE-WELTTOURNEE* (The "Ø" neo-hippie-interventionalist-anti-internet-periphery-world-tour). The production's deliberate hyper-camp imagery, already alluded to in the title, can be understood as a satirical commentary on the tradition of grand opera to which much music theatre production often still aspires to. Reinholdtsen works heavily with parody as a mechanism for institutional critique, replicating the institutional structures that his work exists within as a way of showing the absurdity of how they function. It should be remarked that this approach also closely resembles strategies of early institutional critique in the visual arts, specifically those of Broodthaers, who uses parody of

establishment structures (here the opera house, there the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum) as a means of calling their self-evidency with which they assert their scopical regime on their audiences. When for instance near the beginning of the first webisode, the title screen reads:

In 2015 the institution “The Norwegian Opra”—as a strategy to gain total control over the production means of art and in search for total artistic freedom—took the radical artistic choice to NOT ANY LONGER PERFORM FOR ANY AUDIENCE. (Reinholdtsen 2018, 0’49’)

Reinholdtsen lampoons CCM’s search for aesthetic freedom. This can be understood as an instance of conceptual virtuosity, rather than skill-based virtuosity: its value is not in the artfulness of the formal composure of the sentence (in comically bad English), nor in the literal assertion of a will for artistic freedom and a decision to withdraw from performance completely.<sup>25</sup> Its artistic value is rather in the humorous commentary on the pervasiveness of this way of thinking in the Western classical music tradition in general, pointing out the absurdity of the quest for freedom from public scrutiny by artists such as Schoenberg (with his *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*), Wagner (and his idea for the Bayreuth festival), or Gould (who in 1964 gave his last public performance, and would from then on only release recordings) that persists in much musical thought until today.<sup>26</sup> Continuing to poke fun at this quest for artistic autonomy, he elaborates in the work’s description what such a radical withdrawal needed to entail:

In practice this meant that the opera director was also the composer, main diva, orchestra, director, light designer, restaurant chef, propaganda minister, ticket master, audience, leader of the Worker’s Union etc., etc. It all amounted to a radical withdrawal from official contemporary music and social life in general, into a private paradisiacal echo chamber with no critical or pragmatist input from the cor-

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25 Some critics had difficulty understanding this changed emphasis, such as when the reviewer for the Munich *Abendzeitung* got so offended by Reinholdtsen poking fun at the festival’s sponsors that he left the performance less than half-way through (“Münchener Biennale: Ein bisschen Dada wagen” [Munich Biennale: trying a bit of Dada], Munich *Abendzeitung*, 12 June, 2018).

26 Paulo Virno makes particular reference to Gould as an example of a performing artist discontent with the proximity of his practice with political action, writing: “This great pianist ... fought against the ‘political dimension’ intrinsic to his profession. At a certain point Gould declared that he wanted to abandon the ‘active life,’ that is, the act of being exposed to the eyes of others (note: ‘active life’ is the traditional name for politics). In order to make his own virtuosity non-political, he sought to bring his activity as a performing artist as close as possible to the idea of labor, in the strictest sense, which leaves behind extrinsic products” (Virno 2004, 53).

rupted "Outside." (Münchener Biennale and Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt München 2018, 155)

Reinholdtsen is essentially describing the antithesis of the biennale platform idea, with the point being that with total isolation comes total freedom to realize one's artistic ideas, but at the cost of any sort of societal relevance. The joke is of course that his work is in this sense not "free," but rather highly tailored to the CCM community that it wants to address. In this sense, Reinholdtsen practices the opposite of what he preaches, exhibiting throughout an acute awareness of the various issues that plague the discourse, and using artistic license to bring attention to them, often through mocking and humor.

This play of meaning and approach to composition by Reinholdtsen can be compared with what Shannon Jackson calls "hijacked de-skilling," wherein "artists trained in a variety of forms actively masked that skill, marshaling a series of Conceptual questions in order to interrogate and perhaps explode the art traditions from whence they came" (Jackson 2014, 58). Significant too is that this de-skilling is for Jackson a typical hallmark of the interdisciplinary arts as she understands the field, also because it is a practice associated with the creation of conceptual artistic practice itself: The de-skilling practiced by Reinholdtsen is motivated by specific conceptual questions he has about the discipline that he is working in. From the décor made of neon-pink foam, live plants, and dead fish, to the carefully-out-of-tune, high-pitched singing of a choir of worms (who, it can be surmised, cannot sing well because they are worms), Reinholdtsen is always both hyperconscious as to how precisely his work will be interpreted by the audience at the biennale, and able to manipulate this interpretation for artistic gain. Implicit in this schema is that the composition is "directed at" the perception of the audience, as was the case with Tsangaris' artistic work, but even more dependent on tacit knowledge about the idiom and thus a very specific New Music audience whose presumptions about that music tradition he can then call into question as an artistic strategy.

The work takes the reality of New Music practice as a subject, and is thus aimed primarily at a specialized public that is informed about and engaged in it. It was tailored to both play to and disrupt their expectations, meaning that it was nevertheless meant to send them a clear critical message (as Broodthaers' plaque at Documenta V said, "faire informer pouvoir"). The limitation of this approach is of course that in its specificity it becomes very much based on insider knowledge in order to function, shrinking its universality, but making it highly effective at its particular site of performance.

In contrast to the two earlier works, Reinholdtsen's success can be attributed to a much greater degree of maturity with which it presents this unique form of music theatre practice. The composer has developed over time his own strongly conceptual



musical language, one that is highly vibrant and unique.<sup>27</sup> Because he has been working with this approach already over several years and multiple productions, he is better able to turn it into an effective performance. Importantly as well, the work was not developed as part of a biennale platform, meaning that Reinholdtsen could rely on his established practice that fit with DOMTS vision already, rather than have to go back to the drawing board, which would have lessened the work's effect.

### Promoting Discourse and Scholarship

*Regno della musica*—TERRA and Reinholdtsen's "Ø" represent two different approaches to mediating music theatre production to their respective audiences. The first production approaches mediation by directly involving the audience in the creation of the future work, or, using Bishop's language to describe Troncy's work, having the audience be part of "the primary audience of participants" in this process-oriented work, or at least directly watch them at work (Bishop 2014a, 244). The second meanwhile tailored itself precisely to the expectations of its niche, expert audience, while also intentionally subverting them for comedic and critical effect. There exists however another kind of offering for the festival audience, one that is usually directly overseen or conceived by the director themselves, namely discourse offerings such as conferences, symposia, or talks. How DOMTS have navigated this aspect of the biennale merits examination here as well, in that it will help reveal additional issues around the wider institutional context in which the biennale acts.

As theatre scholar Jennifer Elfert points out, an integral part of festivals is their discursive aspect, and their functioning as an opportunity for meetings between the scene's specialists, a role that can be traced all the way back to the universal expositions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Elfert 2012, 79; Jones 2010, 80). A symposium during

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27 For an early example of Reinholdtsen's conceptual musical practice, see his highly funny "Complete Music Performance Videos september 2008" parts 1 to 4, on the composer's YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/user/trondreinholdtsen>. The first is entitled *Die Geburt des Künstlers aus dem Geiste der Musik*, and begins with Reinholdtsen "birthing" his head out from between worn copies of *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Music* by Xenakis, and *Texte zur elektronischen und Instrumentalen Musik* (Texts on electronic and instrumental music) by Stockhausen, before using further books as percussion to do a "rhythmical study," etc. For an early instance of using characters somewhat similar to those in the Ø Trilogy, see *The Norwegian Opra launch and gala happening* (2010). See also his piano concerto, *Theory of the Subject* (2016, premiere at Ultima Festival, Oslo), which would also use characters from the composer's "Ø" series, and which philosopher Harry Lehmann would characterize both as an example of conceptual composition, which he formulates as a new project for New Music practice after post-modernism (what he calls *Gehaltsästhetik*) (Lehmann 2018, 42).

the 2016 edition of the Munich Biennale addressed did just this, and sought to contribute to the scholarly discourse around music theatre, inviting musicologists, but also a dance scholar and commissioned composers, to come together and reflect on the performances going on at the festival.

For the second edition of the festival in 2018, the discursive aspect was changed to follow a different concept. It focused on a series of nightly meetings in a quasi-talk-show format with hosts being co-directors Manos Tsangaris and Daniel Ott, along with author Navid Kermani, and guests being artists from the day's performances or premieres, often supplemented with small musical interludes. Discussion was more casual and non-academic, focussing more on experiences and motivations for creating works. A series of lectures around the biennale's theme of "private matters" also took place during the second weekend of the festival, with presentations by Daniel Libeskind, Stephan Pauly, Saskia Sassen, and Marlene Streeruwitz, moderated by David Roesner. DOMTS chose with these presentations to focus more on the thematic focus of the biennale rather than on reflection on its relationship to the medium of music theatre. These discursive presentations were interesting and well-executed, however they seemed to be a missed opportunity to utilize the collection of critics, practitioners, and scholars already in the room.

This same approach is also increasingly being used at the Maerzmusik festival, with its Thinking Together conferences (see Chapter 5). These also have increasingly been programming exclusively scholars outside of music, and focusing instead on inviting guests that can add a level of reflection and perspective to the larger philosophical and societal questions being asked. In regards to the Munich Biennale and its discursive offering, this argument should be understood against the background of a lack of an established and mature discourse around music theatre. This view is supported by music theatre scholar Matthias Rebstock, who argues that

what independent music theatre urgently needs, in addition to networking amongst producers and internal exchange amongst the different ensembles and artists, is greater visibility and the creation of its own discourse. (Rebstock 2017, 544)

What this created was a chasm between this thematic focus on the one side and the biennale productions and their critical reception on the other.

There is a very pragmatic reason for this of course, namely that in the case of both festivals, there is a severe lack of discussion from scholars that take them seriously. There is a strong tendency towards more prescriptive approaches to experimental music that come from a background in traditional historical musicology. Ideally, these artistic directors would be able to program scholars who were able to both give a perspective on the societal issues being addressed at the biennale, as well as develop and present ideas based on actual artistic decisions made during the festival. In both the cases of Maerzmusik and the Munich Biennale, that fes-

tivals have moved away from hiring scholars of music in favour of scholars from non-musical disciplines suggests that this kind of practitioner is still rare.

Without this strong discourse production from scholars or even artists, the main instigators of discourse around these works are newspaper New Music critics. Time and budget constraints among critics mean that these tend to be quick to reassert, through inertia, the same established values that DOMTS seek to move away from. Figures such as Max Nyffeler still maintain that particularly specialized music journals remain ideally suited to contextualizing new production, averting the creation of echo chambers (Nyffeler 2018, 3–4). However, this format seems to remain limited in the amount of time and resources it can dedicate to such festivals, normally hardly progressing much further than a cursory description of the events. Solutions to this issue of reflection and writing need therefore to be approached from a different angle: through the directors perhaps spending more time consciously organizing forms of reflection and documentation of the biennale. This would not be in order to only write positive things about it, but rather to produce the conditions necessary for its outcomes and lessons to be explored, mediated, and archived in such a way as to serve the larger professional community.

Apart from the organization of networking events and academic symposia, solutions such as inviting young critics to the biennale to do a platform of their own could have been interesting impulses to break this system (as has been done at the Darmstadt Summer course with the “Talking about Music” program in 2016 and 2018). The biennale could also embed critics into productions to produce criticism, reflection, and contextualization for its catalogue instead, in a way more similar to the status of catalogues for large-scale visual art biennales.

Speculation aside, just as the biennale is reimagining the creation and presentation of music theatre, it is equally important that it consider how the forms of education and knowledge-creation that it deploys relate to its conception and productions. At least since discussions around the “educational turn” in curatorial practice over the past two decades, it has become clear that these connections present tricky but crucial situations for festival leaders to navigate (see O’Neil and Wilson 2010). Without sufficient consideration also of the various levels of educational and pedagogical practice taking place at the festival, this facet of festival practice threatens to undercut much of the interesting and important artistic developments being pursued by DOMTS.

#### 4.7.3 The Biennale Platforms as a Change in Labour Relations

The interdisciplinary system of music theatre production that was used by Henze and Ruzicka having been replaced by experimentation with music theatre formats and the biennale platforms, one of the most drastic changes at the biennale has been in the nature of the working method for artists. Specifically, it has replaced

technical excellence within a pre-existing framework with creative proficiency and the ability to create ever-new frameworks, in a way similar to the register change that comes along with Welsch's concept of transculturality in the previous section.

This shift concerns two diverging understandings of virtuosity put forward in Chapter 3 in following the argumentation of interdisciplinary arts scholar Shannon Jackson (section 3.2.2). She identifies first what she calls lay virtuosity, which is understood as valuing exceptionalism and high amounts of technical know-how of a given skill, such as playing an instrument at a high level of proficiency. Second, she identifies conceptual virtuosity, which is a virtuosity of ideas and the ability to communicate or mediate them, as in politics, or conceptual art.

Post-Fordist philosopher Paulo Virno argues that conceptual virtuosity is associated with the capacity for political action, sometimes in the service of public politics, however mainly the politics of competition (e.g. among artists), or the rhetorical skill of articulating ideas. Its rise in prevalence and importance is also associated with what post-Marxist scholars diagnose as a societal shift towards immaterial labour work in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century economies. It is also associated with a turn towards affective, performative work inseparable from the act of its being produced, and finally, the need for "creative" solutions to problems. Looking through this lens will help to illuminate the changed nature of musical production in DOMTS' platforms.

Virno argues that there are two ways of conceiving of "social cooperation" among workers, taken here to mean the participating artists. The first is what he calls the "objective" form. This is when

each individual does different, specific, things which are put in relation to one another by the engineer or by the factory foreman: cooperation, in this case, transcends individual activity; it has no relevance to the way in which individual workers function. (Virno 2004, 62)

This description resembles the interdisciplinary approach to music theatre production. This form of collaboration can be seen in the festivals of Henze and then Ruzicka; a theatrical assemblage is conceived and then realized by the director and/or dramaturg(s) using the skillsets of various artists. Individuals are representatives of their specific skills and competencies, orchestrated (literally, in the orchestra's case) by some combination of the director and/or composer, depending on how the rehearsal process is designed.

The second form, which fits with how artists participating in the platforms are asked to work, is what Virno describes as the "subjective" form of cooperation. This is when "a conspicuous portion of individual work consists of developing, refining, and intensifying cooperation itself" (2004, 62). Central is that

the task of the worker ... consists in actually finding, in discovering expedients, 'tricks,' solutions which ameliorate the organization of labour (Virno 2004, 62)

meaning that this knowledge of cooperation of the worker is not just presumed or used in passing, but is *requested explicitly*. It is this second form, where experimentation with forms of cooperation is requested explicitly by the biennale during the platforms organized to develop commissions, which represents post-Fordist labour relations. The skill that is most valued is the ability to forge useful relationships where collaboration can take place.

The platforms, designed as moments of condensed contact leading to eventual commissions, are equivalent to what Virno calls a publicly organized space, understood as one where the artist is able to "perform" linguistically this creation of cooperative networks. The participating artists need to interact and figure out on their own how best to work together in order to be able to produce the right kind of connections they need so as to receive a commission (2004, 55). In this way, establishing relationships with others becomes the main skill needed to be successful. Being able to articulate a concept or idea, communicating one's feelings, arguing or convincing others, etc., in short, that entire "toolbox" of political/affective skills, becomes subsumed within the field of (artistic) labour.

There is certainly a case to be made for this having always been the case in music production, especially when the many anecdotal accounts of the parties in Henze's apartment in Munich around early biennales are taken into account. There does remain a marked difference however in the nature of the work itself, in that here these informal relationships become formalized as the way in which biennale productions' internal organization takes shape. In other words, what has changed is that the established work-flows of creating music theatre have been disrupted by DOMTS, and replaced with the request that each group develop their own way of solving this disruption individually.

What then happens is that the notion of quality that is germane to the musical tradition, namely musical/compositional lay virtuosity, is displaced by an emphasis on conceptual virtuosity, and the ability to communicate. A further expansion of such an approach could be viewed as the beginning of a "conceptual turn" in the field, where it is precisely work with established formats and lines of communication that is falling out of favour and being replaced by a foregrounding of a focus on ideas and their communication, which then implies in a secondary step a specific medium.

The emphasis on communication skills as an important factor in biennale productions is strengthened by statements by DOMTS on the importance of discussion in solving issues of differences of opinion between them and their team. Daniel Ott has said that disagreements within the core team are generally dealt with by dis-

curring for as long as it takes to reach an agreement within the core team.<sup>28</sup> Manos Tsangaris' position in interview was to say that these kinds of conflicts are manageable, particularly for those who have some experience with theatre and this kind of process.<sup>29</sup>

What this change in labour relations should also imply is the opening of another avenue of inquiry and concern for the biennale, namely an awareness of the role that they play as a commissioning body in the professional careers of musicians in this new system. The commodified work (i.e. the traditional score), able to be realized largely independently and with (limited) input from its creators, is rapidly becoming a less common model. What is emerging in its place is more a system whereby site-specificity and musical decision-making in the moment of performance are once again being acknowledged as key parts of musical production, seen in terms such as Bhagwati's "comprovisation."<sup>30</sup>

With a re-emphasis on the performativity of production comes a danger of the re-precaritization of certain aspects of the musical work from an economic perspective: de-commodifying the musical work may be more artistically interesting, however it presents a host of new challenges for those who profited from the circulation of this commodity unconnected to their own performative labour.

This insight can be used to think further about one of the central aspects of the biennale, namely its stated desire to want to support early-career musical practitioners working in the field of music theatre. Success within the field of CCM can no longer be defined solely in terms of a linear career path as composer, singer, librettist, musician, etc., or in other words a career consisting only of the exercising of one specific skill set. Portfolio careers, where musicians "deriv[e] their artistic and financial income from a variety of sources," have already become the norm in the field (Tolmie 2017, 26). To whatever limited extent it was true before, success no longer means that a successful commission as a composer for the Munich Biennale will be the golden ticket to a plethora of further commissions, performances, steady teaching opportunities, etc. Rather, careers are to be developed along more idiosyncratic paths, with musicians fulfilling many different kinds of roles over the course of their careers, often with a higher level of precarity associated with this work.

Musical career researcher Diana Tolmie describes this as a shift to what she calls a "protean" model of success in musical careers, which shifts the ability to de-

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28 Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

29 Manos Tsangaris, interview by the author, Berlin, 03 May, 2017.

30 Bhagwati writes "Choosing the word 'comprovisation' to encompass the manifold creative practices operating in contemporary 'secondary aurality/orality' is an attempt to approach the issue in an inclusive manner, acknowledging both oral, improvisatory traditions and the rich heritage of eurological, sinological and other traditions of written composition" (Bhagwati 2013, 171).

fine success away from organizations and onto individual, “enterprising” artists. In this new framework, musicians work in a variety of settings and roles, rather than solidifying a career in one single role (e.g. doing some composing, some performing, some stage managing, lighting, writing, etc., etc.). Their focus is on defining success for themselves in terms of their own individualistic criteria (“success for me is...”) rather than it being imposed as a normative characteristic by CCM institutions. Further evidence of this trend can be seen in the rise of self-deterministic and entrepreneurship-oriented programs at European music conservatories.<sup>31</sup>

The flipside of this is the degradation in working conditions among artists: “Entrepreneurship” as a strategy must also be viewed against the background of increasing competition for decreasing jobs in the music sector (e.g. Gembris and Menze 2018 305–306). As can be read out of Scharff’s analysis of the working conditions of young female musicians in Berlin and London, a less charitable interpretation of the “entrepreneurial turn” in music institutions is that it amounts to an offloading of responsibility for employment from institutions onto musicians themselves (Scharff 2018, 23).

The biennale, as well as the platforms in advance of it, is a place to make personal connections, either between artists, or between artists and their future prospective employers (programmers from other institutions). While festivals have always been a place for networking, the shift to an emphasis on conceptual, collaborative, and entrepreneurial work endows this networking aspect of the festival with a newly urgent also economic rationale, where “informal recruitment” becomes further entrenched as the norm (see also Scharff 2018, 59–60).<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, if the biennale is to pursue its stated goal of supporting the further development of musicians working in the music theatre genre, and if the curatorial approach of DOMTS is to be taken in good faith, it must adapt its form of support in

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31 For an example of a music school experimenting with this, see the “Musician 3.0” program at the University of the Arts Utrecht. An excerpt from their website: “Musician 3.0 is the only program in the Netherlands that is not bound to a style or genre. You play a large role in shaping your education and you are in control of your own development” see <https://www.hku.nl/Home/Education/Bachelors/Conservatorium1/Musician3.0.htm>. See also the RENEW project (2014–2018) at the Association Européenne des Conservatoire, Académie de Musique, et Musikhochschulen (AEC) on how to implement entrepreneurial skills in musical higher education in Europe, as well as the follow up project Strengthening Music in Society (SMS) Strand 3: Entrepreneurship working group (2017–2021). Additional research from Diana Tolmie from Griffith University in Australia is also insightful on this issue. From the beginning of her dissertation abstract: “For the last two decades, ... traditional forms of music employment [have] become more competitive and the portfolio career has returned as an accepted mode of working for musicians” (Tolmie 2017). For a more critical reading of the same see Christina Scharff *Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Work* (2018), especially chapter four.

32 This can be seen as a new kind of combination of the festival’s economic and community-nurturing aspects as described in section 2.3.1.

order to address the new career reality of working musicians, and work against the worst tendencies of this transformed mode of musical production.<sup>33</sup> If it is to be a younger, “next generation” biennale, then a further structural innovation in regards to the biennale could be to actively seek to reduce the precarity of its musicians, further increase its diversity, and address issues surrounding the transformation of labour relations that those being programmed are experiencing.

#### 4.7.4 Heterogeneity as a Meta-Narrative

What can now be examined is the effect that the biennale’s changed understanding of quality has on its artistic outputs and the relationship this is creating with its audience. More so than the biennale’s theme, its emphasis on programming a widely diverse range of productions, its self-understanding as a laboratory for experimentation with the genre of music theatre, and the return of the festival to programming a younger generation of composers and artists were the factors that would come to influence the 2018 biennale and its productions the most. One of the biennale’s stated goals has been to search for alternative ways to create music theatre works, and to present a multitude of different ways that this could be achieved, many of which came from the biennale platforms.

Observation of the biennale’s productions shows however that a break is happening between the moment of commissioning productions and their presentation in the biennale program. Works seem to be having difficulty in scaling up to the level that is expected of them, and seem to be navigating this step of finalizing production in ways that are detrimental to their quality. Having observed and studied the biennale, it will be argued here that this is being caused by a tension within the biennale between the experimental character of the works on the one hand and on the other a latent expectation by both audience and the festival’s own production infrastructure of a certain level of polish, grandeur, and perhaps spectacle that should be associated with productions. This expectation can be traced back to the disciplinary history of operatic opulence related to the operatic genre of music theatre that was the focus of the biennale under Henze and Ruzicka.

Hand in hand with that kind of music theatre production was also an interdisciplinary way of working, with an entire pre-established apparatus existing in order to turn scores into music theatre performances. The advantage of this system being obviously the incredible level of polish and sophistication that can be achieved in relatively little time for productions, its disadvantage is its rigidity: though there is a great deal of flexibility, DOMTS artistic vision was that productions work with

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33 Scharff’s analysis, referenced above, for instance makes clear how such systems tend to disadvantage women and minority groups. See again Scharff 2018, 59ff.



their format as a form of artistic expression. This means that while groups benefited from the expertise of dramaturgs, lighting technicians, etc., ultimately they could not rely on this preestablished system of production in order to make their works.

In place of this interdisciplinary system, many biennale commissions are to genuinely *transdisciplinary* music theatre working groups. This means that their progress towards an end outcome is significantly slower, and the scope much more limited than groups consisting of artists trained in precisely the forms of interdisciplinary collaboration that are necessary to create music theatre work in established ways.

The nature of the commissioned groups was such that the ability of artists to develop together their own *structures* for collaboration, rather than be able to rely on preestablished forms to do so, became most important. Instead of being able to rely on the established structure of for instance the orchestra or ensemble framework in order to have a group of musicians present, part of the work that had to be done by the artists themselves was to *create* their own framework in service of their collective idea.

The tension emerges when it becomes clear that at least when it comes to group members coming from music conservatories, these kinds of “entrepreneurial” competencies are only gradually starting to be taught (and valued) there (see 4.7.3n31). That the average age of the festival’s participants is also tending downwards (see Figure 3) also makes it more difficult for these skills to have been gained in musicians’ professional careers after their formal education has ended. Independently developing collaborative structures together is therefore something that is rather radical and uncommon for most musical practitioners. In addition to this difficulty, the emphasis that the biennale places on creating experimental formats comes at the expense of lay virtuosity, in other words of excellence at a given skill. Because recourse cannot be taken to preestablished routines, they must be established anew. What this means is that creating new, experimental music theatre works in a transdisciplinary team of artists from a variety of backgrounds is a highly fraught enterprise, where, in order to be genuine, no less than everything must be at stake; every presumption must be questioned, defended, discussed.

This also holds true when it comes to communication in a transdisciplinary setting. Different backgrounds mean different definitions of what were thought to be common concepts. Perceptions of what was thought to be the common ground vary and need to be understood differently, or reconciled through the making of new, individual frameworks. This is of course an obvious description of the entire basis of transdisciplinary work—its attractivity being a genuine richness and diversity of perspectives, allowing for experimentation to occur and new, unforeseen paths to be created. However it is also its curse, in that work, in order to happen at all, must happen incredibly slowly.

Transdisciplinary work emphasizes the productivity of deep work and the process of creating-together. An overemphasis on end product, on result, at too early a stage can jeopardize the entire benefit of transdisciplinary work, in that received notions are not questioned, and practitioners fall back on what they already know in order to minimize risk and guarantee a certain level of polish for the deadline.

What this means for the final festival is that productions tend to focus on either one, the presentation of the results of a complex process of transdisciplinary collaboration that can by almost by definition only be preliminary or addressing the (conceptual) debates in the groups, or two, more mature productions by established composers that are also experimenting with the music theatre format. This means that the biennale's productions, because of how they have been programmed and the thematic interests of the directors, have completed a shift away from productions that emphasize lay virtuosity to ones that emphasize a conceptual, political one.

To return to the beginning of this section, the issue comes when works produce a mismatch between their expected and actual levels of mastery and finish. The reasons for this mismatch are many, and include surely the high level of sophistication of the final Ruzicka biennales, but also the expectations of a music theatre public that still largely expects more traditional forms of virtuosic display.

Nevertheless, none of this means that the task is impossible, nor does it mean that there can be no middle ground between these two kinds of virtuosity. Here another term can be borrowed from Shannon Jackson, namely "dedicated amateurism" (Jackson 2012, 18). *Dedicated* because of the emphasis on work and practice that is still so emphasized in CCM, and *amateurism* because of always having to start from zero with each new project, each new constellation of people and places, as in the platforms. Understanding productions as having to balance these tensions, also with an eye to the expectations of their audiences, would go far in order to help better mediate the festival to its critics.

It should be emphasized that much of the problem as it has been presented here is less one with fundamental outcomes, and more one of messaging and mediation. Clearer articulation of the significance of the curatorial concept for the festival to the audience, a communication of the importance of this way of working, and perhaps also a better framing of this struggle between conceptual and skill-based working would go far towards addressing this structural issue with the festival.

### Bubble <3

The example of *Bubble <3*, performed at the 2018 biennale, can be used to illustrate this issue. DOMTS recognize this delicacy of transdisciplinary working processes, often refer to the biennale platforms as laboratories, from which can be interpreted that they want them to be places of shelter from the urgencies of fast-paced pro-

duction work focused on the quick turnaround-time for productions (Ott and Tsangaris 2016, 8–9). What they intend is for them to be protected places where this fundamental work can occur, can germinate, before flowing back into the world at large. This can be seen for instance in how music curator Kung Chi Shing, one of the mentors of the biennale platform in Hong Kong, speaks about the project's outlook:

[An] aspect I really like about this platform and the Munich Biennale idea is that the result is important, but not as important as taking our time. We aren't going to worry about doing a masterpiece, we just want to do a piece to the best of our best abilities, and I like that. (Kung 2017, 54)<sup>34</sup>

Kung puts the most emphasis on the process of establishing a working method together, rather than on the end product, though obviously this is an important aspect as well. The commission which he helped mentor, *Bubble <3*, was itself also a modest work: After assembling in a courtyard, the audience is brought on a series of three short sound walks around the neighbourhood, augmented and “amplified” by many small artistic interventions in the soundscape by the team. These include a lady talking loudly about nude photos into her cellphone (a private matter brought into public, connecting to the biennale's theme), a sheet of scrap metal dragged down the street, a bike with a baseball card in the spokes, an intimate performance of capturing air in plastic bags, static forms by two dancers, and a bottle dripping water strung from a tree. Because the walks take place outside, composed events mix with the surrounding sounds, in a Cagian questioning of their boundaries and what is present-at-hand in a Heideggerian sense, also reminiscent of Tsangaris' *Mauersegler* examined in section 4.5.1. Finally, the group is led to an upstairs apartment, where a performer is being controlled like a puppet by stagehands within a large plastic (filter) bubble. The performance ends with the bubble expanding to slowly press the audience against the sides of the room.

The work was filigree, fine, and breakable. It was exemplary in many ways of the sound art scene in Hong Kong, which often works with small but powerful interventions, often in public space, and a minimal amount of materials (as storage space in the city is prohibitively expensive).<sup>35</sup> It was however also a modest performance—something critics were quick to pick up on. Because it was not properly contextualized as such, and put in grand a framework for what it was, expectation

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34 Note that this author was also responsible for transcribing, editing, and publishing this interview.

35 In response to the question “What are some typical problems of a Hong Kong artist?” Hong Kong artist Jaffa Lam responds that “The cost of renting space here is extremely high, it's a luxury for a Hong Kong artist to be able to rent a space. We always need to consider how to store stuff after the shows are over.” In interview with Patrick Kull. (Bucher, Farnsworth, Kull, Schindhelm 2014, 44).

and performance did not align, resulting in many of the negative reviews of the production. As Kung says, it was not a masterpiece, nor was it intended to be. It was intended to be a presentation of a very fundamental process of research and experimentation together. Such processes produce an enormous surplus of valuable insights and learning, but, like basic research, do not produce themselves much useable end products (as opposed to applied research in the traditional research and development model). It is not that a level of grandeur would have been impossible, but rather that this was not the intention of the artists involved. Producing a work with that level of polish would have required either a working method that was more fixed, meaning that the format would have to be less experimental, or a huge amount more time and resources would have had to be invested, which was not feasible.

The performance of *Bubble* <3 is then best understood as a small bundling of the results of the workshop, a work in progress, not as a magnum opus of epic proportions—its development structure itself was not set up for this. It is in this moment that the biennale's production methodology and the expectations of the festival public diverge: While the methodology insists on an experimentation with format and with conceptual ideas around the issue of music theatre in the process of production, leading to productions that are the presentation of preliminary experimentation, the public still seems to expect the level of finish that comes with a fixed working method and a traditionally-musical approach to virtuosity (what has been referred to as lay virtuosity).

This insight once again returns to the question of how such approaches can be better mediated to their audiences. It also more generally addresses a larger aspect of the biennale, namely that the curatorial focus of DOMTS as directors of the biennale has been on the mediation of productions themselves, which seemingly comes along with a difficulty in mediating these processes of creation to festival audiences.

#### 4.8 The Munich Biennale in Numbers

This section will examine the biennale from a quantitative perspective, considering data from the first 16 editions of the festival, spanning between 1988–2018. Based on data collected from the biennale and processed by the author, this section presents a series of charts and analyses that allow for some central claims of the biennale to be tested, and some unexpected trends to be detected. Furthermore, it allows for certain differences in the management style of DOMTS to be contrasted with those styles of their predecessors.

### 4.8.1 Age of Commissioned Composers at the Biennale

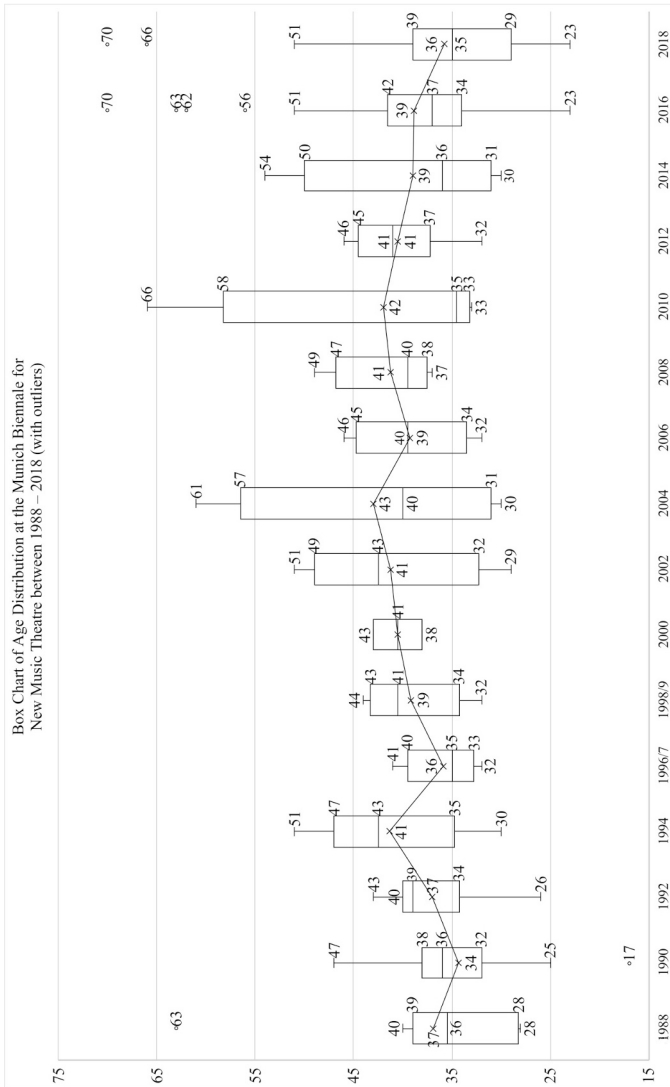
Hans Werner Henze's original ambition was to create a biennial festival where younger composers could receive their first music theatre commissions. The biennale's goal can be seen to change and move away from its original ambition: rather than be a festival that supported the first music theatre compositions by young composers, it increasingly became a platform for more established composers to receive commissions in the genre of music theatre. DOMTS' ambition has been to reverse this trend, and bring the festival back to its roots of being a festival to support the next generation of music theatre composers, claiming that in general that artists for the biennale should not be much older than 35 (Münchener Biennale and Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt München 2018, 31). Statistical analysis of biennale productions can help evaluate these narratives.

In order to do this, Figure 3 uses a box chart to plot how the age of biennale composers has shifted over the thirty years of the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater. Important to consider is that between and including the years 1988–2014, the average was calculated by tallying up the ages of composers of all the works commissioned for the biennale, including puppet theatre works, and smaller music theatre works. For the 2016 and 2018 editions of the biennale, DOMTS shifted to their platform system of developing productions, and to a system of giving commissions mainly to groups rather than to discrete individuals. Therefore, *the ages of all commissioned group members were taken into account here*. This includes not just composers, but also directors, scenographers, and other members of the commissioned groups. Composers and commissioned individuals whose birth years were not available were excluded from the results ( $n = 13$ ).

Looking at Figure 3 supports the interpretation that Henze's biennales started out as targeted at a younger group of composers. The first three years would also see a number of composers under 30, which would only happen again once in 2002, and again in the DOMTS era biennales. While the "transition festivals" in 1996/7 and 1998/9 would largely stay within the trend set by Henze, over the course of Ruzicka's tenure, the mean age of commissioned composers and the age range of the festival both increased drastically. Most festivals during these years seem to have a mean age of around 40, as well as a high range for the third quartile, further suggesting that these years were dominated by older composers, in general.

While the diverging methodology for measuring the mean age of the two DOMTS-era biennales has been addressed already, it is nevertheless interesting to see how it fits in with the other historical data. The first insight that can be drawn from this data is that the two most recent biennales surveyed do seem to be once again lowering the average age, which corresponds with their stated claims to this effect. Furthermore, the youngest commissioned individuals, 23 years old in both cases, as well as a median age of only 35, once again return the biennale

Figure 3: Average Age per biennale edition year 1988 to 2018



to a similar territory as those biennales of Henze. The 2018 biennale for instance has a box that is almost identical to that of the first biennale exactly thirty years prior. Notable as well in these two editions is that because of the low mean and median ages and larger data set, the older generation of composers programmed

at the festival have less effect on the dataset, and are identified as outliers to the core group. Their statistical “outlier” status fits well with DOMTS intention of programming this older generation in order to maintain a relationship to older music theatre practices.<sup>36</sup>

In order to attempt to produce a more approachable overview of changes in mean age across the three directorships, the per director mean can be calculated, which produces a bird’s eye view of the situation:

*Table 1: Average Age of Commissioned Artists (in Years) per Period of Artistic Directorship at the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater*

<b>Director Name (Years as Artistic Director)</b>	<b>Average Age of Commissioned Artists (in Years)</b>
Hans Werner Henze (1988–1994)	36.97
Peter Ruzicka (1996–2014)	40.00
Daniel Ott/Manos Tsangaris (2016–)	37.41

Here once again the same general narrative seems to be confirmed, namely that composers during Ruzicka festivals were in general older than their predecessors during Henze’s tenure. Significant as well is DOMTS direct return to an average age very close to that achieved by Henze, in accordance also with their stated goals.

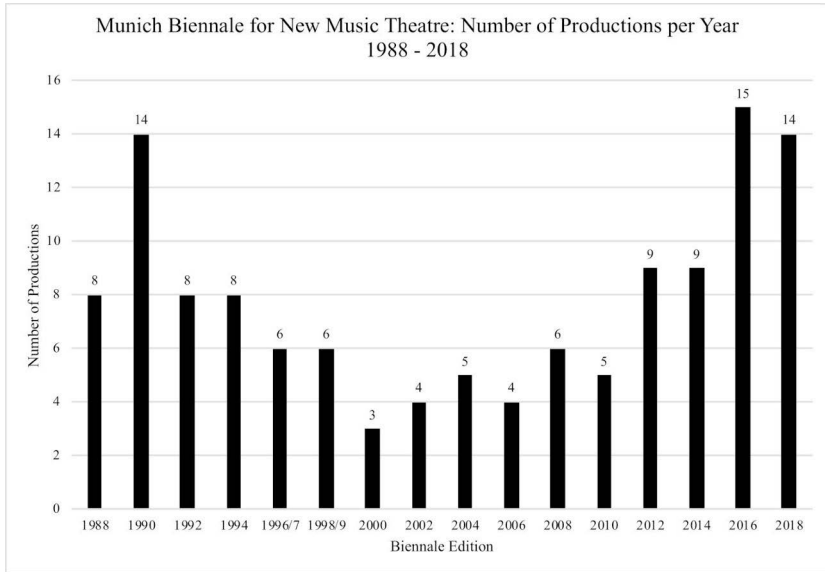
#### 4.8.2 Number of Productions at the Biennale

Another important statistic to look at are the number of productions put on by the biennale per year. The number of productions can be understood as an expression of the size and scope of the biennale. Figure 4 plots the number of productions per year over the course of the biennale, from 1988–2018. Productions are considered to be all those discrete projects listed as commissioned by the biennale for a given year, including also puppet theatre works in the earlier years, and various other experimental formats and smaller projects over the years. This does not then consider the number of performances per production. These would have been lower in the stagione years of the biennale (1996/7 and 1998/9), where productions were only performed around three times each, and higher e.g. in the 2018 edition of the biennale, which adopted a model of higher number of performances for less audience per performance (*Bubble* <3 in 2018 was for instance performed a total of 10 times for small audiences of around 20 people each).

Plotting the number of productions per year in Figure 4, a U-shaped curve is formed, created by a high number of productions in earlier festivals, a trough

36 Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

Figure 4: Munich Biennale for New Music Theater: Number of Productions per Year 1988–2018



around the turn of the millennium and the leadership of Peter Ruzicka, followed by a return to a high number of productions.

Another consideration in studying this chart is the difficulty in counting what precisely should be considered a biennale production over time, particularly in historical biennales before 2016. The decision was made during the evaluation of the data to count all productions equally, despite some of them being very small. Two enormous music theatre works vs. 10 mini works would look the same here. A comparison would have been possible, e.g. by comparing the inflation-adjusted budgets of each production, along with perhaps the total audience capacity offered, however accessing this data would have gone beyond the scope of this particular study. This was decided in order to not have to make subjective decisions regarding how to differentiate between large and small productions in the many edge cases. For instance, for the 2016 biennale, the very small production of *Sez Ner*, which was a book reading double-billed with *Pub-Reklamen* was counted, despite its small scale.

Examining the graph, another similarity between Henze's earlier biennales and those of DOMTS becomes visible. Earlier biennales had a large number of productions, with the second edition in 1990 having a total of 14. This would mark a peak that would only descend in the years afterwards, to a low of just 2 productions

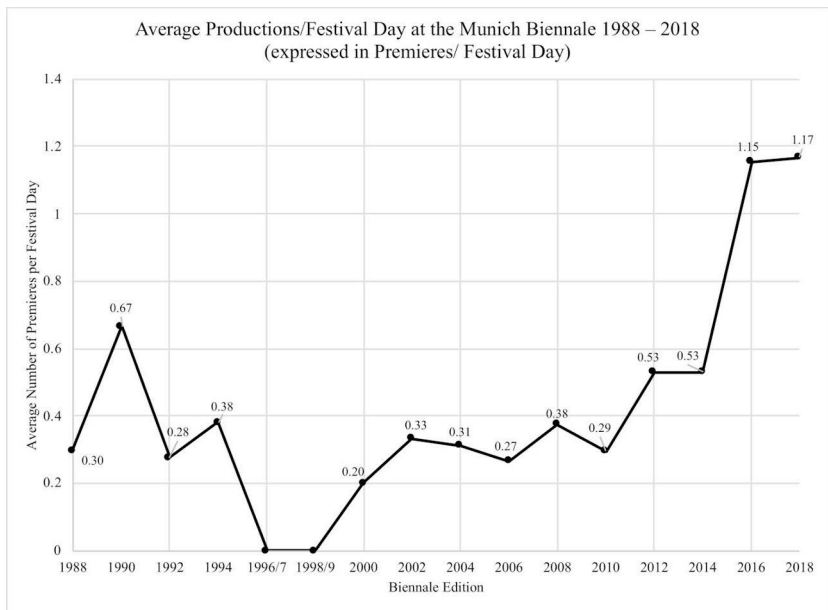


in 2000. After the transition to DOMTS' leadership of the festival, the number of productions shot up again sharply, and in the biennale's 15<sup>th</sup> edition in 2016, managed to just top its previous record by organizing a total of 15 productions. This was followed up by 14 productions in 2018—the same as its previous all-time high.

### 4.8.3 Concentration of Productions at the Biennale

The data in Figure 4 can be combined with the duration of each festival in order to calculate their respective densities. This is interesting for understanding the extent to which each festival offered a spatio-temporal concentration of music theatre works. Comparing the number of days between the first and last performances of the festival (its effective length) to the number of productions commissioned per year allows for a rough way of comparing the relative densities (premieres/day) of the festivals. This comparison can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Average Productions/Festival Day at the Munich Biennale 1988–2018



Note that in Figure 5, the 1996/7 and 1998/9 festivals were set to a duration of 0 because of their stagione system, wherein they had three and two periods of performances respectively over the course of the two years' time, which cannot be considered a festival in the same sense. Note as well that this does not consider the number of performances/day, which once again would certainly be substantially

higher during DOMTS' tenure, particularly in the 2018 edition, when they decided in favour of a large number of performances for very small audiences, due to the biennale's theme ("private matters"). The difficulty in assessing size of performances vs. number of productions is why this metric of productions/festival duration has been chosen here instead.

What Figure 5 shows is that the festival density has never been higher than in the past two festival editions. This has principally been achieved by reducing the duration of the biennale under DOMTS' leadership. The past two editions have lasted 13 and 12 days respectively, making them the shortest so far. Daniel Ott has said in interview that one of the goals of DOMTS has been to attempt to return the biennale to the festival character of earlier Henze biennales. While he mentions the "legendary" parties of the Henze era, he also mentioned returning to a concentration of the festival to a narrower period of time.<sup>37</sup> Looking at the graph above, this goal has clearly been reached, even going far beyond the density of the Henze-era biennales. The 2018 edition has a production/day density of 1.17, which comes close to doubling that of Henze's most dense biennale in 1990, with a value of 0.67. Notably, any density by this metric that is  $\geq 1$  means that there is at least one premiere happening on each day of the festival.

One way that DOMTS have achieved this density is through avoiding the reuse of performance venues. The two most-used theatres during the previous two directors were the Carl-Orff-Saal and the Muffathalle in that order, and were used for multiple productions per edition. In the 2016 edition, these two locations were used for only two productions each, reducing the amount of dark days that were needed in the festival programming. This in part is what allowed the directors to pack their 15 productions into just 13 festival days. The strategy in the 2018 edition was more drastic; the directors did not reuse any venues, which allowed them to present 14 productions in just 12 days.

#### 4.8.4 Gender of Commissioned Individuals at the Biennale

Examining biennale productions since 1988 in their entirety allows for an analysis also of gender equality at the biennale to be examined. The following charts compare the proportions of commissions given by the biennale as divided by gender (separated into male, female, and non-binary). Note that demographic categorizations have been made based only on the limited publicly available information available at the time of compilation of the data, and as such raise the risk of misgendering participants. Effort has been made to avoid this, and the author welcomes all corrections. Between 1988–2014, the charts reflect the demographics of commissioned composers of biennale works. As of 2016, as in the analysis of age

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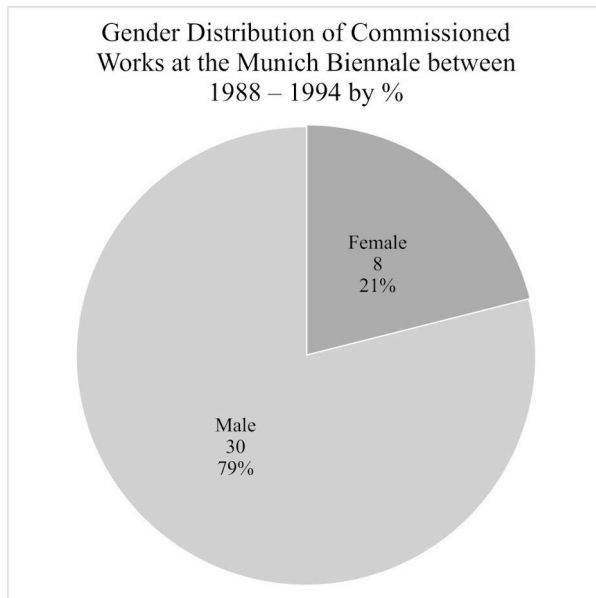
37 Daniel Ott in conversation with the author, 28 October, 2017.

(section 4.8.1), all commissioned group members have been counted towards the statistics.

What these charts show is more than just a distribution of gender statistics. Rather, it can be understood as a proxy for the extent to which this biennale is addressing issues of structural exclusion of minority groups. It is unfortunately the case that CCM has a longstanding and deeply-engrained problem with being a largely male-dominated field, particularly when it comes to composers or other author figures. The prototypical “male genius” unfortunately still carries too much currency in the field, and is an issue that only recently has slowly begun to be addressed and called into question (by groups such as Gender Relations in New Music).

Under Henze’s leadership, the biennale’s commissions were largely male-dominated, with only 8 commissions going to women over the period between 1988–1994, as can be seen in Figure 6.

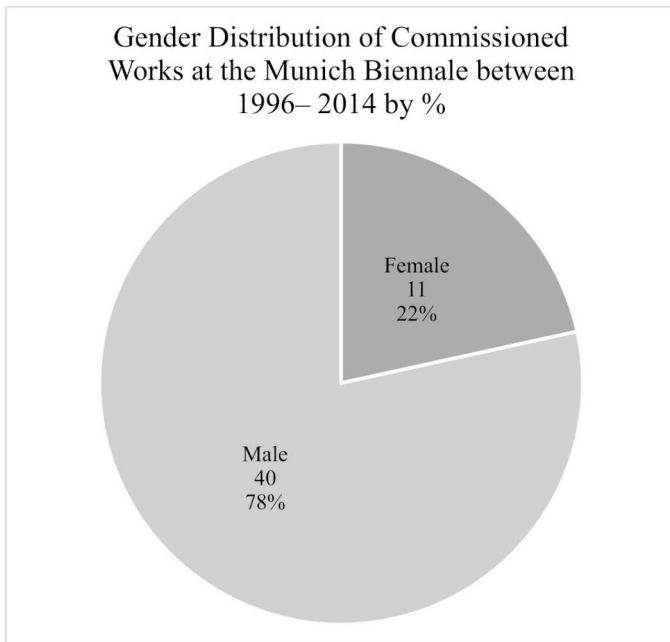
*Figure 6: Gender Distribution of Commissioned Works at the Munich Biennale between 1988–1999 by %*



With the transition to Ruzicka’s leadership of the biennale, between 1996–2014, Figure 7 shows that only 11 women received commissions, representing a slightly higher proportion of commissions, though still vastly outnumbered by their male colleagues. Notable about these two graphs is that they both reflect the roughly

80/20 gender split as calculated by Gender Relations in New Music across several other festivals, for instance Maerzmusik (between 2002–2017, 77.42% male, as of 2018, 47.63%), or the Donaueschinger Musiktage (between 1981–2017, 86.73% male) (Gender Relations in New Music n.d.-b).

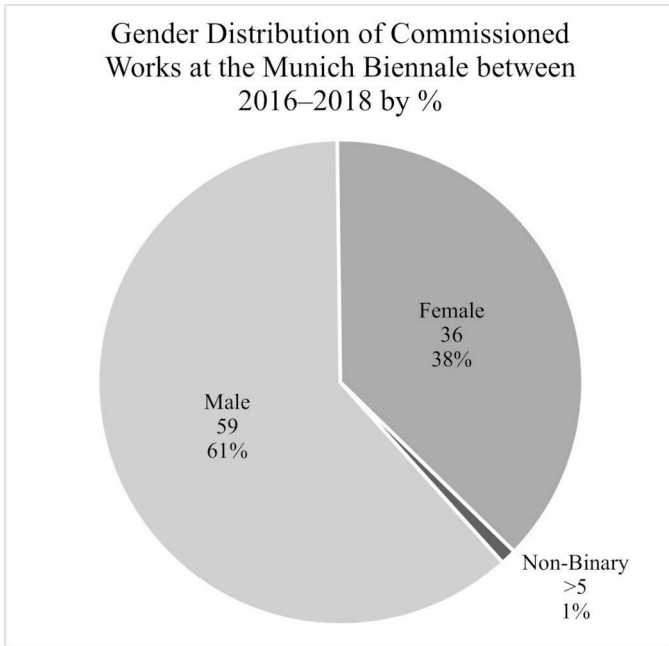
*Figure 7: Gender Distribution of Commissioned Works at the Munich Biennale between 1996–2014 by %*



With the DOMTS biennale, the number of non-male identifying people commissioned almost doubles, while nevertheless leaving much room for improvement (Figure 8). One hypothesis for this sudden change is that the festival's change towards commissioning multi-person teams to create productions meant that all members of the commissioned teams were counted towards the total, including perhaps people who have not historically been counted as musical authors. DOMTS also placed emphasis on making interdisciplinary teams with practitioners from a variety of backgrounds. It could be argued that issues of gender discrimination are to an extent less prevalent in other fields (or even reverse discriminatory) and therefore raise the percentage of women and non-binary people.

While this change in the commissioning and therefore counting system means that a direct statistical comparison is not possible, it could be argued that from

*Figure 8: Gender Distribution of Commissioned Works at the Munich Biennale between 2016–2018 by %*



a functional diversity standpoint, because DOMTS' demographical statistics skew closer to equality, their platform system is successfully producing more outcomes that are assigning authorship to women and gender non-binary people, despite no explicit goal to do so being set by the organizers themselves.

#### 4.8.5 Number of Co-Producers of Biennale Productions

The biennale has always taken the form of a festival of premieres, presenting with very few exceptions only new works. This comes out of its stated goal of supporting the development of music theatre repertoire over the years—this can only be done effectively however if the works are also presented somewhere else. Furthermore, as new commissions are investments, co-productions are also strategic in regards to cost-sharing. Apart from this first goal of offering a laboratory for young composers, Henze saw the festival also as a place for the promotion of the genre of music theatre in the German operagoing public. According Peter Ruzicka, fewer than 3% of new operas are performed again after their first production, in what

Tsangaris has called a problematic *Uraufführungsgesellschaft* (premiere-based culture) (Ruzicka 2014, 9; Brotbeck 2016, 17).<sup>38</sup> This low amount of new productions of new operas makes their entry into the repertoire much more difficult, which proponents such as Ruzicka argue over time creates a vicious circle wherein less exposure to the genre leads to audiences to appreciate it less, making opera houses program less new operas, leading to less exposure.

If a second goal of the biennale has been increased public exposure (and thus hopefully acceptance) of contemporary opera, then not just supporting new works, but also taking responsibility for their life after the premiere is essential. This problem has been addressed through a strategy of co-financing of productions together with other opera houses. This allows not only for the festival to share and therefore reduce its own costs, but also means that its productions would have at least one more opportunity to be performed on another stage somewhere else after their premiere.

This helped the works reach a larger audience, and increased the chances that they would be picked up for further performances or stagings. The result of this was that roughly fifty percent of works during Ruzicka's tenure were staged at least one more time after their premieres, and several pieces would receive subsequent productions, and prove to be influential in the development of the genre and composers' careers (Ruzicka 2014, 9). This can be seen for instance in the effect that both productions in the 2000 edition of the festival, *Angelus Novus* by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, and *Prima... Ins Innere* by Chaya Czernowin, had on their composers and their careers.

An emphasis on the importance of co-productions is continued under the directorship of DOMTS. In an interview before the duo's first edition in 2016, Daniel Ott writes that they have continued the emphasis the importance of co-productions for the festival, attempting to perform all works at least four times in Munich, and four times on another stage somewhere else (Brotbeck 2016, 17). Now having access to the data for two of their festivals, this emphasis on co-productions can be put to the test.

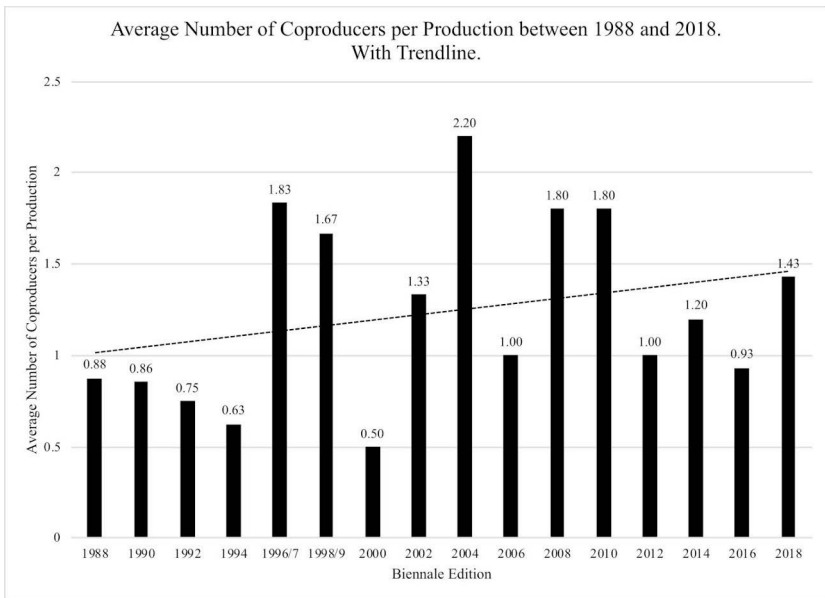
In order to compare the number of co-producers across the three directorship periods, what has been counted are the average number of co-producers per production per year of the festival. This metric was chosen because it allows for comparison independent of the number of productions per year. Plotting this looks as follows:

Ruzicka took over the administration of the biennale as of the 1996/7 festival. In this year there is also a spike in the number of co-producers per production, increasing just shy of threefold to 1.83 from 0.63 the year before. Notably, Ruzicka's

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38 NB Ruzicka himself does not provide a source for this statistic.

Figure 9: Average Number of Co-Producers per Production between 1988 and 2018



2004 edition would prove to have the largest number of co-producers so far, averaging at 2.2 per production. These high numbers show that Ruzicka put an emphasis on finding co-producers.

Comparing this to co-productions under DOMTS, their first two editions have roughly the same number of co-producers as the two last years of Ruzicka's tenure, though they have an upwards trajectory: by their second edition, they managed to bring in approximately 1.43 co-producers per production.

What is not shown here are *who* are working as co-producers to the biennale's productions. In interview with Manos Tsangaris, he mentions that in a conversation he had with Daniel Ott and Peter Ruzicka in 2013 during the festival transition, that the latter had mentioned that if he were to do something different, he would work less with opera house, which often predetermine very strongly the format that productions can take.<sup>39</sup> This is seen in the list of co-producers of Ruzicka's productions (omitted here, but visible in the appendix), which includes many state theatres and opera houses (for instance the Staatstheater Stuttgart, the Alte Oper Frankfurt, or the Bayerische Staatsoper). Looking at the co-producers of DOMTS'

39 Manos Tsangaris, interview by the author, Berlin, 03 May, 2017.

productions, while there are still opera houses (like the Deutsche Oper, or the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, however both via their “experimental” spaces, the Tischlerei and the Neue Werkstatt), there are also an increased number of co-productions with independent arts project spaces (Lothringer13 in Munich, Gare du Nord in Basel, Villa Waldberta near Munich) and art institutions (Kolumba in Cologne, Onassis Cultural Center in Athens). This can be interpreted as evidence of a shift away from the stringent form needed for opera productions and towards the more experimental music theatre approach taken by DOMTS with their productions.

As mentioned earlier, the diagnosed premiere-based culture, where there is a large emphasis placed on the presentation of new works, presents a difficulty for new operas to make it into the opera repertoire, which in turn reinforces the well-ensconced repertoire even more. However, while there are some works that would benefit from being restaged on opera stages (inasmuch as this is at all possible), for the most part the productions under DOMTS fit more into an independent music theatre genre, or a performative approach to music theatre (see Rebstock 2017).

What this means is that the success metrics for the biennale must be re-examined, as the work-concept itself has shifted. For many of the performances commissioned by the current biennale, the highest level of success is not the successful integration of the work into the operatic canon. This is because works are often much more site-specific and process-oriented, and thus cannot be well-transported to other venues without the work itself fundamentally changing.

Nevertheless, it seems that the concept of “success” in terms of a biennale production’s afterlife (what used to be canonization in the repertoire), as well as the sensitization of the German theatregoing public towards music theatre are both categories that would need to be re-examined. In light of the changing nature of biennale productions, the co-production metric shifts from being an indicator of the likelihood that a performance will be made a part of the repertoire into a possibility that the commissioned artists will be invited to make subsequent commissions within the specific frameworks of projects connected to those other institutions, such as the restaging of *regno della musica* at ECLAT in Stuttgart where it presented the culmination of its open rehearsal process in Munich. This shift can be attributed to the increasing importance of site-specificity to these artistic works, which limits their dissemination across so many identical theatres, and disrupts the concept of the theatre “work” which is tailored to fit into it.



## 4.9 Conclusion

I was interested in the working methodology of the curator (which was: the artist is the work. Invite them and they will make/or not make) and, within this, the working process of the artists... Perhaps you have some idea about what is possible from each artist – but this is not a stable ground. I was not interested in making what is known or expected or predictable. (Tiravanija 1995, 91)

The continuation of a history of New Music informed the approaches to leadership of both Henze and Ruzicka after him, in their respective ways. Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris, while still doing the same, have decided that adherence to this one specific tradition of music making would be a missed opportunity to explore the wealth of ways that music theatre can take place. Their approach has been one that emphasizes a diversity, a heterogeneity, of practices and formats of music theatre, seemingly understanding New Music as a tradition that is, as is apparent in its very name, something open and attempting to foster unforeseeable change.

Both of their artistic practices are concerned with the *composition* of the event of performance. They both coordinate many different performers in order to realize the specific situations that they have in mind. At the biennale, this concern with the composition of the event takes is directed at the *conception* and planning of the biennale. This is seen in how they manage the platforms, as well as their work commissioning other artists outside of this system to appear at the biennale, and taking care that these all work together in a coherent whole across a variety of venues during the festival week, etc.

What is happening here is a transfer of their *creative and artistic skills*, that used to be focused on composing immersive music theatre events to the *management* of the festival. This intermingling of creativity and festival management is an extension of their already-established artistic practices composing immersive events. What is new is that these skills are now no longer only focused on the event, but extend to also attempt to manage the financial, managerial, and administrative aspects of realizing the event.

Rather than separate out artistic and organizational practices, as was the case with the two former directors, the creation and running of the biennale platforms means that the artistic practices of DOMTS are directly tied to the success of the biennale. They have to manage relationships, give advice, and nurture productions until they are ready to be shown, a deeply affective, creative task, now coupled with an entirely new added dimension of being in charge of all these works' contextualization, the management structures that will help realize them, the funding structures that will pay them, and the co-productions that will help these artists fund their next project.

This is the juncture where this form of artistic production can be labeled as a curatorial practice, in that, as has been shown, a curatorial practice is one that works across a diverse set of stakeholders in order to establish both an artistic message and its specific contextualization, aspiring to create a coherent public event that aspires to take a position on contemporary reality.<sup>40</sup>

The integration of administrative responsibilities, and the expansion of the composer's task to include not just "non-musical material" but the management of the entirety of stakeholders contributing to the performance, is additionally significant because it is recursively also something that each individual project needs to navigate as well. While heterogeneous, biennale commissions share in common their need to reckon with the specificity of their own mediation.

This focus of artistic production on mediation can itself in turn be understood by looking at the changed societal status of immaterial labour (for which the performative arts are the poster child) under the regime of cognitive capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The project of artistic critique having become integrated as a cornerstone of the new economy, what disappears is the self-evidency of its message. As Chiapello argues, the concept of critique is still valid (understood in the sense of not wanting to be governed "like that," after Foucault), but with the additional caveat added that artistic practice must now also navigate the pitfalls of being instrumentalized by the entertainment industry (see Chiapello 2012, 51; also see section 2.4.3). This "navigating pitfalls" is nothing more than the need for artistic practice to also be acutely aware of the specific realities of its mediation, and its deployment within a given constellation of interests and stakeholders.

Thinking in these terms about both the biennale's organization by DOMTS, as well as the productions that it is developing, makes it possible to better understand the consequences of the biennale moving in its current direction. While what DOMTS have done is open up music theatre practice to the ambivalences between contribution to the experience economy and revitalizing a critical project in musical practice, this has been necessary because it allows for the *potential* for music theatre works to insist on their criticality at all. This means that in the best cases, there remains proximity to the cultural industry, but also a marked differentiation through the insistence on the production of genuinely critical, counter-hegemonic knowledge. Whether this occurs does not follow a general rule, except for that it needs to happen on a case by case basis, in coordination with the stakeholders that one is working with.

DOMTS are reacting to the difficulty with which New Music is currently able to respond to important political, social, technological changes in society. This is clear at the latest when they claim in the opening statement to their 2018 biennale that finding music theatre works that deal with the issue of privacy would have

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40 See here also Raqs Media Collective's definition of curatorial responsibility in section 2.5.2.

to be done with a magnifying glass (Münchener Biennale et al. 2018, 9). They are acting against that situation, and in that way are producing a critical practice that seems to be, at least partially, successfully navigating the situation in order to do this. Despite their occasional shortcomings, the productions at the biennale have achieved a level of ingenuity that is infusing the space with a newfound energy.

This energy is the result of DOMTS' curatorial practice fostering musical performances that have regained the possibility for artistic critique by being able to determine their own mediation. The fact that they are working like this is in turn a development of their respective compositional practices that have shifted to focus on composing infrastructures and interpersonal relations in the name of increased societal relevance of musical practice.

## 5 Maerzmusik: Festival für Zeitfragen

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### 5.1 Introduction

On the occasion of the first Berliner Festwochen in 1951, Ernst Reuter, the mayor of West Berlin, asked:

Given all that has occurred, should one really be celebrating festivals in a time when such anguished times weigh so heavily on our community and on individuals? The answer is yes, also Festspiele are important and belong in the life of our city of Berlin. For a person [*Mensch*] needs more than bread and physical nourishment. They also need to relax and indulge [*ergehen*] themselves.<sup>1</sup> (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 2; translation added)

As frivolous as relaxation and indulgence may sound, Reuter hones in on the importance and power of the festival format in this speech. In 1951, a divided Germany and Berlin were just beginning their long journey towards reconstruction after the total devastation of WWII. Reuter's West Berlin had by that time already been isolated from the rest of the Federal Republic of Germany and began its time as a political enclave within the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Thus the first Berliner Festwochen were more than just an opportunity for heady fun; in a time of turmoil, they gave an identity and (re)affirmed the values of the newly-formed Federal Republic.

As has been outlined in earlier chapters, the festival, and its origins in the pre-modern fest, are an ideal and established societal strategy for doing just this. They are moments that suspend the everyday (and by extension the brutal drudgery of reconstruction), and create a temporary state of exceptionality, using this to reaffirm community values, and ensure the stability and continuity of that community (see section 2.2).

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1 "Ziemt es denn, so könnte man fragen, Feste zu feiern, wenn die Not der Zeit so unmittelbar auf einer Gemeinschaft und auf den einzelnen lastet? Die Antwort darauf ist ja, auch Festspiele sind nötig und gehören in das Leben unserer Stadt Berlin. Denn der Mensch braucht zum Leben nicht nur Brot und körperliche Nahrung. Er will auch einmal sich entspannen und sich ergehen."

In this sense, the Berliner Festwochen has played an important role in the spiritual and intellectual public debates within West Germany during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As opposed to affirming itself as legitimate per se due to its high art status, the festival has proven a canny and receptive partner to German society during this time, helping to define the major role that theatre plays in German society today (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 122). While this is true for West Germany, it holds as well for both the reunified Germany post-1990, as well as by extension its reunified capital of Berlin.

While having its origins on the other side of the Berlin Wall, the history of the Maerzmusik festival would be closely intertwined with the Berliner Festwochen in many ways. The Maerzmusik festival itself, originally under the title Musik-Biennale Berlin, began as a means for extolling the excellence of socialist composition styles from both the German Democratic Republic as well as across the communist states, while still remaining an important site of contact between composers in divided Germany. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the festival continued without interruption and largely as originally planned in 1991, becoming part of a concerted effort by the new Federal Republic to promote cohesion through culture, being integrated as part of this into the framework of the Berliner Festspiele, and therefore alongside the Berliner Festwochen. Over the course of the 1990s under the leadership of Heike Hoffmann, the festival would concentrate on stitching back together a common history of German musical development on both sides of the border, as if trying to suture a wound. Its approach to addressing this historical trauma would prove to also be typical of the leadership strategies common to the New Music community; the festival would show a persistent unwillingness to question the core presumptions of the systems that sustained it. This feature characteristic of music festivals is brought into relief in this chapter through an explosion in such approaches in the leadership of visual arts festivals during the same time period.

With the beginning of the tenure of Matthias Osterwold in 2002, the festival would change from a biennial to an annual rhythm. It would also demonstrate a new post-modernist plurality in its programming choices, expanding to embrace a plurality of musical practices, from electronic music to sound installations to concerts, and including also an explicit interest in programming contemporary classical music (CCM) from around the world.

The festival has been selected however not because of these features, but rather because of the change that it experienced under the directorship of Berno Odo Polzer as of 2015. He would give the festival the subtitle “Festival for Time Issues,” and dedicate it to the exploration through musical practice of this theme. Polzer displays an uncommon willingness to involve himself in the dramaturgy of individual concerts, even calling them for a time “composed evenings,” implying him as the composer of the concerts themselves. His choices of artist, as well as his pro-

gramming of many non-musical artists, together with this careful concert design, all point to Polzer asserting a much greater degree of subjective authorship over the festival as a whole. With this would also come an organizational shift wherein the festival is driven by its pursuit of understanding its theme and central questions, which then imply the programming of certain people and formats.

Maerzmusik becomes about an exploration of ideas through the vehicle of the concert, planned and conceived by its director. Subsuming so much power and authority into the festival's artistic director, and attaching to this a desire to deal with socially-urgent topics has few examples in the field of music, but does bear similarities to developments in the field of curating in the visual arts. In that field, the iconic figure of Harald Szeemann stands out as a classic early example of how singular authorship and a shift to conceptually-driven programming work together. It also gives the necessary historical dimensions to be able to call Polzer's work curatorial. The criticisms of Szeemann also make it possible to pre-empt tensions in the field of music going forward, as younger practitioners are increasingly working in the same conceptual space as Polzer, focusing on site-specificity and controlling the mediation and ideas of their work, in a similar way to how Szeemann was an early example of the tensions surrounding the exhibition format at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Polzer did not however copy his playbook directly from Harald Szeemann, rather the conceptual similarity of their approaches is brought about through two very different practical approaches to leading arts events, both resulting from the specificities of their individual disciplines and historical moments. While much of the conceptual thinking around these two kind of arts leadership practice are similar, Polzer's approach has to be analyzed on the basis of the concerts that he has so far organized. His practice is thus curatorial, but informed by the discipline in which it works, music, meaning that his practice can be tentatively labeled music curating.

This specificity is presented by looking at specific concerts by the music curator, including the 2017 opening concert featuring works by Julius Eastman, and "Storytelling for Earthly Survival," a so-called composed evening exploring the philosophy of Donna Haraway.

The 2017 opening concert was a loose reenactment of a recorded concert by Eastman at Northwestern in 1980. The festival's engagement with Eastman also included a collaboration with an arts space that would include further events, as well as a research initiative that would culminate at the 2018 festival, where the composer was featured again. These efforts were all part of a strategy for addressing the composer's work in a way that both put it within its historical context, as well as sought to make it relevant to contemporary listeners. The multi-faceted, sustained engagement with the composer, while simultaneously presenting his work

in a framing that made it relevant to contemporary ears, were a significant curatorial feat for the artistic director.

The second concert, “Storytelling for Earthly Survival,” consisted, among other aspects, of a screening of a documentary on Donna Haraway, as well as readings related to her work, a performance by Alvin Lucier, and a documentary on artists inspired by Haraway’s writing. The lack of traditionally musical performances makes it difficult to call it a concert, and Polzer himself refers to it instead as one of his “composed evenings.” This is also notable in that the evening presented a large amount of material from a variety of artistic backgrounds, raising the question of its relationship to a music festival. The answer is in Polzer’s characterization of the evening as “composed,” in that he uses his musical sensibility to juxtapose heterogeneous materials into a composed whole. While the individual parts may not be explicitly musical, save for Lucier’s performance, it is argued that Polzer creates an event based on a musical, compositional logic, but that is not explicitly related to only specifically sounds. In this way, the composed evening is shown to be an important building block of Polzer’s approach, in that his approach to programming the music festival is focused more on creating a specific experience in time than on putting together individual musical works.

## 5.2 A Brief Prehistory to the Maerzmusik Festival

### 5.2.1 The Berliner Festspiele

While the Berliner Festwochen would themselves run yearly from 1951 up until 2003, the institution itself would expand and contract repeatedly over the years of its operation until taking on the shape it does today under its current name, the Berliner Festspiele. The following section will briefly detail this genealogy in order to be able to best contextualize the institutional landscape in which the current Maerzmusik festival takes place, the ultimate subject of this chapter.

In 1967, the original Berliner Festwochen would go on to found Berliner Festspiele GmbH (note the plural of Festspiel), expanding to include three other festivals with which it had been associated over its history, while continuing the Festwochen under the same name. These were the Filmfestspiele (later known as the Berlinale), which had also taken place for the first time in 1951, the Theatertreffen, founded in 1964 and known then as the Berliner Theaterwettbewerb, and the Berliner Jazztage, originally a part of the Berliner Festwochen in 1964 with a thematic focus on Africa, and later spun out into its own festival (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 32–36).

As of 1990, the Berliner Festspiele GmbH took over trusteeship of the festival known then as the Musik-Biennale Berlin (note the Italian spelling, once again in

reference to Venice) following the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic (Berliner Festspiele 1998, 106). As of its 2002 edition, this festival would be renamed to Maerzmusik Berlin, and take place annually rather than biennially. This will be discussed more in the next section. In 2001, the Berliner Festspiele finally moved into a new, permanent home, taking over the former Theater der Freien Volksbühne, a modernist theatre built in 1963 in West Berlin (Berliner Festspiele 2011a). The new building would be the site for many, but not all, activities of the Berliner Festspiele, including the Theatertreffen, and the Maerzmusik festival.

Beginning in 2001, and finalized in 2002, the Berliner Festspiele was formally reorganized into a new organization, Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin (KBB) (Federal cultural events in Berlin). This saw a fusion with the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures), and the Berliner Festspiele assuming responsibility for the Gropiusbau building as well. This new organization transitioned ownership of these institutions from the state of Berlin to the federal government, with the latter as its sole shareholder. Joachim Sartorius would lead this new Berliner Festspiele as of 2001 until 2011, with Thomas Oberender taking over in 2012.

Under Sartorius' directorship, a number of festivals and series were initiated, though not all continue on until today. Perhaps most notably, the Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (Berlinale) separated itself in 2002 from this new joint organization to become independent. The Berliner Festwochen, with their traditional focus on mainly classical music, would continue under his leadership as of 2005 under the new title of Musikfest Berlin (Berliner Festspiele 2011b, inside rear cover).

The Berliner Festspiele today consists of what it on its website considers to be eight discrete areas. The first is the Gropiusbau, added, as mentioned, in 2001, and a site mainly for archaeological, historical, and contemporary art exhibitions. Second are a series of federal competitions such as Theatertreffen der Jugend, meant to promote the next generation of cultural producers in various strategic areas. Third and newest is the Immersion Program, a series of events both in the venues of the Berliner Festspiele, as well as in other venues around Berlin, dealing with installative and immersive art experiences, and addressing issues of digitalization in society. Fourth is Jazzfest Berlin, which still takes places yearly both at the Festspielhaus and in other venues in the city. Fifth is Maerzmusik, which will be addressed in greater depth later. Sixth is Musikfest Berlin, the continuation of the original Berliner Festwochen. Seventh is the Theatertreffen, which invites theatre productions from all over the world (but mainly from the German-speaking countries) to present during the festival every summer. Finally, eighth is made up of the various formats in its Immersion program, started in 2016. (Berliner Festspiele n.d.–a)



### 5.2.2 Musik-Biennale Berlin

The current-day Maerzmusik festival can be said to have its furthest origins in the Musik-Biennale Berlin, an international music festival organized by the German Democratic Republic. It was founded in 1967 already bearing the biennale title that would imply its continuation, and was a continuation and expansion of the 1965 Festtage zeitgenössischer Musik which took place in 1965 also in Berlin (Archiv Verband der Komponisten, File 347). Until the collapse of the GDR, the Biennale would be run and managed by a committee from the Verband der Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler der DDR (Association of the composers and musicologists of the GDR) (*ibid.*).

Without overstating elements of continuity between the GDR-era festival and today, it is nevertheless interesting to observe the way in which some of the same aspects of music festivals in general are maintained, and even some latent components still acting on the current editions of the Maerzmusik festival.

#### Concept of the GDR-Era Biennale

According to a folio produced by the organization entitled “Information über Konzeption und Vorbereitung der Musik-Biennale Berlin vom 4. bis 12. März 1967” (Information regarding conception and preparation of the music biennale Berlin from 4 to 12 March 1967), the Biennale strove to be a recurring festival with international reach, as well as one that differentiated itself from similar festivals in the West through its emphasis on the promotion of a socialist musical agenda (Archiv Verband der Komponisten, File 347). This was understood to be the biennale’s main point of distinction to other festivals happening both within socialist countries, naming specifically Warsaw Autumn and Biennale Zagreb, as well as those major festivals in West Germany, Donaueschingen and Darmstadt (*ibid.*). The goal was to achieve an overview of current musical trends happening internationally across a variety of genres, including music theatre, symphonic works, chamber music, but also now more dated formats like political lieder.

#### Internationality

The Musik-Biennale Berlin emphasized the importance of its internationality as one of its main attractions. While the goal was naturally to bring together the best works of composers from socialist countries, an explicit goal was also the programming of certain works from capitalist countries, including West Germany.

Returning briefly to the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London as a comparison, that grand event sought to bring its Victorian-era citizens the finest gems (quite literally) from British colonies and trading partners around the globe. So too though did the Musik-Biennale search for the greatest “compositional gems” from (mostly)

among the socialist countries, in order to bring them back to Berlin and present an *overview* of developments from across the world of musical composition.

Common to both is the tendency for their concept of the “world” that the festival implies in its internationality to be strongly informed by their respective historical and ideological realities: The 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition featured an Indian diamond taken under conspicuous circumstances from that colony as one of its major attractions, a chance to see the spoils of that country’s colonial legacy so entwined with British history. Similarly, the internationality of the Musik-Biennale for instance in 1967 focused on works by composers from the GDR, USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Hungary, and Yugoslavia—the countries that made up the “international” of the socialist worldview. However, the Musik-Biennale also presented from West Germany, Brazil, England, Italy, Mexico, and the USA, meaning that the ideological agenda of the festival was not enforced through exclusion from programming alone (though this took place as well), but rather through a mechanism of juxtaposition.

Therefore, though taking place ideologically within a socialist country, and funded by the state, it is remarkable to observe the festival’s relationship to internationality fitting right in with how it has been discussed in Chapter 1, namely as an affirmation of self through the presentation of self in relation to others. Here as earlier, the internationality of a festival does not just include those closest strategic partners, rather it also seeks to define oneself in relief to one’s neighbours and ideological opponents, in particular West Germany. In this way, internationality and plurality become a paradoxical means for nationalism in the deployment of the festival format.

### March Music

The first Musik-Biennale Berlin took place between 4 and 12 March, 1967 (Archiv Verband der Komponisten, File 347). Over the course of the biennale’s run during the GDR, it would thereafter generally take place over the last two weekends in February. The festival normally ran for 10 days—beginning on a Friday night, continuing through the following week, and presenting a final concert on the following Sunday night (*ibid.*).

After the fall of the wall, and the festival’s subsumption into the Berliner Festspiele as of 1990, it would shift slightly later, and settle on mid-March (but until 2002 still be branded as the Musik-Biennale Berlin), maintaining generally the same 10-day length. Ten days in the middle of March would thus become the usual length of the festival that has been maintained ever since, and which has now been formalized in the title, Maerzmusik (lit. March music).

### 5.2.3 Historical Trauma and the Post-Reunification Musik-Biennale Berlin

Heike Hoffmann would take over leadership of the Musik-Biennale as of its first edition in 1991 in a post-reunification Germany. She would then go on to lead the festival for the next decade, until finally handing it over to Matthias Osterwold as of the 2002 edition (this being also the moment of its name change to “Maerzmusik” and its shift to a yearly rhythm). On the occasion of her final festival in 2001, she reflects in her introductory text on her programming strategies, writing that in the past decade, the music biennale has focused on mostly one topic, the processing of 40 years of separated music history in East and West (Hoffmann 2001, 7). This was realized by Hoffmann and others mainly via programming choices, and attempting to present important composers and works from both sides of the formerly-divided country.

The first biennale post-reunification, its 13<sup>th</sup> edition, would take place between 14 and 24 February, 1991. In the festival’s introduction by then-director of the Berliner Festspiele, Ulrich Eckhardt, he frames it strongly within the context of these struggles (also cultural) of a newly-reunited city, positioning the biennale as an opportunity to write a new, unified history of the 40 years of musical development on either side of the wall as a precursor and foundation for a new German society (Eckhardt 1991, 3). Significant here is both the focus on understanding how the two divergent musical canons could be unified, as well as an intense focus on the split past. Of note is also the branding continuity of the biennale, naming it the city’s 13<sup>th</sup>, despite this drastic change. In terms of programming, the 13<sup>th</sup> biennale edition would mix important works and composers from both former East and West in various combinations. Much of the planning having already been completed by the Verband Deutscher Komponisten, it would be as of the 1993 edition of the festival that its programming would change more significantly to reflect its newfound position.

Between 1993 and 1999, so between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> editions of the biennale, the attempt at rewriting a unified German music history would be scrupulously followed by Hoffman and others. Evidence of this can be seen in the hefty, four-volume work entitled *Neue Musik im geteilten Deutschland* (New Music in separated Germany) commissioned by the biennale and published volume by volume over four biennales starting in 1993. Compiled and commented on by Ulrich Dibelius and Frank Schneider, the immense work systematically collected primary documents such as correspondence, newspaper clippings, book excerpts, etc. from both East and West on the various musical developments of note occurring there. Each volume was assigned a decade beginning with the 1950s and continuing onto the 1980s, thus spanning effectively the entirety of divided German music history. The volumes themselves give the impression of a careful act of stitching back together a torn history, for each topic presenting first documents from the West then from

the East, and finally a commentary putting it all into perspective (see Dibelius and Schneider 1993; 1995; 1997; 1999).

The historical re-stitching did not just take place in print, but was enacted also through biennale programming in the corresponding festival years. This meant that the 1993 biennale focused on works deemed of historical significance from both East and West from the 1950s, the 1995 biennale focused on the 1960s, etc. until the treatment of the 1980s in the 1999 biennale.

Putting this into a wider perspective, in section 2.2.2, both established and newly-created post-WWII biennales for the visual arts were shown to make a programmatic shift away from an emphasis on achieving an “overview” of international trends and establishing a narrative about interrelations between national and international art practice. Instead, they began to experiment with their structure, working to establish the conditions for knowledge-production that created alternatives to this colonialist/modernist approach. These, ideally, would be spaces where the entanglements of various strands of history would be able to be teased apart in their complexity, and with the searcher as themselves also contained within that network. Another tendency was to establish biennales in embattled and damaged places, using art as a way to “exorcise political traumas” (Martínez quoted in Rocés 2010, 53). While Rocés argues that these attempts often did not fully manage to resist the tendency towards a linear/modernist approach to understanding lineages and histories, they nevertheless represented attempts at breaking free from this straightjacket (53–54).

Hoffmann’s Musik-Biennales at the Berliner Festspiele in the wake of reunification were certainly set in a site of historical trauma, and to that extent bore a point of comparison to the visual arts biennales in similar sites mentioned by Rocés. Her approach to biennale leadership was one that sought to reunite a divided music history through attempts at recreating a common past. Observing from afar, this approach, though one in the spirit of emancipation, suggests a repetition of the modernist festival principle, namely a reimagining of a singular past in search of a path into the future. Maximal effort seems to have been devoted to “unification” of music history into a singular narrative stretching posthumously into the past. A biennale, with its modernist penchant for storytelling and for (re)asserting values in times of crisis, is an ideal site for this historical revision to take place. The decade of post-reunification biennales focused on 40 years of separation, performing and thus realizing a singular music historical narrative. The festival structure, 10 days of concerts consisting of discrete pieces made by trained composers, was not called into question, nor more significantly was the constitution of the particular music-aesthetic paradigm itself challenged on a fundamental historical level. Rather, the canon seems to have been adapted to suit a new political reality.

Just as the objects on display in the white cube are placed in relief against a neutral background with which they do not interact, so too did the festival itself

seemingly not allow for interaction with the hard facts of its organization and basic set of assumptions.

Therefore, despite its similarity to other biennales established in disputed zones, it significantly attempts to consolidate two divergent histories under a new, singular, privileged gaze. The post-reunification Musik-Biennale can thus be said to have attempted to mend a divided cultural history, though without reflecting on how its fundamental structural constitution was a product of that same history.

### 5.3 Maerzmusik 2002-2014

From 2002 until 2014, Matthias Osterwold would serve as artistic director of the Maerzmusik festival. The beginning of his tenure would also mark the launch of this new festival, starting in 2002, as the successor to the Musik-Biennale Berlin, which had begun in the German Democratic Republic, and been put on by the Berliner Festspiele as of 1991 due to the state's collapse. The festival would be centred at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, but worked consistently together with a varied group of other important Berlin cultural institutions. Among them were such prominent institutions as Radialsystem V, Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg Platz, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the Hamburger Bahnhof, among many others.

Already somewhat discernable in this list of institutions was the emphasis that Osterwold placed on the festival programing a wide spectrum of musical practices and formats. This would include everything from new and historical orchestra and chamber works, to small experiments, music theatre, crossovers between music and visual arts, as well as electronic music, all in ever-changing combinations. For instance, during the first festival in 2002, the first Saturday evening was dedicated to a massive presentation of installations and compositions by, or inspired by, John Cage at Funkhaus Berlin, the former East German radio studios south-east of the city (Berliner Festspiele 2002, 104).

The festival also as of 2003 began a format that it called the Sonic Arts Lounge, in the Ticket Hall of the Haus der Berliner Festspiele. The format was conceived of as the "late night" offering of the festival, with concerts beginning as of 22h. The format was an attempt at exploring the interrelationships of avantgarde music, sound art, and club culture, all of which had rich communities in the city (Berliner Festspiele 2003, 196).

There was also a constant and very prominent emphasis on the programming of music from a variety of countries and regions that do not normally get as much focus as those major Western centres that much of CCM's history has focused on. This initiative focused for instance on China (2002), the Balkans (2003), Mexico (2008), or on Russia, Armenia, and Central Asia (2009). Osterwold would invite

composers and ensembles to come and perform at the festival from these regions, giving audiences a broad survey of musical developments around the world.

Osterwold's programming would, as a typically post-modern approach, no longer be confined to the European concert hall. His broad definition of music in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century saw it spill into various forms of music making and neighbouring fields and disciplines, including theatre, installations, etc., and an acknowledgement of works outside of Europe and North America (see also de la Motte-Haber 2011, 17). These two axis—interdisciplinarity and internationality, would form the matrix onto which the majority of Maerzmusik's programming can be mapped.

Examining the festival more closely, it is along these lines that the clearest differences between Osterwold's Maerzmusik from 2002–2014 and Polzer's festivals as of 2015 can be observed. The flood of various musical practices that the festival programed as part of its exploration of "current music" can be understood as the festival embracing a kind of post-modern diversity of musical practices; no longer differentiating between the one elite stream of the avant-garde (i.e. the German *Ernste Musik*, literally "serious music") and music from other communities like the club scene (i.e. the German *Unterhaltungsmusik*, "entertainment music"). The issue is that the surveying of this diversity seems to ultimately be left up to the festival's director to filter and program; it still ultimately the individual figure of Osterwold that determines the current's direction(s).

Section 2.3.2 examined the difference between the post-modernism of "Magiciens de la Terre," an early attempt at engaging with non-Western art practice on the same level as Western art practice, and the post-colonial approach of Enwezor to Documenta 11. Reanimating this discussion here can help draw out distinctions between the programming approaches of Osterwold and Polzer. "Magiciens de la Terre" was a large-scale group show that brought together works from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and exhibited them alongside works from Europe and North America. The central criticism of the show was that despite the diversity of practices that were exhibited, they were nevertheless subsumed into the para-text of the curator and his singular vision of the exhibition.

Likewise, Osterwold's programming seems to make him into a kind of programmer-as-ethnographer, travelling the world and Berlin's experimental scene, and bringing back to the Festspiele the most interesting (for him), most authentic practices from individual music-making communities. The festival becomes a kind of celebration—and thus solidification of identity—of the diversity of practices that are programmed within it. It is a post-modern celebration of diversity that, as Wolfgang Welsch states, "proceeds from the existence of clearly distinguished, in themselves homogenous cultures - the only difference now being that these differences exist within one and the same state community"—that of this festival for current music (Welsch 1999, 3).

Leadership strategies within the visual arts institution field have since shifted away from such an approach to programming, as the criticism of the “Magiciens” exhibition has shown. In the section above, it was contrasted with Okwui Enwezor’s Documenta 11, which took instead a more post-colonialist approach to organizing documenta’s programming of art from non-Western artists. His approach was to instead approach the exhibition by showing the interconnectedness of Western and non-Western art. This did not mean just looking at how non-Western artists were inspired or influenced by Western artists, but rather looking at the broad picture of interdependencies between them.

This approach pre-empts Polzer’s focus on “Time Issues” rather than musical practice with Maerzmusik. Unlike Osterwold’s “surveying” of various countries’ musical practices, reduced to several select representatives, Polzer seizes on specific issues, and sketches a network of relations that act upon it, showing how an artistic practice cannot be understood without understanding how it is interconnected with both its context, and issues that span the globe such as the legacy of colonialism, or issues of capitalism.

## 5.4 Berno Odo Polzer

### 5.4.1 The Programme is now the Text

Chapter 4 looked at how Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris, the current co-directors of the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, focused their creative energy on shaping and creating a set of conditions to nurture new and experimental forms of music theatre practice—the most interesting and fitting results of which they commission to appear in their festival programs. The resulting festival is then put together by the duo, alongside their team, in such a way as to take also into consideration the festival experience of the visitors. This meant for instance between the 2016 and 2018 editions of the biennale changing it so as to not use any venue more than once, in order to ensure that there were no dark days where the festival would not present any works, in order to better maintain its “festive” energy.

Working with the greater technical limitation of one main venue, the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, along with a few additional partners, Polzer also has to take this large-scale shaping of the experience of his festival and its productions into consideration.<sup>2</sup> However, a fundamental difference between the two cases lies in the thrust of their efforts to impress upon these festivals their own viewpoint and artistic direction. DOMTS’ focus is decidedly on a practice of mentoring and

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2 The 2017 and 2018 festivals are the focus of this section. While the program of Maerzmusik 2019 was taken into consideration, an analysis of that edition could not be included.

accompanying the performances that will ultimately make it into the biennale. In this way, they are very much involved in the development of individual productions, which in turn become collectively an articulation of their artistic direction for the festival.

Polzer, in contrast, is not involved in the close-scale development of works. His is a practice of programming and commissioning of productions, and one of deciding how these discrete parts will fit together, like parts of a larger picture. Of course DOMTS are also involved in the creation of a larger picture or vision, however the difference lies in that for Polzer, the *particular way in which* works are combined is both constitutive of a specific expressive articulation, and a key part of his authorship of the festival. This means that the locus of expressivity of their leadership lies in different places for these two festivals.

The importance that Pozler places on combining works in order to create an additional layer of meaning is analogous to *composition*—understood here obviously in the musical sense, but as well in the sense of a synthesis of elements that creates an alteration or surplus of meaning. The curator’s “value proposition” is then immanently present in relation to the audience, as well as in characterization of the festival as a series for instance of “10 composed evenings” as he conceives of it in the preface to the 2017 edition (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 4).

The writings of Dieter Mersch can help think through the specificity of this kind of expression via concert programming. In a text discussing artistic practices of “transmutation and transition,” part of a larger idea by the philosopher on prepositional thinking and the knowledge of operators, he discusses the process of synthesis inherent to both programming and com-position:

“con”/“com” implies knowledge without a synthesis, an “as” founded on “together” that, however subtly, appears at the very beginning and allows for the possibility, the idea, or a whiff of meaning. This is however only an eventuality: Signification does not necessarily grow from a connection, rather the latter creates the conditions for the former. And because sense is inescapable and nonsense always also produces the sense of nonsense [Barthes 1985], there can be no such thing as pure a-significance in art. Rather every net or web of differences, however diffuse, can become part of a symbolic order, even when it negates the same. (Mersch 2018, 272)

Mersch’s point here is that a precondition of signification is connection, connection in the sense of the con/com operator that is the basis also of the word com-position. This can help access the sense-production of Polzer’s “composed evenings.” As will be shown later in examples such as his 2018 concert “Zeitgeist: Brian Ferneyhough, Iannis Xenakis, Ashley Fure,” through his act of juxtaposition and combination of works, he creates a significance out of the works that is both his own, and also a unique meaning that emerges from that combination (that was not present in the



individual parts). However, as Mersch rightfully points out, connection is only the precondition for signification, and sense can emerge effectively from any combination of works. This relates to the receiver-based theory of interdisciplinary arts perception from Chapter 2, where it was argued that ultimately the receiver is who untangles a web of meaning, creating for themselves their own understanding of an event. What is being examined is then not a significance that is present in these concert formations and not in others, but rather how *these particular instances* of significance emerge from the juxtaposition of works, in conjunction with other factors, such as personal experience and written explanations of the concerts.

Furthermore, while it may be true that sense (or nonsense) can emerge from any combination of work, a further element of investigation here must be as well the presence of an intentionality on the part of the curator in creating a specific kind of knowledge-production, which says something not about the concerts themselves, and much more about the particular attitude of their organizer towards them. In other words: why is it important to say that there is a meaning?

A last facet of Mersch's thinking on composition can be used here to better isolate out the connection between Polzer's "composed evenings" and curating as a practice of critical knowledge production. It pertains to the way in which composition can work as a basis for creating the unforeseeable, which Mersch understands as a critical break. He identifies three characteristics that lie at the basis of successful (defined here by its ability to create such a break of an artistic intervention) aesthetic thought. The second seems to best capture Polzer's practice:

Second, the type or modus of connection and disconnection seems to be important—the respective play of its “togetherness”, the specific way elements are juxtaposed, the role of the fugue or distance “between” the elements, and how the interstices, the emptiness, and the relationship of proximity and distance, or amplitude and dynamics, takes on its own weight. This second characteristic of “aesthetic thought” concerns that which goes beyond the side-by-side of its compilation, and manifests a transgression or a surplus which exceeds its elements. Most important seems to be that the juxtaposition of things puts something in the world in a performative sense, which creates a shift, a *metabasis* or transition, a passage towards something different—that is to say the specific *how* is key, not *that* (*quod*) it exists or subsists. (Mersch 2018, 275–276)

While every concert program in its combination of works creates a meaning, there is also an importance that must be placed on the “specific *how*” works are combined. The practice of realizing a specific bringing together of elements in order to create an aesthetic break, a critical moment of reconsideration, of knowledge creation, or of affective and mental upheaval, as the tragedy has been described in section 2.4.2, is a specifically *artistic* one. It is furthermore one that is worth analyzing, in order to attempt to grasp the nature of the “break” it produces.

This is exactly the work that is being undertaken in this chapter; namely, the process of understanding Polzer's practice of running Maerzmusik as itself an *artistic* practice, albeit one that unfolds on the level of program organization. The exercise of an artistic sensibility and the production of an aesthetic break, as argued with Mersch, but in the medium of festival organization, allows for the beginning of a resemblance between Polzer's work and that of curators from the visual arts, theatre, and dance to take shape.

### An Early Example at Wien Modern

From 2000 until 2006 Polzer was curator, and from 2007 to 2009 artistic director, of the Wien Modern festival in Vienna. Examining that earlier festival, prior examples can be found of how Polzer and his team could be said to *compose* the festival program in such a way as to create these kinds of tensions detailed by Mersch.

As this author was not present at these festivals, speculation regarding the compilation of individual evenings will be avoided. One interesting early example of Polzer's "compositional thinking" can however be found in the program to the 2005 Wien Modern festival. The festival booklet (in name only, and in fact quite a hefty book) has as its first section "Reflections," a section of texts by the festival's directors as well as essays and excerpts of other texts (e.g. "Über das Komponieren" by Lachenmann as the first entry). Polzer's entry consists, characteristically in this regard, not of a musicological text, but rather of a collection of small quotes by Scelsi taken from several sources. When read as a text, they function together as a reflection by the composer in his own words on the relationship between music and sound, though of course the "cut and paste" work is entirely that of Polzer. The final quote finishing the text reads as follows:

You perhaps still do not have a clear idea of my own ideas (*Laughs*). Maybe they are totally and completely personal; maybe true, maybe false; but they are certainly my own.[47] (Polzer 2005, 50; translation added)<sup>3</sup>

With this final quote—to be clear, written by Scelsi—the curator clearly demonstrates the play of authorship that he engages in with his concert-bricolages. Works at once doubtlessly belong to their authors, but at the same time can easily, through their contextualization and juxtaposition with other works, also become part of an emergent "idea" of Polzer.

While this progression follows its own internal logic, it is here germane to examine what this has to do with the concept of "curating." Comparing Polzer's behaviour and self-perception to the history of the emergence of curatorial practice

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3 "Sie haben vielleicht noch keine sehr klare Vorstellung von meinen eigenen Ideen [Lachen]. Vielleicht sind sie ganz und gar persönlich; vielleicht wahr, vielleicht falsch; aber es sind jedenfalls meine eigenen.[47]"

from section 2.4.1, reveals that that the approach to festival leadership taken by Polzer is one in which he understands his leadership as itself a form of quasi-artistic expression, and where he mystifies his decision-making process as a mediating figure.

To quote Paul O'Neil out of context in order to show the appropriateness of this link, the concert thus becomes a "synthesis of artwork, concept, and praxis transformed into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*" in a manner reminiscent of the exhibitional practices of the 1980s with their highly-mysticized curator figures (O'Neil 2012, 22). That these furthermore typically brought together heterogeneous works into forms of "dialogue," or subjective and non-art-teleological narratives of the curator's own design, and that such a description is also fitting for describing Polzer's current approach to the Maerzmusik festival, should be understood as equally telling.

Before delving into this comparison, it is worth further examining more closely the specific strategies used by Polzer, in order to complexify (i.e. not oversimplify) the nature of the relationship between his practice and those of visual arts curators.

#### 5.4.2 Attaca

"Zeitgeist" was on paper one of the more traditional concerts presented during Maerzmusik 2018 in its focus on three well-established representatives of CCM (from three respective generations). The program, in three parts, presented works by Brian Ferneyhough, Iannis Xenakis, and Ashley Fure, each occupying their own discrete section of the evening buffered by breaks. While a full analysis of the concert and its works cannot be undertaken here, the concert was noteworthy in how Polzer conceived of each section as a performance unto itself, one that managed to transcend the discrete, individual works, and become its own meta-composition, as well as how he threaded the three sections together into relation with each other. Polzer did this mainly through a simple yet well-coordinated *mise en scène* of each section, coordinating the works and their lighting in order to communicate the coherency of the whole to the audience. Examining briefly the second section of this concert featuring Xenakis' works can help illustrate this better. The italicized sentences after each work have been added to detail transitions from one work to another. It should be noted that this information is only available to those who were in the concert hall, as it is not notated anywhere else, making it further evidence of the mystification of Polzer's role.

Zeitgeist

Venue: Haus der Berliner Festspiele (Schaperstraße 24, Berlin)

Date: Friday, 17 March, 2018

Time: 19.30

...

Part 2 – “Iannis Xenakis”

*Charisma*

for clarinet and cello (1971)

*Light fade in from black, Charisma begins. Choir faintly discernable, standing ominously in the background. Light fades out as piece ends, no applause from the audience. Diamorphoses for tape begins during fade out.*

*Diamorphoses*

for tape (1957)

*The work continues with lights off. The piece, through a multi-loudspeaker setup, distributes its “sonic entities” around the hall.*

*Pour la Paix*

Live version for mixed choir, speaker and tape (1981)

Texts by Françoise Xenakis

*Fade in. Choir is already standing in position. There is a video screen above them that is black but visible. The piece begins. When the narrators commence their dialogue, the screen turns on, and a video of people fleeing along the Macedonia–Greece border on 16 March, 2016 is displayed (date and location mentioned only in the program distributed on the evening). Shot from the side, the audience is shown a procession of people moving mostly from right to left. The screen is turned off during each section with tape/electronics. The screen fades to black during the grenade explosion scene at the end. Orient-Occident begins as the lights fade to black, making it unclear to an audience not already familiar with the works where *Pour la Paix* ends and *Orient-Occident* begins (as one ends with tape and the other is only for tape).*

*Orient-Occident*

for tape (1960)

*The tape piece is played in the dark hall. It gives the effect of being a kind of epilogue to the intense psychological drama of the previous work.*

*Nuits*

Phonèmes sumériens, assyriens, achéens et autres

for 12 voices (1967)

*The light fades back in in the hall. Nuits, with its strong, energetic beginning, starts immediately. A shocking piece as a kind of warning or premonition at the end. [end of Zeitgeist Part 2]*

How this progression of works has been interpreted illustrates that combining works in this way produces a surplus of meaning, and creates links between works that are *more than* the sum of their parts, as was argued with Mersch in the previous section. It also shows a strategy that frequently emerges in Polzer's programming practice, what will be referred to here as *attaca* transitions, after the directive in musical scores instructing the musician to continue on to the next movement without a pause. These transitions are a way of creating explicit links between pieces through an immediate juxtaposition and elision that occurs when the audience is denied the ritual of applause, which would otherwise act as a kind of "palate cleanser" between works, neutralizing their concerns, and preparing the ears as a clean slate for the next one.

While this kind of approach is not unheard of in New Music, what is noteworthy about Polzer's approach is the successfulness of these interlinkings. Looking back at the concert described above, the experience that Polzer is able to produce is one of a consummately thought-out parkour through the musical works. It is one that shows not only the music curator's experience working with the concert format, but also his willingness and ability to engage with the (pre-formed) musical material itself. This can be seen for instance in the skillfulness of the transition between *Pour la Paix* and *Orient-Occident*; transitions that seem to pre-empt the mood that these works will evoke in the concert hall with such accuracy as to be able to mould and shape them through the act of programming.

A further aspect of these *attaca* transitions is that they are not easily brought into words; they exhibit rather a tacit knowledge of the material, one that is only translated with great difficulty, and with a loss of its exceptional character. The ways in which Polzer, with these transitions, is able to reveal new connections between works, makes them a thoroughly artistic practice. It is a knowledge of the event of the concert that exists only as it is enacted, produced, and thus a non-discursive form of artistic knowledge production that cannot be accurately reproduced within another medium or another logos (see Mersch 2015b, 22–23). Despite the challenge in describing them, several more examples of Polzer's concert programming can nevertheless be examined in order to approach this form of expressivity of the artistic director.

### The Lichtenberg Figures

Another example of a successful and interesting use of this kind of transition was in "The Lichtenberg Figures" concert in 2017. The composed evening took place in one block without intermission, and consisted of two parts. The first was the approx. 30-minute film *Island Song* (1976) by artist Charlemagne Palestine, the second was *The Lichtenberg Figures* by Eva Reiter and played by the Ictus Ensemble, an approximately 40-minute piece for voice and ensemble.

The video was presented to the audience on a screen installed in front of the theatre curtain. Shot in the first person, and in black and white, it shows a trip around the island of St. Pierre by the artist on a four-wheeler. The artist chants, shouts, and blends his voice with that of the engine motor: The video evokes a sense of existential dread, perhaps directed at the horror vacui of rural life. The second part of the video takes place in a thick fog that has rolled in, and that presses claustrophobically against the camera. The poor video quality turns the fog into a quasi-minimalist play of grey, where sky, ground, and objects are no longer distinguishable. A fog horn sounds, Palestine takes the pitch and improvises over it, panning the camera towards the sea. An uncanny assemblage of fog horn, voice, and video artefacts is created by the video work.

Once the video ends, the curtain rises, and the *Lichtenberg Figures* begins immediately. Once again this attaca transition is clearly meant to bring the two different works into relation with one another.

*The Lichtenberg Figures* by Eva Reiter is a music theatre work based on texts by Ben Lerner. The piece is inspired by the old format of the book of Ayres, a renaissance form for setting poetry to music, consisting of seven songs and six interludes, with a prologue, a fitting choice considering Reiter's training in renaissance music (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 85). The piece builds a kind of cyborg theatre, a mix of humans with so many machines; Reiter stands at the top of a pyramid-shaped stage of musicians, controlling electronics and reciting text. Above her, the text is projected as super-titles. Reiter, the composer, performer, stage designer, and electronics-composer, becomes the nexus, with sinewy strands of electronic noise, sounds from the musicians below her, and voice effects all rotating around her as their central point.

Examining how the festival curator knit the two experiences together, there was no (discernable) thematic link, nor was there a practical material one, as the video and the musical performance did not share a common ensemble or technical set-up (save the PA system). The link, which was created/highlighted by the rapid transition from one stage set up and piece to another, was rather another example of an attaca transition, one whose combination is best understood as based on an unsayable immanent logic of the event.

The juxtaposition allows for the audience to observe formal similarities between the works; both hollow out language, while still using it as a driving force of the work. Both built unlikely combinations of human and machine, allowing their artistic messages to emerge out of their respective assemblages.

In bringing them together, the artistic director proposes to the audience that these works should be understood in relation to another. While seemingly obvious, this implies an emphasis placed on the formal and immanent characteristics of the pairing, rather than a focus on their respective music- or art-historical significance. The audience is invited in a more intensive way to consider their immediate, situ-

ated perception of the works, rather than the works as representative of something else.

## Blocks

In stating explicitly that he creates a series of “composed evenings,” Polzer touches on a history of curatorial authorship that has existed in some form since at least the landmark career of Harald Szeemann. Historically, this has often conflicted with the intention of the practitioners themselves, who have often felt as if they then just are executing the vision of somebody else, and effectively are robbed of their own artistic agency.

Examining Polzer’s concerts and working method, it becomes clear how these same kinds of issues have so far been largely avoided. The artistic director adheres usually quite closely to what can be called a “block principle” in his programming of the festival, which arguably helps navigate around this kind of conflict. If each work or programmed element is considered as a temporal block, then his practice is of placing these blocks in specific combinations, perhaps using the *attaca* transitions that have already been presented here.

What he does not do is attempt to alter the constitution of the blocks themselves. This would imply some sort of involvement or interference with that bracket of time that is controlled by the ensemble, composer, artist, etc., and would thus be inserted into a highly codified and coordinated space. While it is doubtless the case that an amount of communication and negotiation takes place, the extent that this goes beyond the role of a more traditional festival director is most likely limited. It would of course be possible to do this, working with ensembles or individual artists to change in specific places the way they execute the pieces, but given the huge amount of productions that happen during the short amount of time of the festival, it seems to be an impossible task to do adequately.

Looking at both the “Zeitgeist” and “The Lichtenberg Figures” concerts, this working with blocks can be clearly seen. In all of the relevant situations in those two concerts, an invisible line is maintained between the freedom that the curator takes with the contextualization and staging of works, and preserving the *Werktreue* of the programmed pieces.

### 5.4.3 Experiments with Concert Staging

Examining Polzer’s history of concert programming, going back as well to his time at Wien Modern, it is clear that experimentation with concert staging is an important piece of his expressive work as artistic director. The significance and shape of *where* a work is performed, as well as *how* the audience is intended to perceive it, are basic tools in this curator’s toolbox.

Several concerts have experimented with their audience setup, often with the audience being sat in non-traditional seating arrangements in relation to the performer. Aggregating some of these together will help understand them as part of a larger approach of the director towards the festival.

### Pre-Opening

The 2017 pre-opening concert featured a work by Catherine Christer Hennix, *Kalam-i-Nur: The First Light, The First Sound*. The concert took place in the mourning hall [Trauerhalle] at Silent Green, a crematory-turned-arts-space. Bathed in an ethereal green light upon entering the complex, the audience was asked to make themselves comfortable on rugs placed over the marble floor. The Arabic letter *Nun* was projected on a wall, the first letter of the Arabic word for light (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 47).

Hennix often describes her music in cosmic terms, arguing for the cathartic effects of mathematical relations between the atoms in our bodies and sounds being played, writing for instance that “the whole universe can be understood as just one single vibration ... When we hear these vibrations our system of molecules vibrates with them. You can then think of sound as a medicinal tonic” (Christer Hennix quoted in Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 15). This event was understood by the artist in the same way, in that she sought with it to recall “the epoch of the universe at the intersection between what came before the Creation and what came after” (46).

Regarding the staging specifically, two elements are notable. The first was the clear reference to Islamic prayer rugs in the mats used to cover the floor. These fit with the conceptual frame that Hennix set for the musical content. They were not props, but rather equipment befitting the concert’s content, a distinction useful inasmuch as it shows a deference by the curator to realizing the artist’s immersive vision for the concert. Second is the choice of a crematorium for this work, in that the site was formerly as a place of transformation (to ashes), which can be related back to Hennix’ intention of reconnecting people with the “cosmic dust” from which they came, though this link remains associative.

This suggests an attempt on the part of the curator to bring additional semi-otic elements into the performance in order to either shift or enhance the meaning of the piece, achieved in this case through the selection of the venue. By working repeatedly with the venue as a kind of medium and way of contextualizing in a specific way the positions that take place there, the curator works against the notion that it is a kind of neutral backdrop to the performance. Rather, it becomes understood as (always-already) co-constituent of it, a significant actor in the network of relations that construct the concert.



## The Long Now

Serving as an ambitious coda to the Maerzmusik Festival, the “Long Now” is a 30-hour concert marathon that has taken place on the final weekend of the Maerzmusik festival since Polzer began. The format takes over the cavernous spaces of a former power plant in the middle of the city, and presents within them a varied and heterogeneous line-up of performances lasting late into the night. While some of the performances are chances to hear again an artist already heard during the festival (such as Alvin Lucier or Catherine Christer Hennix), it has also been a space where the curator programs DJ sets, jam sessions, but also installations, video screenings, and other events as a kind of final intensification of the festival atmosphere (not least because the lack of windows create a separation from the outside not unlike the characteristic separation of the festival community from its surroundings discussed in Chapter 2).

The audience was free to move about the hall, and food and drink were offered inside, so that theoretically one would not ever have to leave for the entirety of the marathon event. Cots were made available to place in the large hall, leading many audience members to lie back and doze off while the concerts were going on. Noticeable at the event was also the age difference between the audience of “The Long Now” and other concerts at Maerzmusik (itself having a younger audience than most CCM festivals). Polzer, with this quasi-club event format, is very clearly attempting to bring in a new audiences to the festival, trying with it to address a new group of potential festivalgoers.

Part of this is also his programming at “The Long Now” a wide range of different kinds of music (from Renaissance music to New Music to techno), promoting at the same time a pluralistic understanding of musical production. It can be read as perhaps one of the more obvious ways in which through the act of programming and contextualization, the curator is attempting to expand the festival beyond the narrow New Music community, as well as foster exchange between New Music and many other forms of music.

While easily dismissed as part of the “eventalization” of art experience, the format on the contrary is interesting in its having found a formula that manages to attract a relatively broad swath of the music-going public in the city. Its somewhat eclectic mix manages to offer something to both the club crowd, as well as those interested in hearing obscure New Music works that are rarely otherwise performed, in this way allowing for audiences to discover music that they might not have otherwise, turning it into an example of how programming can be used as a tool for audience development.

Because of the scope and scale of the event, it is also significant for the mode of listening that it elicits. The audience shifts into “exhibition time” and away from “event time,” to make a distinction taken from Claire Bishop, allowing to determine

effectively with their feet the length that they would like to stay (Bishop 2018, 29). This does not just mean that audiences can leave when they become disinterested, but also that they are able to stay much longer than could reasonably be expected during a usual concert: For instance the 2018 edition of “The Long Now” featured an extremely long performance of Feldman’s *For Philip Guston* (1984) that would have been unthinkable in a concert setting. The concert was setup though such that people could sleep, leave, listen, or otherwise experience the concert (or not), helping render that work more accessible in a variety of different ways.

### Mark Fell

Contrasting with 2017, the 2018 festival returned to more traditional audience setups. This did not mean however that the curator would abstain from experimentation with the concert format, rather that it would take place more in aspects of staging instead. One such example was during “Deproduction,” a concert with two works by Terre Thaemlitz in collaboration with zeitkratzer ensemble, followed after the intermission with a set by Mark Fell. The first part of the evening consisted of a very idiosyncratic interpretation of Thaemlitz’ work *Deproduction*, first premiered at Documenta 14, by zeitkratzer together with Thaemlitz, who provided the vocals. Once the 11-person ensemble was finished their set, the intermission started, usually also the time during which the stage is rebuilt for the next set by stagehands.

Returning after the break, the stage unusually still had all the material from the zeitkratzer set, with the addition of a small table in the middle. Mark Fell walked onstage with his backpack and computer under one arm, sat down at the desk that had been installed for him, plugged in, and began his set. He did not look up from the computer. After a moment, a stagehand came onstage and began to disassemble the last set, followed by 3 others, who put away stands and coiled cables. Fell’s intense electronic sounds then accompanied this unexpected, unintentional performance.

Fell’s music came exclusively through the hall’s loudspeakers. His presence itself was minimized through his intent focus on solely his laptop, fading into the background. In the traditional musical understanding, this kind of music is understood as acousmatic, immaterial, in that the source of the music cannot be adequately located by the audience in the concert. The laptop performer, being so involved with the machine in front of them, produce sounds from what for the audience is little more than a black box (Brüstle 2013, 22, 191).

However, in this case the stage’s working lights were turned on, and the entirety of the theatrical apparatus was exposed to the audience. The audience was also shown the real labour of the stagehands who had to clean up the web of cables from the previous zeitkratzer set (i.e. they were doing their job, not acting). While this on its own without music could be the basis for an interesting concep-

tual performance, the juxtaposition of music coming from a laptop and stagehands at work produced an emergent effect. The performer's disinterest in their public is contrasted with the portrayal of the invisible labour of stagehands that goes into the maintaining of the illusion of the stage.

The contrast between the happenings onstage and the music highlights what has previously been referred to as the theatricality, or mixedness of media, that is inherent to all performative events (see section 3.2.1). In other words, there cannot be a "pure" consumption by a passive spectator of the perfect sounds delivered through the loudspeakers; the situation will always imply a host of other actors that are co-constituent of it, from audience and seats, to cables and stagehands that assemble the illusion. Via the constitution of this concert situation, the audience is invited to contemplate the theatrical machinery, understood as both its technical provisioning, as well as its human labour, that underlies the functioning of the festival and its sometimes very "immaterial" production, on a basic level. This in turn relates back to Polzer's interest in a reflexivity regarding the systems in which music happens. It is also a clear demonstration of how this interest is shown through concert programming as an expressive medium.

Fell then closed the laptop lid, quickly acknowledged the audiences' applause, and left.

#### 5.4.4 The Catalogue as the Locus of Discourse-Production

Discussing the increasing number of critics now self-identifying instead as curators, artist and curator Liam Gillick explains that

"the brightest, smartest people get involved in this multiple activity of being mediator, producer, interface and neo-critic. It is arguable that the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in art magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centres and exhibitions." (Liam Gillick quoted in O'Neil 2012, 43).

The critic's former position of power and influence was arguably replaced by the curator, with many taking on the role of curator instead, and subsequently writing about art in catalogues rather than magazines, making catalogues important sources of critical texts and contextualization of artistic practice. The curator has become a figure who initiates a discourse, who is able to frame and begin debate around a particular artistic position (that they usually represent). As a result of this, the catalogue as an important arm of the exhibition has gone hand in hand with the rise of the figure of the curator, particularly since the education-focused turn of the 1990s. Since that era, catalogues have often been used by curators to further strengthen the theses of their exhibitions, often through excessive amounts of background documentation and commissioned essays (O'Neil 2012, 44).

Returning to Polzer, as his programming moves away from supporting the New Music community through commissioned new works, and as he continues his work of thematically-driven concert and festival programming, he in doing so is also increasingly isolating himself from the critics for New Music. This group is for the most part sent to the festival to report back on it to various specialist publications, mainly in the German-speaking world. The critics themselves, with their limited scope and resources, usually tend to exercise a strong norming influence on the concerts they report on, often negatively receiving changes that are felt to deviate too strongly from the community values established around New Music. Tight turn-around times and word-counts also mean that critics are not able to engage with the large amounts of material generated by these thematically-driven events. With critics no longer being in a position to reliably reflect on concerts, or catalyze meaningful conversation, this role is left up to the curator. As a result of this, Polzer's team has put a large amount of work into the program for each Maerzmusik festival, which itself resembles much more the catalogue to a visual arts biennale in both size and content than most music festival programs.

### Early Maerzmusik Programs

As has already been mentioned in the section on the Musik-Biennale Berlin, during most of the 1990s, that precursor to Maerzmusik put as well a significant effort into the contextualization of its works, mostly through the expansive four-volume series by Dibelius and Schneider entitled *Neue Musik im geteilten Deutschland*. These volumes began in the 1950s and advancing one decade per biennale-edition (first published in 1993, then 1995, 1997, and ending in 1999 with a focus on the 1980s), collected primary source documents from both sides of Germany, and re-knitting the divided music history of the country. In contrast to the other examples here, these were ancillary publications to the festival itself, and were separate to the printed programs used for the Musik-Biennales during those years.

The programs produced during Matthias Osterwold's directorship between 2002 and 2014 are quite modest in their scope. Each programme contains a small section of essays at the beginning, and for each event in the program prints artists' bios, as well as sometimes extracts from a libretto or sung text, or further information on pieces. While they do serve their purpose of giving some additional context to the works in the concert program, their design strongly suggests that they are to be understood as a small accompaniment or reference to the programmed works. The programs themselves are printed in a demure 13 cm x 19 cm format, perhaps suitable to stuff in one's back pocket as a guide, and akin to an oversized playbill.

*Image 3: Photo of Maerzmusik 2002 Programme*

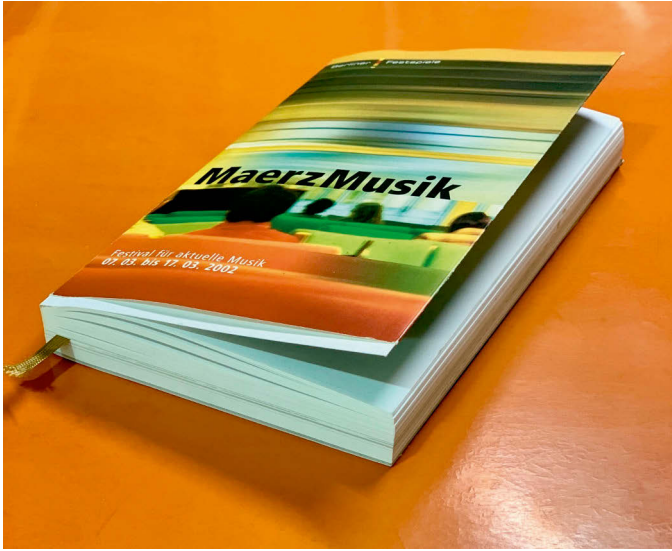


Photo: Brandon Farnsworth

*Image 4: Photo of Wien Modern 2004 Programme, open to pages 144–145 (Odo Polzer and Schäfer 2004 ). Left page spread shows the concert program, right page spread shows image material related to the concert*



Photo: Brandon Farnsworth

## **Wien Modern**

Polzer's approach to printed programs stands in stark contrast to that used by Osterwold. His method of creating programs can be traced back to his time at Wien

Modern; examining the programs to the that festival, where Polzer worked from 2000–2009, it is obvious that its program served as the point of departure.

Measuring a very large 20 cm x 30 cm, and containing usually over 250 pages, the programs to Wien Modern are substantial objects, and certainly not designed to be quickly thrown out after the performance or festival. The catalogues from this period usually consist of three main sections: first is a section containing a preface framing that year's main themes and concerns, as well as a series of "reflections," which are both new and reprinted essays addressing those themes on a general level. Second, and making up the bulk of the program, are the programs for each of the concerts in the Wien Modern festival, which, as it lasts the entire month of November, are roughly around 30. The concert program is printed, but more importantly, also some kind of "material" or document relating to the concert. These documents vary widely in their content, but can include one or more of the following (and perhaps others): essay by a festival director, interview between a director and one of the featured composers, new or reprinted essays by musicologists relating to the program, text by a composer explaining their work(s), primary source documents from works such as scores, librettos, poems, images, biographies, or excerpts of scores.<sup>4</sup> Third, at the back of the book, an overview of the festival program, its accompanying symposium, biographies, colophon, etc.

The first two sections are the most important here: taken together they represent a considerable effort at contextualizing the works being presented in the festival. The materials represent as well an interesting mix of primary-source documents, excerpts from scholarly publications, and reflections on these by the organizers themselves. The organizers' proximity to the authors suggests a greater facility of access to difficult-to-source materials or personal files, adding to the value proposition of such a publication. The festival directors tasked with the creation of these publications are also already spending so much effort programming these works that they are ideally positioned to have a meaningful overview of the most relevant and important documents and positions in regards to the works they are programming.

### Current Maerzmusik Programmes

The most recent Maerzmusik programs begin with a short, framing preface by the curator, before presenting each of the concerts in order. Most significant when observing these programs is that they give more the impression of being readers or catalogues: this is for several reasons. First, they have about the same large dimensions as the Wien Modern readers, at around 21 cm x 27 cm. Second, they are

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4 The programs of Wien Modern 2003, 2004, and 2005 were consulted in the making of this list. Other years' programs during Polzer's tenure were not readily available and thus could not be consulted. See Odo Polzer and Schäfer 2003; 2004; 2005).

Image 5: Photo of Maerzmusik 2018 Programme open to page 46–47. Left page spread contains a transcribed interview between David Garland and Julius Eastman, and right page spread reproduces a concert program where Eastman performed.

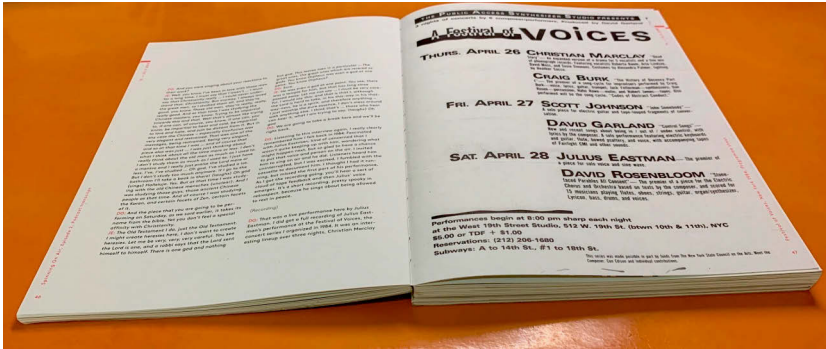


Photo: Brandon Farnsworth

made of coarser paper and have a cheap binding, evoking university coursepacks. This is also emphasized through the frequent design choice of reprinting directly photocopied texts (artefacts and all), rather than re-setting the text. Third, they are approximately the same size as the earlier Wien Modern readers, while only covering around 10 concerts, the Long Now, and the Thinking Together format.

In regards to content, the same model of documents relating to works being programmed is used, however much more material is printed for each concert. What is printed is more than just ancillary texts relating to the works though: the reader can best be understood as a composition in book form, assembled by the curator. As in earlier programmes, Polzer uses the opportunity to reprint hard-to-find or obscure but important material.

For instance in the 2017 program, the section featuring materials related to the composer Julius Eastman includes a photocopy of Kyle Gann's belated 1991 obituary for Eastman in the *Village Voice* (complete with ads and a photo of an installation by Barbara Kruger). The program for the subsequent festival in 2018, which also featured Eastman, also for instance contains a transcription of an interview with the composer from 1984 that seems to have been transcribed for the occasion, contributing as well in this small way to scholarship around the composer.

In another instance, for the “Memory Space” concert, a journal article by Jeremy Woodruff explaining the Gamaka Box notation system for the notation of Carnatic music is reprinted in full, complete even with illustrations, and additional annotations by the editors. This means that it could be used to help an interested person later learn the system, even without having been at the concert where it was ex-

plained. Choices like this abound, and point to an understanding of the reader as more of an additional document produced by the festival to accompany the concerts, but also to further catalyze discussions among audience members who experience them.

Seeing the reader from this perspective allows for a better understanding of Polzer's vision for the thematically-driven festival. The emphasis no longer lies exclusively on the historical contextualization of works within the New Music discourse, or credentialing a particular artist. The festival is instead free to use the reader as one further medium in which to consider the topic of "Time Issues," both through the contextualization of individual works, but also through exploring related ideas more generally, many of which can only be touched on during the festival itself. It is a reader that is less focused on codifying and marking the festival event through words, and is rather focused on offering the audience another temporal experience, that of reading a book. The specificity of this temporal form makes for different possibilities, more long form, differently-complex ideas that can be expressed, for instance. It gives the festival public another perspective on the festival and its stated themes. Rather than being supplemental material, it is another expressive medium in which the festival can unfold.

## 5.5 2017 Opening Concert: Julius Eastman

### 5.5.1 The Northwestern University Concert, 16 January, 1980

Having now developed some key ideas surrounding Polzer's approach to Maerzmusik, both this and the following sections will concentrate more thoroughly on individual evenings, and examine how these connect with Polzer's larger ideas about the festival as a whole.

The opening concert to the 2017 Maerzmusik festival was dedicated to the composer Julius Eastman, as were several additional initiatives during the festival, including an exhibition. Eastman was African-American, born in 1940, and would identify as homosexual. He died in isolation at the age of 49. His musical career first started at Ithaca College, before continuing with piano and subsequently composition at the Curtis institute. Eastman's career as both a performer and composer would see him become an integral part of the American music scene as of the 1960s until the 1980s, working together with composers such as La Monte Young and Terry Riley, and also performing his own works both in the USA and abroad.

Eastman's music is often highly minimalist, though inflected with influences from popular music and many instances of improvisation or open scores. While the composer and performer produced a sizeable body of highly interesting work during his life, his works would fail to catch on or become well-known after his



death (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 69–73). The composer has been experiencing a resurgence of interest in recent years though, particularly in the USA, with for instance a multi-year concert series being organized by Bowerbird Ensemble in Philadelphia as of 2015 (Bowerbird n.d.). In the same year, Mary Jane Leach published *Gay Guerrilla: Julius Eastman and his Music*, a first major scholarly attempt to reflect on his life and work (“Minimalist Composer Julius Eastman, Dead for 26 Years, Crashes the Canon,” *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2016).

Programming a concert of Eastman’s music as the opening to a major European music festival was thus an important contribution to this resurgence of interest in the composer. Part of this renewed interest is also a shift in the understanding of American musical history, which traditionally has been largely devoid of black and/or queer voices. This concert will be examined in detail in order to better understand Polzer’s practice of programming as well as how this relates to the larger themes he intends to address with the festival. The following section shows the program for this opening concert.

Note that the second half of the concert was featured a piece called *The Unbreathing*, a new commission by Uriel Barthélémi. The piece was scored for solo drum kit with electronics, flanked on either side by large video screens. Hitting specific drums triggered the patch, making the action onscreen advance. On the screens was displayed texts by Hassan Khan, as well as (simultaneously) images of struggle by oppressed peoples. For reasons of brevity, an analysis of this work will not be undertaken here.

Julius Eastman/*The Unbreathing*: Opening (Program)

Venue: Haus der Berliner Festspiele (Schaperstraße 24, Berlin)

Date: Friday, 17 March, 2017

Time: 20.00

Part 1 – “Julius Eastman”

*(Audience seated in a circle around the performers, centre stage, both onstage and in the audience)*

Introduction to the Northwestern University Concert, 16 January 1980

*Evil Nigger*

For four Pianos (1979), German Premiere

*Gay Guerrilla*

For four Pianos (1979)

*Crazy Nigger*

For four Pianos (1978), German Premiere

## Intermission

## Part 2 – “The Unbreathing”

*(Audience seated stage right, performer set up on stage left)**The Unbreathing*

For drum set, electronics, and video (2017), world premiere

Uriel Barthélémi

The four pianos situated in the middle of the stage, faced outwards such that the musicians (two men, two women) were each facing the audience, with their backs towards one another. The audience was spread out on all four sides of the musicians. It was possible to sit in the traditional seats in the hall, in bleachers set up on the back wall of the theatre, on another set of bleachers stage right, cardboard stools and bean bags stage left, as well as a littering of these same seats surrounding the performers in relatively close proximity. The atmosphere this evoked was laid-back and casual, contrasting with the traditional concert setup in the Festspielhaus, where the audience, pressed together in the house seats, constitutes a tight community facing the framed stage. Given the minimalist approach of the music, a more SoHo loft atmosphere reminiscent of early minimal music concerts was evoked.

The opening program was a loose re-enactment of an earlier concert of Eastman’s work at Northwestern University on 16 January, 1980. Invited by a composition faculty member, Peter Gena, Eastman would travel to the university from New York to realize a performance of the three works that would also later be played at the Berliner Festspiele, part of what he called his *N\*\*\*\*\** series (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 27).<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Northwestern’s substantial resources, the work, originally conceived for 2 pianos, was expanded to four during the rehearsals for the concert, with the performers being students of the university; 2 male, 2 female—mirrored at the Maerzmusik concert.

Due to racial tensions already simmering on the campus that year, objections to the works’ titles were raised by a black student’s group, who feared that the

5 The N-word has been censored save for the reproduction of the program and in direct quotations of Eastman.

reappropriation of the N-word that Eastman was attempting would not be possible given current campus politics (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 31). The small scandal that this raised would lead Eastman to begin the concert with an introduction that both explained the substance of the works, as well as the meaning of their titles to him. The January 1980 concert was recorded in high-fidelity by the university, and was released in full as part of the 2005 album *Unjust Malaise* on New World Records, an initiative by Mary Jane Leach, an early advocate for the composer's work. This means that the recording of Eastman's explanations has been preserved and is readily available.

At the Maerzmusik opening concert, after two of the three pieces had been played, the musicians paused, and the recording of Eastman introducing the program at the Northwestern concert was played back to the audience. Combined with an identical program to the 1980 concert, and the relatively obscure position of Eastman and his music within the canon compared to other seminal New York minimalists, this programming decision gave the concert the feeling of a re-enactment of a seminal moment in understanding Eastman and his music. This feeling of re-enactment was further strengthened through the reproduction in the festival reader of two pages from the *Village Voice* reviewing the concert as part of an obituary by Kyle Gann for the composer in 1991, and an excerpt of the transcript of Eastman's introduction most likely taken from Hanson-Dvoracek's master's thesis on the Northwestern University concert (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 59–61).

There is of course an aspect of chance at play in the existence of this recording, which was largely due to the university's generous facilities and ample budget that led to this document being produced and preserved while others were not. However, as Hanson-Dvoracek puts it well, “[n]onetheless, the Northwestern concert remains unique in the amount of detail it offers not [sic] about Eastman's working habits and about three of his most important compositions” (2011, 35–36). This is not just because the concert at Northwestern was of three works that would become some of Eastman's best known, but also because of the recording of his explications of the ideas behind both the *N\*\*\*\*\** series and *Gay Guerrilla* would subsequently often be cited in attempts to understand Eastman within broader historical and political contexts, as well as positioning him within discourses around blackness and queer identity.

Addressing the audience, Eastman in the recording positions himself in relation to these two points, beginning with blackness and its relationship to American society and economy:

Now, there was, there was a little problem with the titles of the pieces ... They are called the Nigger series. Now the reason that I use that particular word is because for me it has a, what is what I call a “basicness” about it, that is to say that I feel that in any case the first niggers were of course the field niggers and upon

that is really the basis of the American economic system, without field niggers we wouldn't really have such a great and grand economy. So that is what I call first and great nigger, the field niggers, and what I mean by niggers is that thing which is fundamental, that person or thing that obtains to a basicness, a fundamentalness, and eschews that thing which is superficial or, what can we say, elegant... (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 96–97)

Eastman's positions black slaves as a "thing" (i.e. people robbed of their humanity) that is fundamental to the society and the basis of the American economy. They are what made it possible to create such grand institutions as the university in which he performed his pieces. Naming his musical works after these people can be understood as a form of empowerment of the term, in that it marks within an elite society an acknowledging of their indebtedness to that oppressed group (see also Ndikung 2018, 4). According to a newspaper account of the concert, despite this initial furor regarding work titles, it was musically well-received by the audience (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 35).

Musically, both pieces are highly energetic works of minimalism. *Evil N\*\*\*\*\** features in particular a recurring 4-piano unison cadence between sections that is both distinctive and strikingly memorable. Because stopwatches were not available for the Northwestern performance, Eastman's solution was to call out "one two three four!" to mark the beginning of these unison passages after the four pianos had slipped out of phase—a characteristic that was also maintained in the Maerzmusik concert (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 30).

Eastman also mentions the middle piece on the program, *Gay Guerrilla*, in his speech, addressing another important part of his identity and artistic expression:

Now the reason I use *Gay Guerrilla*, G-U-E-R-R-I-L-L-A, that one, is because these names, let me go into a little subsystem here, these names, either I glorify them or they glorify me. In the case of "guerrilla" that glorifies "gay," that is to say there aren't many gay guerrillas, I don't feel that gaydom has, does have that strength, so therefore I use that word in the hopes that they will. You see, I feel that, at this point I don't feel that gay guerrillas can really match with Afghani guerrillas or PLO guerrillas, but let us hope in the future that they might. You see that's why I use that word "guerrilla," it means a guerrilla is someone who is in any case sacrificing his life for a point of view and you know if there is a cause, and if it is a great cause those who belong to that cause will sacrifice their blood, because without blood there is no cause. So therefore that is the reason I use "gay guerrilla" in hopes that I might be one of them, if called upon. (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 97–98)

The 1970s marking the beginning of the nascent gay rights movement, the aspirational comparison to guerrillas in Afghanistan or Palestine seems for Eastman fittingly jarring. The work for its part stretches out comfortably over 30 minutes in

Eastman's characteristic minimal style, gradually undulating into a meditation on its sharp, piercing title. It is also the gentlest and calm of the three works.

As part of Maerzmusik's engagement with Eastman and his oeuvre, the festival cooperated with the visual arts project space SAVVY Contemporary, which involved also the launch a year-long research project at SAVVY into Eastman and his life and work.<sup>6</sup> Maerzmusik would focus on the composer again in the 2018 edition of their festival, building on the joint research project, once again presenting him with pride of place at the opening concert (though with a format that was less compelling than this earlier concert). In the introductory booklet to the latter 2018 exhibition, SAVVY's artistic director, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, discusses the recording of Eastman explaining his works, using it in order to help position the space's initiative. He interprets the recording as evidence that Eastman's work cannot be understood without attempting to also understand the historical realities that informed it:

[A core element of this project is] to read Eastman's work not only within its musical sensitivity, structure or texture – (ar)rhythmic, (dis)harmony, phonic – but also consider Eastman as a political being who saw his work as a medium to deliberate on the sociopolitical, economy, religion, as well as issues of gender, race and sexuality. (Ndikung 2018, 3–4)

As a part of this contextualization of Eastman as a “political being,” Ndikung criticizes the frequency with which the aforementioned pieces, some of Eastman's most well-known, are performed without any kind of contextualization given for why Eastman named them as such (Ndikung 2018, 4). In these cases, the titles seem to give the problematic effect of titillating the audience with taboo words, while not explicitly making attempts at disrupting their expectations.

Ndikung's project with SAVVY is focused on exactly such a necessary project of contextualization and education, as for him it allows the works to be seen within a light that emphasizes their artistic and critical questions, rather than simply understood on the basis of their formal musical characteristics.<sup>7</sup> The events, performances, lectures, and exhibition that were organized were all forms of supplementary knowledge-creation around the composer, in order for a fuller picture of his oeuvre and artistic message to be articulated. While the first exhibition, presented in 2017, focused on assembling archival materials, the second, in 2018, also com-

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6 The project began with performances and a documentary exhibition in the context of Maerzmusik 2017 entitled “Let Sonorities Ring,” and culminating in a symposium, more performances, and a larger, artistic exhibition during the 2018 edition of the festival, entitled “We Have Delivered Ourselves from the Tonal — Of, With, Towards, On Julius Eastman.”

7 See also Ndikung 2017 on the larger curatorial concept for SAVVY Contemporary.

missioned works by contemporary artists, who could respond to Eastman in their own practices, exploring how his work related to them and their current struggles.

Because of this added contextualization, this project, as well as the programming of Eastman at Maerzmusik 2017 and 2018, stands out in the amount of importance it placed on both reflection and re-actualization of the composer's artistic goals. Placing Eastman at the centre of the opening concert must itself be understood as a significant act of (re)inscribing him into the musical canon and music history. However, the organizers seem to be placing emphasis on *not just* repositioning Eastman within this history and canon from which he has been excluded, but also using their exploration of Eastman's work to call into question the very system from which it was excluded. In doing this, the artist's work is not neutralized, but is rather given the space and even expanded, in order to interrogate the entire legitimacy of the system from which it was excluded in the first place (in a way analogous to Eastman's naming of works after those who were the exploited foundation of the society they helped build).

Giving Eastman's works the ability to address the constitution of their frame is anathema to the normative functioning of the classical concert and specifically the contemporary music festival. Both of these rituals are based on forms of repetition, ones that help to (re)assert the identity of contemporary music through paradigmatic, representational portrayals of excellence, rather than call this definitional power into question (see also section 1.4.4). Reconstructing the facts of Eastman's life becomes a way of questioning the legitimacy of this supposedly-neutral concert space in which the musical canon is constituted and perpetuated.

In the same way, instead of working as a repetition of the festival ritual, Polzer's opening concert takes on more the character of a *reenactment*, rather than a repetition or enactment. "Reenactment" is chosen here because when taken together, many elements of the concert work together to reference and replicate the historical event of Eastman's concert at Northwestern. The concert also implicitly posed the question as to why this composer did not become better-known, and what impact his identity touching on two oppressed minorities had on answering that question. Most interestingly, the framing and contextualization of the Eastman opening concert, both with the specificities of the event itself, as well as the effort of contextualization in collaboration with SAVVY taken together accentuated an interpretation of the historical works that implied a re-actualization of Eastman's aesthetic concerns, making them relevant to the present-day audience.

### 5.5.2 A Concert, A Reenactment

Media scholar Maria Muhle has explored reenactment as an artistic strategy in her research in a way that can help to think further about Maerzmusik's approach to programming Julius Eastman. She argues that reenactment must be seen not as a

practice for the righting of historical wrongs, nor for the understanding of historical decisions, but rather as an instrument to re-create out of historical materials a past event within the context of the present (Muhle 2013, 134). Central to Muhle's argument is that the experience of the reenactment, just as in the original event, is immersive, and in this sense not only logical, but also affective. One does not just logically process historical facts, but rather one is put into an environment inflected with them, making the reenactment experiential (2013, 131). The goal of a reenactment of an event is to explore what the recreation of certain conditions can *again do*, exploring further potential and possibilities inherent to the multiplicity of the event, rather than focusing on retracing why something happened, or how it could have happened differently. The production of this reenacted event is significant itself just as situated and unique as the event it makes reference to. It is not an exact repetition or mimesis, but rather for Muhle a productive tension between participation and representative distance, identification and criticism, in such a way as to unsettle the link between reality and its established norms (2013, 134). This unsettling is what creates the space for the aforementioned new, further action among the participants.

Returning to the Maerzmusik concert itself, Muhle's theory proves productive inasmuch as it allows for a thinking of reenactment as an experimental system based on historical materials deployed as the event of performance. Reenactment then does not need to imply that an actor plays the role of Eastman and delivers a speech explaining the titles of his works to an audience of fictionalized Northwestern University students, nor that the rehearsal period be as chaotic, or the resulting performance as imprecise, as is audible on the recording of that concert in 1980 (Hanson-Dvoracek 2011, 28; Eastman [1980] 2005). Rather, reenactment looks different here. It manifests itself more as a concerted effort at contextualization of the works within the historical context of their performance and the life of their author, *as well as* directly through an identical program to the 1980 concert, and the addition of the recorded voice of Eastman.

Co-constituent of this reenactment approach was also the commitment of Polzer, in collaboration with SAVVY, to research Eastman, his life, and his political beliefs, in an effort that extended also beyond the event of the concert itself into both the festival time of Maerzmusik 2017, as well as unconventionally bridging the festival gap to Maerzmusik 2018.

Small moments of mimesis of the historical event within the concert itself would of course help to evoke the immersion within that world. Ultimately though, the form of reenactment more closely resembles the more diffuse, less literal definition of it put forward by Muhle in her text, one that is based on the exploration of further possibilities within the reenactment of an event. The dimension of critical action that Muhle speaks about can be found in this concert through the accumulation of small interventions to (re)constitute Eastman as a "political being" and his

work as a “medium to deliberate on the sociopolitical, economy, religion, as well as issues of gender, race and sexuality,” to repeat Ndikung’s framing of the composer (Ndikung 2018, 3–4).

There also exists a discrepancy between this politicized, polemicized (re)insertion of Eastman and his music into the festival’s collective consciousness and comparable, more normative “rediscoveries” of composers. The latter occur normally in a move that Boris Groys, in his essay “On the Curatorship” dealing with the traditional role of the curator in the visual arts, would describe as a double movement of iconoclasm and iconophilia. As Groys writes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century museum curator:

All kinds of “beautiful” functional objects—previously used for various religious rituals, decorating the rooms of those in power, or manifesting private wealth—were collected and put on display as works of art—that is, as defunctionalized, autonomous objects of pure contemplation. The curators administering these museums “created” art through iconoclastic acts directed against traditional icons of religion or power, by reducing these icons to mere artworks. (Groys 2008, 42)

The creation-through-decontextualization of works of art, and their subsequent exhibition-through-recontextualization would allow for museum curators to fit these automatized works into a teleological story of art’s history, ostensibly cleansed of its functionality within the community it originated in (Groys 2008b, 43). In much the same way as Groys describes the functioning of the modernist museum, so too does the functioning of the reintroduction into music festivals of previously unknown or under-performed composers occur. Festivals, with these kinds of thematic foci, will normally follow a basic pattern of “filling in the gaps” in an existing tapestry of composers in order to reconstitute musical history in some small way. Contrast this with the attempt being made here to present and contextualize Eastman. Every effort was made to present the composer within the “functionality” of his context—through a reenactment and thus re-examination of the possibilities of his artistic position rather than through repetition of a preestablished set of criteria applied to a given musical oeuvre.

As a further dimension of this, the concept of reenactment as an emphasizing of the singularity of the event of performance can be extended as well to the specific musical content of Eastman’s works. The works are characteristically minimalist in their extreme use of repetition of both individual notes and musical material. The audience, sat around the stage in a setup reminiscent of the free seating of SoHo’s lofts, is invited to get comfortable and experience the music as a kind of trance-like presence. Similar to visual artists who also worked in this minimal style at that time, Eastman’s work foregrounded the encounter with the performative reality of the work rather than his skill as a composer. The reduced, repetitive musical



material elicits contemplation and meditation on it, a feeling that was enhanced by the setup of the concert at Maerzmusik.

In the creation of this setup, the same kind of “theatrical” setup described by Jackson in her reading of Fried’s critique of minimalist art in section 2.2.1 can be applied to this concert situation. The audience members, in this reading, are understood as being placed within a situated and performative encounter with the work, where their presence and immanent experience *as* an audience is explicitly thematized and given space to unfold. The individual receiver is thus left to complete the work through the bringing in of their own experience, and their specific knowledge-set. Muhle’s concept of reenactment aligns with this interpretation of the music itself, in its focus on the audience finding and exploring latent, hidden potentialities for future action within the contexts of a historical situation.

The audience of the opening concert thus could be said to have found themselves in a liminal zone between the meditation on Eastman’s minimal music, and a reflection at the same time on the factual realities of the composer’s life and relationship to the musical canon, context furnished by the various mediating activities offered to the audience both at and around the Eastman concert. Between these aspects emerges the specific achievement of this programming of the composer, namely to present Eastman’s music both in deference to the historical circumstances that produced it, while at the same time presenting it to the audience in such a way as to have it appear fresh and relevant to their contemporary experience. Polzer, through his practice of contextualization, presented Eastman in context, while also opening that context to being reactivated as a properly musical experience by the audience.

Viewed through the lens of performative curating, Polzer’s approach to the Eastman Opening Concert seems to manipulate the performative event, understood as a knot of a multiplicity of actors acting on it, while at the same time assuming a curatorial responsibility for some subset of these, attempting to bend and mould them through a practice of concert-making to achieve his desired outcome. The concert curator does not simply schedule a concert of a composer that has been forgotten: he uses the festival as an opportunity for the festival public to learn about the composer and their works, and present them in a way that makes their contemporary audience able to relate them to their life, their experience. This is the practice of critical knowledge creation, focused on staging the event of *producing* knowledge, one that does not yet have a set outcome, and as such has also the potential to be different, to create a new possibility, a line of flight, also outside of what the organizer himself is able to conceive of.

A potential repercussion of Polzer’s approach is that it fits better into the interdisciplinary arts field than perhaps many CCM concerts, in that it offers multiple

points at which audiences from many different kinds of backgrounds can embark.<sup>8</sup> This kind of untangling of the various ways in which a concert can be understood happens regardless, however the key difference being addressed here is that of the explicit support and fostering of a wide diversity of readings. Important too is that this interdisciplinary arts approach also will be shown to inform other decisions made in the programming of the festival more generally, such as will be detailed in the next section on the evening Polzer dedicated to the writings and world of philosopher Donna Haraway.

Understanding this approach is key to understanding Polzer's strategy, which is not to move away from music, but rather to move towards a broadening of what music can be, and how it can become an artistic practice equipped with specific tools for addressing problems and issues of major societal import. In this way, the "Festival for Time Issues" becomes about—in this instance—issues of canonization and the whitewashing of contemporary music after all, though only insofar as this issue relates to more fundamental mechanisms of societal functioning, such as the societal forces that seek to exclude and/or neutralize artists as political beings in the first place, with their full dimensionality as critical subjects, rather than commodified author figures optimized for the machinery of the festival.

Significantly, this also seems to be a way of understanding how Polzer programs projects related to re-interpretations of the history of New Music more generally. Instead of addressing for instance historical omissions or injustices like that of Eastman head-on, he approaches them through a more fundamental investigation of the societal and historical forces that coalesced into the reality of the situation. As much as such a project is about Eastman and his music, it seems to be much more about using the festival as a space for interrogating the reasonings of history, and then in this way coming back around to address the issues themselves after the construction of a new imaginary, once again similar to the concept of the reenactment as outlined by Muhle.

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8 In their study of the audience of contemporary music at three European festivals, Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold conclude that outreach activities to establish broader social access to concerts seems not to be effective, and that a high volume of musical capital (understood with Bourdieu) is needed in order to understand New Music. They link this to the "ominousness" of musical tastes needed in order to approach the aesthetically "new" that is being offered by these festivals. Polzer's positioning here suggests a shift in paradigm, wherein musical omnivorousness is replaced with one informed by a variety of arts styles, referred to here as the interdisciplinary arts. The multiple points of entry then become linked still with a high level of education, but across a diversity of fields.

## 5.6 Storytelling for Earthly Survival

The seventh of Polzer's "10 composed evenings" of Maerzmusik 2017, "Storytelling for Earthly Survival" consisted of an entire evening dedicated to an exploration of the work of Donna Haraway, joined with artistic works connected in various ways to her philosophical ideas and her writings. The event itself can be understood more as the high-water mark of the 2017 festival's engagement with Haraway; her ideas would frequently reoccur in various places in the program, and were clearly influential on Polzer's thinking while conceiving the festival. This was reflected in the reader, too: next to Polzer's editorial appears a statement by the philosopher on "decolonializing time," a transcription from a video call between the director and Haraway that was also screened as the first presentation on both mornings of the festival's "Thinking Together" conference.

This section will examine this concert in detail, showing how Polzer's curatorial practice was able to produce this unique event. Starting directly with the material will help present the festival's core thesis as emerging out of the synthesis of its material. The program to the evening was as follows:

Story Telling for Earthly Survival

Venue: Haus der Berliner Festspiele (Schaperstraße 24, Berlin)

Date: Tuesday, 21 March, 2017

Time: 18.00 – approx. 23.30

Part 1 – 18.00

*DONNA HARAWAY – Story Telling for Earthly Survival*

Fabrizio Terranova, director

90 min., colour, Belgium (2016)

Part 2 – 20.00

*(NB: The order of works on the program was reversed in the concert. The actual order in concert is reflected here)*

*Chorus in cc.*

A vocal gesture (2017) WP

Myriam Van Imschoot, concept & composition

Caroline Daish, Jean-Baptiste Veyret-Logerias, Anne-Laure Pigache, Mat Pogo & guests, co-creation & performance

Participants of the "Thinking Together" voice workshop "Chorus in cc."

Fabrice Moinet, co-creation & sound design

*Staying with the Trouble*

Donna Haraway

Introduces and reads from her new book (*video recording*)*California Bird Talk*

A public radio project produced and hosted by Rusten Hogness

*Audio recording played for the audience.*

“The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” (1986)

In: *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (Grove Press, New York 1989)

Ursula K. Le Guin

Read by Lendl Barcelos (*standing in the audience*)

“The Author of the Acacia Seeds and other extracts from the ‘Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics’” (1974)

In: *The Compass Rose* (Pendragon Press, 1982)

Ursula K. Le Guin

Read by Amy Ireland (*standing in the audience*)*Bird and Person Dying* (1975)

Alvin Lucier

for performer, binaural microphone, amplifiers, loudspeakers and electronic bird-call

Alvin Lucier, performance

Hauke Harder, sound direction

Part 3 – 22.00

*An Ecosex Journey with Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle**(video and presentation with Q & A)*

Presented by Isabelle Carlier

**Donna Haraway – Storytelling for Earthly Survival**

The evening began with a 90-minute biographical documentary video on Haraway by director Fabrizio Terranova. The film introduces Haraway’s personality and thought to the viewer, but also formally enacts her call for the telling of new kinds of stories that often traverse between the very personal and local, and the deeply political and philosophical. This is done through a number of lightly surreal SFX interventions, often achieved with the use of a greenscreen. For instance, during long verbal elucidations by Haraway, the view out of her window in the background

may change in an instant from one forest scenery to another, gradually unsettling the viewer's perception of reality.

These small interventions increasingly tell their own narrative, and as well serve to make space in the film for various “critters” ranging from Haraway’s dog to jellyfish wandering across the background that together form an important cornerstone of Haraway’s philosophical argument. Highlighting these various kinds of living beings (as she calls them, the “chthonic ones,” after the Greek *chthonios*, meaning that which is under the earth or sea) is part of the philosopher’s project to argue for a decentring of the human from the locus of the world and its future (Haraway 2016, 53). Instead, she argues that we must understand humans as part of a larger whole, writing for instance that

the chthonic ones are not confined to a vanished past. They are a buzzing, stinging, sucking swarm now, and human beings are not in a separate compost pile. We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman. (Haraway 2016, 55)

Changing the perspective of humans to their surroundings, understanding themselves as part of a vast network of entities that are co-becoming together is the story that Haraway sets out to tell—and that Terranova in his film seeks to show—in order to spread her message of “earthly survival,” not coincidentally the title of the film. For Haraway, as she would explain during the evening via a pre-recorded video, this survival is in the face of mass extinctions and reductions in biodiversity, the threat of global warming, and the massive changes to the planet that have been caused by the processes of “capitalism, extraction, colonialism” in which humans play such a large part (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 159). This shift in perspective happens for Haraway only through a shift in the kinds of stories we tell, a position that has led the philosopher to engage deeply, also in her own writing, with science fiction, and with other such kinds of speculative fabulations (she uses the abbreviation “SF” as an open signifier to mean various related concepts such as these). As Haraway writes:

What used to be called nature has erupted into ordinary human affairs, and vice versa, in such a way and with such permanence as to change fundamentally means and prospects for going on, including going on at all. (Haraway 2016, 40)

The stories we tell do not just describe reality for Haraway, they are constitutive of it. Therefore, changing these stories to reflect this rupture that has occurred, as she attempts, are for her efforts at changing reality. For this reason, the inclusion of non-human actors in *Storytelling for Earthly Survival* is no coincidence or whim of director Terranova. Allowing for instance Haraway’s dog to play its own unique kind of role in the film, or intervening as he did in the visuals and backdrops of the documentary, are the director’s attempts at realizing in filmic form the content that

Haraway is detailing in spoken word. Like with Terranova, many artists and writers that engage with Haraway's writing will often realize her suggestions through an emphasis on telling alternative stories and narratives in this way.

Functionally, screening this kind of documentary at the beginning of the evening served as a handy and accessible introduction to both Haraway's philosophical positions, as well as, because of documentary's style, to some of the ways in which her writing has influenced and inspired a great number of artists.

Regarding staging, the entire evening would take place on the main stage of the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, with the audience sitting on cushions and bean bags on risers onstage as well, facing the empty theatre seats. This approach to putting the audience onstage was reminiscent of Polzer's transformation of the backstage area during the 2016 edition of Maerzmusik into a makeshift black box theatre, effectively giving him two kinds of stages to work with in a single evening. The difference was that in 2016, the stage curtain was drawn, creating a separated space onstage, whereas during this evening—as during the opening concert—the curtain was up, affording the audience a reflexive view of the theatre itself. The Terranova film was projected onto a screen framed by the proscenium arch, with the hall's grand dimensions providing a backdrop.

### Chorus in CC

Part 2 began with a performance by members of one of the conference's "Thinking Together" workshops that had been taking place during the past several days. The work, entitled *Chorus in cc.* and conceived of by artist Myriam Van Imschoot, was described by her as an "insect chorus" (Imschoot, n.d.). The piece was performed by a group of 30 mainly non-performers, and, because it was the first piece of the second section, would set the vibe and energy for the audience for the rest of the evening. It proved to be a slow and rather atmospheric kind of performance, setting a calm and reflective tone after the film that would continue for much of the evening.

The performance provided the audience with an opportunity to get involved and participate in Polzer's highly-detailed programming in a different way; through developing a collective performance. While the importance of this should not be overstated, within festivals for music, particularly those analyzed so far, it is rare for there to be moments of audience engagement that are presented as part of the main programming, and without in some way being presented with a caveat of one kind or another implying they are not the "real" or significant works but rather presentations out of necessity or obligation to financial sponsors. Polzer with this project opens his meticulously-coordinated concert to an element of unpredictability and engagement from the festival community with whom he shares the time of

the festival.<sup>9</sup> Because this performance was organized by a commissioned artist, Van Imschoot, it is also an example of Polzer's tendency to compose evenings with a "block-based" approach: he programs the workshop as a time block, but does not interfere with its content once set (see also section 5.4.2).

### Staying with the Trouble

Haraway then addressed the gathering via pre-recorded video (though originally supposed to be livestream), and read an excerpt from one of her *Camille Stories*, a series of science fiction stories written by Haraway and others (among her collaborators is Terranova) about the fictional, future community of New Gauley, West Virginia. Haraway relates in her book *Staying With the Trouble* how this series of stories came about as the result of a workshop with Isabel Stengers on speculative fabulation, and how this style of writing has become so integral to her work and philosophical project in the interim (Haraway 2016, 134). As already mentioned, storytelling as a practice is for Haraway a means of realizing new network connections through the speculative interlinkings that narrative affords, a challenge to traditional philosophical writing.

The story itself tells of Camille 2, born in 2085. Haraway explains of her fictional world that "[b]odily modifications are normal among Camille's people; and at birth a few genes and a few microorganisms from the animal symbiont are added to the symchild's bodily heritage" (Haraway 2016, 140–141). Thus,

at initiation at age fifteen, as a coming-of-age gift the second Camille decided to ask for chin implants of butterfly antennae, a kind of tentacular beard, so that more vivid tasting of the flying insects' worlds could become the heritage of the human partner too, helping in the work and adding to the corporeal pleasures of becoming-with. (Haraway 2016, 152)

The story continues like this, following Camille 2 through her exploration of this additional set of sensing appendages, and the unlikely connections to various communities and species that it enables.

Haraway herself was once again presented on the video screen, though because the video now consisted of a statement filmed simply from the philosopher's webcam, the aspect of editing and video-intervention no longer played a role in the content, shifting the audiences' focus more on the sound of Haraway's voice. The story of Camille 2, read by Haraway, became an acousmatic experience, bridging in

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9 It should be pointed out that these participants would have had to rehearse for several days in advance of the performance, an aspect that further highlights their membership in the festival community (more than just attending this one concert), in that they are participating in a moment of spatio-temporal concentration, and isolation from their daily lives.

a way the gap between the festival's focus on sound and the vibrancy of the opening movie and its enticing image-world.

### California Bird Talk and Stories by Ursula Le Guin

These two presentations were followed by several episodes of Haraway's partner Rusten Hogness' *California Bird Talk*, which documents, in short segments, the birds of California and their various calls. The audience, in need of a break by this time in the evening, listened with one ear, while chatting quietly amongst themselves, creating once again a relaxed, casual atmosphere for the evening. This work, played back over the hall's speakers, was the first to have no visual component at all, leaving the audience free to listen and contemplate the hall, with a kind of reflexivity also about their own position within the evening's happening.

*California Bird Talk* was followed by readings of two stories by Ursula K. Le Guin, a fantasy and science fiction novelist, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (1986), and "The Author of the Acacia Seeds and other extracts from the 'Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics'" (1974). The stories were read aloud by people standing in the audience, disrupting a frontal stage set-up and making once again for a more intimate experience of the evening. Once again, nothing was set up onstage, affording a sweeping view of the cavernous, empty hall that seemed to stare back at the audience.

With the exception of *Chorus in CC.*, the material presented during the evening until this point consisted of works that have some kind of strong connection to Haraway's writing, in particular to her 2016 book, *Staying with the Trouble*. Terranova's film saw Haraway present and repeat in various reformulations her central positions that are present in the book, while the filmmaker himself was also a co-writer with Haraway of the Camille stories. One of these was read at the end of Terranova's film, and another, which also appears in Haraway's book, was read aloud by her via video. Adding to this, she makes explicit reference to Le Guin's carrier bag theory from "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" as part of her second chapter. She uses the story to point out the bias towards certain kinds of stories in our culture that themselves focus too much on the human, rather than their accompanying objects, or in this case their containers (Haraway 2016, 39–40ff). "The Author of the Acacia Seeds" also makes an appearance in her book, "populating," in her words its sixth chapter, which attempts to "tell an SF adventure story with acacias and their associates as the protagonists" (7; 117ff). So too does Rusten Hogness in many places.

### Bird and Person Dying

The evening was however not entirely a direct illustration of Haraway's book and position. Following these presentations of different kinds of temporal materials re-



lating to Haraway, Polzer then presented *Bird and Person Dyning* (1975), performed by composer Alvin Lucier himself. The work utilizes the principle of heterodyning (hence the name) to create difference tones between two sound sources; a chirping bird sound, and a person wearing binaural microphones, which create various feedback loops. Depending on the exact position in the room of the microphones, the resulting difference tones will change. Thus as the performer moves their heads to listen, they are simultaneously composing the piece. (Rusche and Harder n.d.)

Taking from Dieter Mersch's analysis of *Music for Solo Performer* (1965), which Lucier created a decade earlier, Mersch writes of this category of Lucier's work that "the piece is a direct product of the technical set-up that is at once instrument and player" (Mersch 2017, 28). The same can be said of *Bird and Person Dyning*, with its particular combination of performer, microphones, speakers, and chirping bird. Not only do the specific motions of the performer inform the production of the difference tones, but so too do aspects of the *situated* reality of the performance event. The size and shape of the hall, the position of the listener, the distance between the different elements of the setup can all significantly impact the listening experience. The difference tones for their part are created psychoacoustically by the individual listener themselves, and can only be captured by a microphone should a "knot" of heterodyning occur by chance where the microphone is positioned (Rusche and Harder n.d.).

As Mersch writes, this means that the piece transforms "the sensory dimensions of physical phenomena and scientific procedures into veritable *aesthetic* phenomena. This might justify calling them experiments in perception" (Mersch 2017, 28). Their experimentality binds them to the present, and makes audible an ensemble of actants, both human and non-human, connected together in a given situation. The work's interaction with the agglomerated acoustic medium of a given space is thematized explicitly, revealing itself via the experimental setup (31). It is singular and unique to the moment of its being heard, dependent on "the time and space in which they are performed and the location of the listeners listening to them" (Mersch 2017, 32).

In contrast to the other authors programmed during this same evening so far, Lucier himself would certainly not relate his work directly to the writings and ideas of Haraway, preferring to focus more on his own pragmatism of approach (see on this Beyer 2017, 25). There do exist similarities between the two approaches though, significantly made perceivable via Polzer's programming strategy, which itself relates to Haraway's philosophy.

Haraway's call to "stay with the trouble," also her book's title, is in part realized for her through the making of what she calls "oddkin." Rather than focus on filial relations, or "natural" connection, she focuses on relationships of kinship, shared interests, friendship, or affinity. The "oddness" of these oddkin is the unexpectedness of connections—once again moving away from a human-centric understanding of

the world to one where humans co-occupy it with many other entities. Returning to Haraway's book, she lays this out in the beginning of her introduction by saying that

staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplacé, entangled and worldly. (Haraway 2016, 4)

These “unexpected collaborations and combinations” could easily be a way of describing Lucier's experimental systems, which, as has been shown with Mersch's analysis, are singular and situated “kinships” of walls, ears, electronics, etc., that produce “odd” or “unforeseen” results. These sonic results are the sonification of the “hot compost piles” of the particular concert settings themselves. Haraway speaks of a vitalism of material, and calls for exploring the limits and hidden facets of the world that surrounds us: Lucier devises artistic experiments whose results allow the audience to perceive differently their surrounding environment—of which they themselves are of course co-constitutive.

### 5.6.1 Storytelling for Earthly Survival Part 3: Composting is so Hot!

After Lucier's *Bird and Person Dying* closed out the second part of the evening, there still remained one final element on the program for the evening—a screening of the rushes (dailies) of the documentary *An Ecossex Journey with Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle*, presented by Isabelle Carlier during the last hours of a lengthy evening. Carlier exemplified the concept of show and tell as well in her presentation, alternating between showing rushes (of substantial length), and contextualizing them for the audience.

The film itself presented a series of provocative portraits of workshops the Stephens and Sprinkle have done, and the ideology of their ecossexual movement. A provocatively-literal take on the same strain of ecological thinking argued by Haraway, the two seek to grow their community of people who have an erotic connection to the earth and to nature. To quote from their manifesto:

1. WE ARE THE ECOSSEXUALS. The Earth is our lover. We are madly, passionately, and fiercely in love, and we are grateful for this relationship each and every day. In order to create a more mutual and sustainable relationship with the Earth, we collaborate with nature. We treat the Earth with kindness, respect and affection. (Stephens and Sprinkle, n.d.)

Like with much of the other materials presented in the evening before it, Haraway also makes explicit reference to Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle's practice, relat-

ing that they even made her a special bumper sticker that reads “Composting is so hot!” (Haraway 2016, 32).

As the film presentation wound to a close, it became clear that the audience was exhausted by the end of this long evening of materials relating to Donna Haraway, which began at 18.00, and ran to just before midnight, with only two short breaks. What became clear as the audience began to fatigue was how this particular program was able to attract many audience members because of their interest for Haraway’s ideas, rather than their membership in the Maerzmusik festival community. Their apparent difficulty with the long, loud, and very intense performance of *Bird and Person Dyning* earlier in the evening supports this. In any case, what Polzer managed to create was a distinctly musical composed evening, while at the same time creating it in such a way as to attract a non-specialist audience interested in the ideas and themes being addressed, rather than the way in which they were presented.

Just as it has been shown that the receiver is the one who ultimately untangles the complex webs of interdisciplinary arts practices, Polzer’s practice here shows one possible way that musical practice can participate in this interdisciplinary arts field. The Haraway concert, though obviously also attracting a music audience watching most of the festival, was directed much more at an audience sorted by issues or ideas rather than by knowledge of a singular artistic discipline. Musical knowledge was used, but routed in such a way as to enhance the presentation of Haraway’s ideas via the temporal form of a concert.

### 5.6.2 Compos(t)ing the Evening

The example of “Storytelling for Earthly Survival,” which contained few musical works, can help give insight into how Polzer conceives of the events in his programming also more generally. He writes in his introduction to the 2017 festival that it consisted of “ten composed evenings,” notably using “evening” to describe the events, instead of concert (Berliner Festspiele 2017, 4). In doing so, he therefore de-emphasized the expectation of featuring mostly music, as well as the norms of the concert ritual. As seen with the conceptual similarities between Haraway and Lucier’s work, this “kindred” relationship is significant not because it is groundbreaking, but because it shows Polzer’s way of assembling concert programs in a way similar to Haraway’s concept of making oddkin. The music curator assembles together different kinds of works, such as film, speech, story, radio show, science fiction, and CCM performance, and fashions them into a cohesive and coherent whole “evening” of his own devising. Polzer is thus using the *logic* of musical composition, bringing works into relation with each other, spatializing them within a concert hall, even experimenting with the audience’s seating arrangements, in order to make a result that is, while musical, not specifically a musical performance,

but rather is related to a conceptual theme—here calls to “tell new stories” and “make oddkin” in Haraway’s sense.

This odd mix presented as a cohesive whole creates a hybrid form that is less related to the concert tradition as it is to the transdisciplinary field more generally. This is because the evening can be best described by the concept of theatricality as it has been developed with Mitchell and Jackson in section 3.2.1. Theatricality is a useful concept for understanding the mixed media of the performative milieu created by this composed evening, in that what it forms is not any one precise medium (such as even the “concert medium”), but rather a complex moment of performance, in which various media, in this case video, readings, and performance, are brought into relation with each other using a musical logic of composition.

Music is nevertheless present in the understanding of this situation in two ways. Importantly, it is the background that informs the approach of the music curator and determines the methodological toolbox that he approaches the evening with. It is also present in the relation that Polzer is proposing with the festival between music and time. Maerzmusik as a “Festival for Time Issues” (the subtitle given to the festival by Polzer, which also notably does not contain the word music again) is meant to explore issues of temporality, which is the way that Polzer is extrapolating a primary concern of the discipline of musical production to wider societal issues (i.e. music-making as an artistic practice dealing with temporality). That this evening is focusing on Haraway, whose philosophical project is concerned with a shift in our perception of agency, and ultimately also with a shift to inhabiting the temporalities of non-human actors, is in turn then no coincidence; it becomes in other words recursive form and content of the evening at once.

What can be drawn from this is Polzer’s vision of music’s relation to society that is comparable to how Lepecki conceptualizes dance’s social relevancy in section 3.3.1, where he identifies certain characteristics inherent to dance practice, such as corporality, allowing it to act as a space for addressing certain kinds of societal issues. Applied to music, and specifically to Maerzmusik, this means that the festival’s focus is shifting away from an emphasis on musical works, and towards an emphasis on characteristics of musical practice that can challenge certain aspects of contemporary society. The difference here being an interest in symptoms instead of a category.

From this evening, one of these characteristics of musical practice that the festival focuses on can be identified as *composition*, understood as a way of creating meaning out of juxtaposition, and forming a narrative out of heterogeneous materials via a skill of working with their various medial characteristics. Another is *inhabiting alternate temporalities*, like Haraway suggests, as is performed in various parts of the evening, such as through the reading science fiction, or inhabiting the world of the ghost tones formed in Lucier’s piece. The heterogeneity of materials means that these aspects are then not understood to be the exclusive domain of

one strand of artistic practice, but rather one that appears in many areas, and is focused on intensely *also* in musical compositions. Said differently, reading sci-fi can allow for the experience of different temporalities, like Lucier.

Taking this one step further can allow for an articulation of Maerzmusik's curatorial concept to emerge. This is namely that Polzer seems to be focusing the festival's programming on exploring ways in which musical techniques relate to and interact with society. This is instead of the traditional approach to this festival and others in the field, whose curatorial concept is focused instead on discrete works, and, through the use of e.g. a festival theme, becomes a way of helping mediate these works to the festival audience. In this later case, such issues of the relationship between a work and society thus emerge either explicitly in a composer's work, or implicitly through the reproduction of certain values and practices. By foregrounding this aspect of music's relationship to society, Polzer also seems to be taking this definitional power for himself.

This is seen clearly in this evening, whereby the various works exist in an indexical relationship to the larger direction of programming set by the curator. This creating of a subjective narrative of the curator is what then allows for him to easily mix works from different disciplines and that have different artistic concerns; their meaning becomes re-stabilized through the higher order of the curatorial concept, here an evening of Donna Haraway.

## 5.7 Curating and the Maerzmusik Festival

### 5.7.1 Curating Concerts

Theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann distinguishes between three kinds of text; the linguistic text of the theatre play, the text of the staging or *mise-en-scène*, and the performance text, explaining that the latter is produced through the interpellation of the former two (2006, 85). He explains that in post-dramatic theatre, the performance text has undergone a shift in its understanding; it has expanded to encompass the realization that the entirety of the performance situation, of the different various sense-giving actants that make up the theatrical situation, constitute this performance text, rather than it just being narrowly defined as the discrete actions onstage (*ibid.*). Post-dramatic theatre is less about a change in how works are staged, and more about exploring the repercussions of this more fundamental expansion of the understanding of the performance text, which encompasses both the entirety of the theatre event, and is regulated by the individual viewer.

In a similar fashion, Polzer does not go so far as to change what can be understood as the analogy to the linguistic text—the score—of the individual works, for this would not be supported by a musical community that places an extremely high

value on fidelity and *Werktreue* (see also section 5.4.2). Rather, adapting Lehmann's diagnosis of director's theatre [*Regietheater*], Polzer is discovering "the means and devices that are inherent to [ed.: the concert] event without regard to the text" (Lehmann 2006, 50). Text here should be understood as the notational score, not e.g. the choice of scores, which is another area in which Polzer asserts his expressivity, as discussed earlier. This can be observed for instance in the examples above, where Polzer seems to discover the expressivity of the "means and devices" that already exist in his palette of options while designing a concert evening. As has already become established in director's theatre, he moulds and manipulates the dramaturgy in such a way as to have it change the performance text so drastically as to strongly influence the perception of the programmed works in a particular and subjective direction. Polzer could thus be said to be shifting the focus of the concert from an emphasis on fidelity to the "linguistic text" of the work to an emphasis on the performance text through the addition of a carefully-constructed *mise-en-scène*.

Just as with the early development of the role of the dramaturg discussed in relation to Lessing, Polzer's work becomes about both presenting a performance to an audience in such a way as to affect them, but also about addressing the issue of creating a *transgression*, not just showing the audience what they want, but what they *should like*. The way Polzer selects works, transitions between them, selects venues, stages the concert, and contextualizes it with the catalogue are all carefully conceived out of a logic of the material itself, but also out of an interest in ensuring that an event of affective upheaval and transgression occurs in the performative realization of the event. This is an assertion of authorship over the event on the part of the concert's organizer over the individual works or artists.

Section 3.4.1 established the equivalency between curating as a practice of co-creating the event of critical knowledge production and dramaturgy as the practice of creating a performative event of affective upheaval and transgression. Their chief differentiating figure was argued to be the marginality in the institutional hierarchy of the term dramaturg (or even the director of a singular production) in contrast to the prominence of the curator, who is historically put in control of an entire festival or institution. Polzer, in his assertion of control of programming, *mise-en-scène*, and thematic framing of the entirety of the festival, can therefore be understood to have a curatorial practice.

The working definition here of curatorial practice is thus that it is a quasi-artistic form of expression using the means of concert organization. This emphasis on the performance text of the concert event as itself an expressive output of the curator is analogous to the understanding of curating developed in Chapter 3. Both deal with the practice of constituting an event of knowledge-production as a mediating figure responsible to many different stakeholders. This definition also makes for a compelling comparison with historical examples from the field of curating,

in particular the perhaps best-known practitioner of this approach to exhibition-making, Harald Szeemann. As has been shown in section 2.3.1, Szeemann was one of a group of pioneers in the visual arts in this regard, creating exhibitions that were highly subjective in their choices of thematic and works, and particularly in later years also emphasizing the role of the artwork as subservient to a larger thesis of an exhibition.

## 5.7.2 Maerzmusik's Curatorial Shift

### Curatorial Instead of Artistic Concept

Documenta V was the culmination of a shift that had been taking place in the art world away from a focus on individual works in an exhibition and towards understanding the total of the exhibition as an expression of its curator-as-author. Both group exhibitions and installations by individual artists made up the material that Documenta presented. While artists would have control over certain areas of the exhibition, it would itself be understood as a product of its curator. The way that Szeemann framed and juxtaposed the individual works together in the exhibition was in order to realize his own curatorial concept, thus *using* the works in order to make a statement through their composition.

How Szeemann chose to lead this exhibition can help clarify the relationship between the curating of individual *concerts* by Polzer and the claim that he is curating the *entire festival*, which is made up of his “composed concerts,” but also of concerts where individual artists are entirely in control (i.e. where his assertion of authorship is less obvious), as well as other events like exhibitions, installations, and symposia.

While there is a distinction that can be made between events selected by Polzer but showcasing entirely one project, and on the other hand events that show a number of works by the same or different artists, in a *mise-en-scène* developed by the curator, this comes down only to a differentiation between “composing” the festival as a whole and “composing” the collection of works on a specific evening. As was the case with Szeemann before him, Polzer’s involvement in composing concerts and their *mise-en-scène as well as* his working-with artists to help them realize their own projects, be they evening-length performances, exhibitions, etc. during the festival, must be understood together in order to form the curatorial concept for the entire festival.

Once again in the case of Szeemann, the art world’s focus at the time on the individual works in an exhibition was made possible by the presumption of works’ relationship to an art history, which created the more universalist backdrop against which they could be measured. This could be seen e.g. with Bode’s original vision for Documenta as a survey of contemporary art trends. Szeemann’s curatorial concept on the other hand was based on a thematically-driven, subjective choice of artists

and works, a radical departure from this more art history driven approach to the exhibition.

Similarly, Maerzmusik occupies a unique position in the field of music festivals because of its similarly theme-driven, subjectively-oriented program. Other major festivals such as Donaueschingen, Ultraschall, or the Darmstadt Summer Course focus more on supporting the communities of composers that have developed around them. This is despite ostensible thematic foci such as digitalization or gender issues (in Donaueschingen and Darmstadt respectively), which should be understood more as emerging out of their perceived responsibility towards these communities (as well as arts funding bodies), rather than themes or topics around which festivals are built from the ground up.

Maerzmusik is subtitled “Festival for Time Issues.” Polzer uses this as a license to explore how societal and political concerns can be refracted through the genre of music. He writes for instance in the preface to the 2018 festival that “[t]his ‘Festival for Time Issues’ proposes to probe the current state of affairs through the lens of time and through listening” (Odo Polzer, Siepen, Barthelmes 2018, 5). “Time and listening” are for him not in the first instance related to a history of music or of the musical avant-garde (i.e. the capitalized New Music), but rather to what he (subjectively) judges to be immanent issues of broader societal import such as the Anthropocene, or minority rights—related also to the topic of “decolonizing time” that will be focussed on in section 5.8. The purpose of programming is no longer to position works in a grand new rereading of music history together. It is rather to bring them together into a new narrative for understanding society, *set by the curator*.

Maerzmusik is exemplary of a shift in the leadership of music festivals similar to what was observed with Documenta V and Harald Szeemann: a shift from a focus on the artist and their artwork in a transcendental relationship to music history, to a focus on the artwork as existing in relationship to the frame set by the curator, an individual subject.

Because the curator, as a mediating figure, a figure responsible for the programming both of the part and the whole, is shaping this event inseparable from its performance, they become essential to the production of the event per se, in their constitution of a framework. This framework consists of the ideological, thematic framing of the festival, as well as the *specific* practice of how this is realized in conjunction with the artists being programmed (hence the focus on some of these methods earlier). The curator becomes a powerful co-actor in the constitution of the performative event, asserting over it a definitional, meaning-generating power.



### Where is the Resistance?

A crucial difference between the historical example of Szeemann and Documenta 5 and Maerzmusik is the latter's lack of an analogous pushback against or resistance to the curator's annexation of an enormous amount of definitional space. Szeemann was famously criticized both by artists invited to exhibit at Documenta 5 as well as by the consensus of curatorial discourse after him of assuming too dominant a role in defining the meaning of the exhibition.

In the catalogue to Documenta 5, Daniel Buren would accuse Szeemann of "exhibiting an exhibition." His position was that artists' works functioned only as "pigments" for the larger "painting" created by the curator—Szeemann. Works exist in a degraded position, as the curator selects them according to their suitability for the larger exhibition work and its central thesis (Buren 1972, 29; see section 2.3.1). Documenta artists were in other words concerned about this experienced loss of autonomy over the ability to contextualize and set the meaning of their own work. This debate would set up a showdown over the ultimate ownership of the exhibition and the ability for each side to be able to control both it and its ability to create a meaning for their works.

Comparing this to the situation with Maerzmusik begs the question: where is the resistance? Buren and other Documenta artists would retroactively become known as early practitioners of institutional critique in the visual arts field, which remains a major topic today. While criticism and the visual arts exist in a different relationship today than they did fifty years ago, the concern here is a different one.

The composers and performers affected by this usurpation of Polzer of the definitional space of the concert do not see their artistic expression as affected by it because for them it occurs on a different register. Their focus lies on guaranteeing a high-fidelity performance, or otherwise one that fit with music-internal notions of quality. This means that the transformation of Polzer's festival into one centred on the exploration of ideas about society refracted through the lens of musical practice is one that territorializes a space not previously occupied by artists regarding musical meaning production.

This sets up an interesting tension going forward: In the visual arts, this tension between curator and artist occurred not just because of the sharing of the same symbolic space of the exhibition, but also because the practice of both artists and curators began to resemble each other, as both took an interest in art as an expression of ideas and their mediation (O'Neil 2012, 18). While many of the artists that are programmed by Polzer are either dead or otherwise unconcerned with his practice of inserting them into a *mise-en-scène* or festival theme, Polzer's practice itself is part of a broader movement of musical practitioners that are, similar to their analogues in the visual arts, beginning to see the design of the concert experience as itself an important element of musical expression.

Returning to Chapter 4 on the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, that chapter explored how a young generation of musical practitioners are finding ways of addressing the theatricality of musical practice, going beyond a focus on exclusively sonic material within a preset frame (e.g. of the traditional concert or opera stage). They are very much concerned with the mediation and contextualization of their works, due in large part to their more conceptual approach to musical production. It could be said that the trend towards musical practitioners considering the contextualization of their works as integral to their artistic expression is inversely proportional to the degree of freedom for acting within an unclaimed symbolic space for an approach such as that of Pozler.

As the amount of new kinds of music theatre practice grows, i.e. the amount of musical practitioners who feel invested also in the contextualization and mediation of their works as constituent of its effect on the audience, then Polzer's ability to "compose evenings" or even festival concepts himself becomes either more limited, or begins to intersect with the former group in ways not dissimilar to what has already been shown with Szeemann. It would then not be amiss to speculate that criticisms such as those expressed by Buren of Szeemann's "exhibition of an exhibition" from so many years ago are set to increase as the field of contemporary music moves more in this direction, setting up a similar kind of battle over control of meaning of the musical event, as has formed the basis of the field of curating in the visual arts.

## 5.8 Decolonizing Time

It is worth exploring one last thematic strand of Polzer's Maerzmusik festivals, namely their relationships to the issue of decolonization and what Polzer calls "decolonizing time." Since the beginning of Polzer's tenure, the festival has carried the subtitle "Festival for Time Issues," implying that it is attempting to shift its thematic scope to include a broader, more transdisciplinary investigation of the relationships between perceptions of temporality and societal structures. A further semantic shift has occurred in the festival's messaging and programming over the past three editions, in which it has increasingly trained this focus on "time issues" to specifically issues of capitalism, modernism, and colonialism as they relate to both the production of temporalities and subjectivities, as well as various ways of exploring these issues through artistic practice.

At the latest during the 2017 edition, decolonizing time became an important concept in the festival programming. This becomes clear through the prominent placement of a statement by Donna Haraway on what decolonizing time means for her in the 2017 and 2018 readers (pages 5 and 8–9 respectively), as well as the fact that Polzer played the same video of her making this statement as the opening

remarks to both the 2017 and 2018 Thinking Together conferences at the festival. The engagement with Haraway was related to the 2017 evening showing her work, and related events called “Storytelling for Earthly Survival” (see section 5.6). The topic has also become the focus of Polzer’s contribution to the Defragmentation initiative (see section 1.2.2).

As central as decolonizing time is to the festival, it must still be established what this actually means in its specific actualization at Maerzmusik. Understanding Haraway’s comments on the topic reproduced in two Maerzmusik readers will be the most efficacious way to approach this.

Haraway understands decolonized time as an escape from colonized time designed to extract value. Colonized time is shaped by the needs of capital, which destroys diversity in favour of easily-governable and self-same monoculture. Inhabiting decolonized time is about seeking out temporalities that are not aligned with a majoritarian profit motive, but rather form the displaced underbelly of colonial time, which Haraway calls the “Plantationocene” named after that original deployment of this spatio-temporal project. Decolonizing time is an approach to understanding the present that looks beyond rationales of profit in order to listen to and understand the suffering and the pain of those caught up in processes of colonialization, in order to also act in practical new ways to support these non-colonialist structures. It is less so about bringing in new ideas, and more about a concerted commitment to learning and working-with communities in order to develop collective solutions. (Haraway 2018, 8–9)

In the context of the Thinking Together conferences, Polzer’s programming approach emerges from this way of thinking. His programming is intended to develop a discourse that problematizes this relationship between coloniality and temporality, in ways that build a term-cluster, as Dorothee Richter proposes, around the issues of coloniality/modernity/capitalism/the West (Richter 2017). This was achieved in 2017 through conference contributions by, along with Haraway, e.g. C. K. Raju, who illustrated the Western-centrism of the clock, and Rolando Vázquez, who examined the relationship between modernity and time. This conference included also explicit relationships to Western music, with contributions by, among others, sociology of music professor Georgina Born, and artist Björn Schmelzer, who works with the early music ensemble Graindelavoix. In the 2018 conference, the direct link to Western music was much weaker, with the conference emphasizing more its function as framing the festival’s commitment to issues of decolonization through contributions by prominent scholars such as Timothy Morton or Mauricio Lazzarato.<sup>10</sup>

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10 While Morton was ultimately unable to attend, the programming gesture is most significant here.

These concepts can also be seen to be inform festival programming as well, which was strongly determined by the will to include more minoritarian positions, in various ways attempting to program works that reflect on this term-cluster. This can be seen for instance in the programming of Eastman, examined above, or the “Migrants” evening addressing refugee issues in the 2018 edition.

Rather than examine here exact instances of when Polzer has programmed works that fit into these criteria, it seems more worthwhile to take one step backwards, and consider the relationship between decolonizing time and the festival more generally, in order to take a more nuanced perspective on the specific understanding that Polzer is taking in regards to this issue.

Chapter 2 opened by looking at how the festival transformed into an ideal instrument of modernism, one that has proven highly effective in its functioning as a site for the construction of systems of international rationalist order, and crucially also their dissemination to a festival public through the mechanism of exceptionalism brought about by the festival’s spatio-temporal concentration. It has traced the many ways in which this system has proven resilient and hard to change, but also how its effectiveness can be harnessed for purposes other than the reproduction of modernism’s colonialist/capitalist values, fostering critical thinking instead, as has been shown in the tendency to attempt to “outstare the colonizer’s gaze” through the organization of particularly biennales in sites of political trauma (see section 2.2.3) (Roces 2010, 53).

For her part, Haraway’s statement expresses effectively a similar idea when she writes that decolonizing time means inheriting and taking responsibility for the troubles and wounds that have been left behind by a legacy of capitalism and colonialism, which are the underside of these processes that led to the emergence of the festival format in the first place. The concept of inheritance similarly acknowledges that the resiliency of these systems can also prove to be a strength to be harnessed, in that inheriting the legacy of colonialism means also “inheriting the inventions of precious things—for example many of the things in the Enlightenment must never be lost from our planet again—inheriting the precious as well as the terrible and opening up categories” (Haraway 2018, 8). This quote mirrors that same history of working-with and subverting exigent formats mentioned above, in that it accepts the existence of these structures, but strives to reimagine their categories in ways that subvert the destructive systems that produced them, while attempting to emphasize the critical enlightenment project with which they are also connected.

Decolonizing Maerzmusik therefore means using the functioning of the festival in order to achieve ends subversive to the system that produces it. Looking at other decolonization initiatives, these suggest that a common way of doing this is through investigation of sites, frameworks, and administrative procedures.

Approaches such as the one taken with Enwezor's Documenta 11 explored in section 2.3.2, or in Documenta 14's decision to have venues also in Athens, addressing in this way the tensions between European North and South, are a testament to this approach. This can also take place through criticism as a form of digging up the contradictions at the centre of these festivals, such as when, in the opening paragraphs of the editorial to the *OnCurating Journal* on decolonizing art institutions, the authors point out that the capital for Kassel's Fridericianum was originally found through selling soldiers to the English to quell the American Revolution (Richter and Kolb 2017).<sup>11</sup> In this way, "issues of so-called 'race,' class, and gender are always intertwined in aesthetics, in the arts, in art institutions, and their ideologies, and should therefore also be considered together in rethinking a decolonial horizon" (ibid.). For instance, one could ask: how have such issues determined the course of the Musik-Biennale/Maerzmusik since its inception, and particularly during early German unity?

However, such an approach is not the core focus of Polzer's understanding of decolonizing time.<sup>12</sup> Rather, as the term suggests, it is focused primarily on the concept of time, and not on the general decolonization of the Maerzmusik festival itself, though this of course also occurs by association. Decolonizing time manifests itself at Maerzmusik in at least two ways:

First, it is occurring through an approach to programming, in that Polzer is programming artists outside of the normative, narrow approach to contemporary music, and is programming instead musical practitioners from a much broader field unbeholden to a singular majoritarian style. This move implicitly acknowledges the structural complicity of New Music in the systems that he is trying to subvert, and his programming is thus attempting to opening its ears to a more diverse palette as a result.

Second, this approach to programming is combined with Polzer's music curatorial approach to carefully organizing the presentation of Maerzmusik's "composed evenings," in order to produce experiences of decolonizing time that Polzer is aiming for. In this way, the focus on the constitution of the individual concert event as audience experience becomes the vessel which allows for the audience to transform their perception, allowing them to experience a time that is decolonized within the confines of the festival event. All of this fits with the experientiality contained in Haraway's approach to decolonizing time, in that it is strongly based on a situated,

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11 Note as well the proximity between war, capital, Capital, and arts festival, as pointed out by Rocés 2010, see also section 2.1.

12 Arguably however, an approach like the one put forward by Richter and Kolb (among others) is being carried out by the Berliner Festspiele on a broader level, such as for instance their *Palast der Republik* project in March 2019 addressing outstanding issues of German reunification and European identity. An analysis of such an approach goes beyond the scope of this volume.

present, performative, and affective being-with that is well-suited for translation into the concert experience.

Therefore, decolonizing time happens in the Thinking Together conference as a subversion of the discursive offerings at the festival through the presentation of critical theory attempting to navigate the term-cluster around coloniality/modernity/capitalism/the West, and in concerts through the elicitation of alternative forms of perception through a combination of diversified programming and curation (qua dramaturgy) of concerts. Together they are intended to present a festival conception that uses enlightenment structures that question their own complicity within colonialist systems to produce critical knowledge production experienced by the festival community. Decolonizing time becomes a programmatic idea that is used in order to alter the outcomes of existing systems of the music festival.

Returning to the decolonization of arts institutions, it becomes clear that this broader category includes but also goes beyond the approach to decolonizing time that Polzer is practicing with his festival. It addresses to a much greater degree also the constitution of the institution itself, and the position that it plays within circuits of knowledge-production that are most likely compromised in one or more regards in relation to issues of colonialism or, especially, cognitive capitalism. Without mistaking this approach with a search for intellectual and ideological purity (which, as Haraway argues, is nether possible nor remotely productive), it addresses also the specificity of the site, as well as the institution and community's relationship to both it and issues of colonialist importance.

Without speculating as to the absence of this more structural approach to decolonization at Maerzmusik, the centrality of Polzer's position as its intellectual and artistic leader should be noted as a potential hurdle to integrating this approach, which tends to eschew centralized or hierarchical structures of authorship. The centrality of the position that Polzer assumes is, despite the highly progressive approach that is put forward, structurally the same as the centrifugal regimes of knowledge-production seen already in 19<sup>th</sup> century festivals, and in its homogeneity of leadership in contradiction to the pluralist being-with multitudes put forward in the writings on decolonization by Haraway and others.

A more structural approach to decolonizing Maerzmusik (though admittedly more fundamental and a different project than "decolonizing time") would be an opportunity to investigate the history of the festival and its backing institution in light of matters of colonialization and capitalism.

## 5.9 Conclusion/Coda/*Konzertemacher*

Berno Odo Polzer's music curatorial approach to Maerzmusik is moving away from a sole focus on music, and heading towards a more conceptual exploration of mu-

sic's characteristics, such as its ability to shape time. This shift can be described as being *from programming musical works to a musical programming of works*. In other words, his approach to the festival is moving away from programming only one specific genre in favour of programming productions that fit to conceptual questions he wishes to explore. The relationship to music is thus twofold: one, in a "compositional" approach to assembling discrete ticketed evenings that combines selected works with a *mise-en-scène* in order to create a specific surplus of meaning out of the concert. Two, through a focus on concepts and ideas that are related to time and its perception, as well as sound. These are central to (most) musical practice, but the focus on them as concepts lets them be connected to wider societal issues, hence the subtitle "Festival for Time Issues."

While Polzer is succeeding in changing the Maerzmusik festival to become more about societal issues, and less a celebration of CCM as an autonomous art form, this does come at some cost. Polzer's festival is strongly autocratic, its focus determined by the aesthetic concerns of the music curator alone. The emancipatory themes of decolonization, ecological awareness, etc. can themselves only be lauded. Despite this, the centring of the festival around one auratic organizer does start to contradict fundamental premises of these emancipatory politics.

In addition to this, Polzer's curatorship of the festival resembles what Paul O'Neil, writing about the emergence of the curator figure, calls the mystification of the curator figure, auraticizing his practice of organization, and turning the product of an enormous team of people into the perceived expression of a singular figure. The earlier comparison to Harald Szeemann means that the concept of the *Ausstellungsmacher* is close at hand, whereby for Polzer it can be adapted to *Konzertemacher*.<sup>13</sup> As with the earlier Szeemann, a contradiction can be found between the emancipated values at the centre of Polzer's festival and the establishment of the curator at its authorial centre.

A further facet can be isolated out of Polzer's seeming turn away from an emphasis on programming musical production. Each year, the curator seems to be programming less music, and relying more on his approach of composing evenings in order to fulfil their requirement of being somehow musical. This move away from the community that both the festival and Polzer himself have in the past been associated with is at first completely understandable: the New Music field increasingly seems like a small cultural niche, one that is underperforming in relation to the scope of potential of musical practices, and certainly one where artistic practices aware of or addressing current political and philosophical thought are few and far between. This effectively sets a hard limit on the abilities of this well-connected curator to address, through *musical programming*, such issues, causing him to ex-

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13 Term coined by Sandeep Bhagwati.

periment with “sublimating” musicality into another facet of his programming, as for instance with the Donna Haraway evening examined in the previous section.

An alternative view on this would argue that, in keeping with Polzer’s interest in Donna Haraway, *staying with the trouble* should be what happens instead, with the festival committing to working with that problematic community that it comes from instead of moving slowly away from it. Perhaps what are needed are needed are exactly the “oddkin” that Haraway describes, the unlikely networks that can be formed when insisting on working in a damaged landscape. While not the same kind of environmental damage, there is a certain thematic similarity between Haraway’s diagnosis and the stagnation of CCM, caused by a fatigue emerging from the realization of modernism’s false promises.

When Polzer’s festivals succeed, it is because of their ability to purge themselves and their programming of a modernist nostalgia. Through the meticulous crafting of concerts and their larger embedding in a 10-day festival program, most likely only doable with an autocratic system, the music curator creates events based in the history and thinking of European experimental music, versed in contemporary issues and politics, and vibrant and interesting to a young contemporary audience from a diversity of backgrounds. This skill—to be clear, a curatorial one—is what makes this festival unique and worthy of reflection and criticism. If other musical leaders prove unable to match this level of success and relevancy, then no amount of staying with the trouble will be able to help.





## 6 Conclusion/Curating Music

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### Curating Music

A myriad of connections between curators and curatorial practice in various other disciplines and music have been drawn over the course of this book. It has tried to approach curating as a practice of undisciplined knowledge production, a way of escaping from established disciplinary forms and commodified modes of presentation, and the enactment of a movement of thought. Instead of being understood as an exclusively visual arts practice, curating has been understood as a more general way of approaching the creation of critical knowledge, knowledge not firstly associated with a particular discipline, but produced out of a constellation of factors in the performance of the event of its enactment.

Festivals for music and perennial arts exhibitions have thus here not been artificially separated from one another on the basis of their different media or communities, but rather been analyzed in terms of their common lineage. This is one that is related both to processes of mass subjectification and nationalist identification, but also to the potential for creating critical mass, and for fostering counter-hegemonic practices. As has been shown, these latter tendencies have been more thoroughly explored in curatorial practice in the visual arts, forming a body of knowledge and experience that can be transferred to festivals for music that are now similarly starting to experiment in similar ways.

How does one start to think curatorially about musical practice? Firstly by carefully fashioning the conceptual tools that will be used: The first two chapters attempted to establish a common framework for thinking about festivals for both music, the performing arts, and visual art. They also sought to present relevant historical and contemporary debates and discussions surrounding curatorial practice.

The goal has been to show that far from being a specific, definable thing, curating is a much slipperier term, understood variously historically, etymologically, or as a cypher for knowledge-based, post-Fordist labour. Curating has been portrayed as a practice that, as its name belies, first emerged in the field of the visual arts, but has over the course of its development become understood as a discipline-agnostic term for describing cultural producers dealing in some way with the mediation of

artistic work. This understanding of curating comes particularly out of a specific more academic approach to the field that began to emerge in the 1990s. The concept of mediation is key in that it describes the process of providing context and framing, connecting an artistic practice with particular histories, audiences, and places. The transdisciplinary and transculturality that define 21<sup>st</sup> century artistic practice require this explicit constitution of connections in order to not be lost in the deluge (of information, of ideas, of entertainment).

Curating has to be more than a simple providing of context however. The practice must also reckon with the transformation of artistic critique under cognitive capitalism and the rise of the creative economy. The traditional values of artistic work—creativity, critical thinking, eliciting affect—have become also highly valued by market forces, which are quick to integrate artistic labour into reassertions of hegemonic power. The practice of curating, as it has developed into a diffuse, hybrid practice, forever unclear in its purview and responsibilities, but nevertheless acting at the nexus of critical artistic expression and managerial reality, manages to place itself directly in the crosshairs of this struggle.

What then makes curating so important as a concept is its ability to work on this fundamental categorical level in order to constitute in new ways the project of artistic critique, understood as a practice of creating genuine, counter-hegemonic alternatives. It is a practice that has the potential to reimagine the relationship between arts and society in a period when this relationship has become strained, less a practice of framing and more one of re-framing.

As sweeping as this description of curatorial practice may be, successful practices are very much rooted in the particularities of *how* it is done in a particular setting. This means that curating is more of an approach to mediation, a certain tendency, rather than a specific set of discourses or references to know and respond to. Relating this back to the field of contemporary classical music (CCM), while it may not share all the same discourses around critical theory, institutional critique, etc., that prevail in other art forms, this does not per se preclude a curatorial approach to musical mediation. It was also—indeed in perhaps a curatorial way—an attempt at establishing a point of reference on the topic aimed specifically at practitioners in the field of music, and tailored to fill the particular gaps that have been observed in the discourse about CCM, which is generally reluctant to call its constitutive structures into question.

What was then important to establish was a specific theoretical basis for the transfer of a curatorial approach to outside of the field of the visual arts. This was done through an adaptation of Shannon Jackson's writings on interdisciplinary arts scholarship to develop a theory of curating as a practice of taking partial responsibility for the event of the artistic encounter (in the sense of the performative turn), and attempting to shape them so as to produce an event of critical knowledge production for an audience.

Specific ways in which this taking-responsibility has been realized in the performing arts were then examined, in order to establish a basis for what curatorial practice in the performing arts can look like, setting up several key concepts and ideas that would then help inform the study of the curatorial practices seen in the two musical case studies.

In regards to dance, it has been shown how that field's engagement with its mediation connected with the specificities of its tradition and medium have produced interesting new forms of spectatorship, as seen in the dance exhibition format. Examining theatre also revealed important practices creating new definitions of how theatrical practice can exist as a critical social force. It also allowed for an investigation of the distinctions between dramaturg/dramaturgy and curator/curating, arguing that despite similarities among the two practices, the latter distinguished itself through a history of hypervisibility stretching even into other arts, as well as a transdisciplinary trove of knowledge related to issues of criticality and artistic practice.

### **Munich Biennale for New Music Theater**

Looking at the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, examining the festival from a curatorial perspective allowed for a more nuanced view of the way Daniel Ott and Manos Tsangaris have directed the festival. Both are originally composers whose artistic practices have shifted to focus on creating structures and processes for music theatre to be created, rather than the works themselves. While their artistic concerns with the festival may be similar to their own artistic practices interrogating these same limits, the method has changed to become more one of nurturing relationships and establishing a foundation or institutional frame for these practices to unfold.

The connection between creating this frame and their artistic work, as well as the relationship between this and the final festival event can best be understood by taking recourse to curatorial discourse. How they work with all stakeholders, mixing artistic and managerial practice, in order to shape both productions and the festival event in a certain way, is what is most interesting about their approach. Looking at DOMTS and their work from this perspective has the advantage of focusing squarely on their leadership strategy and its relationship to both works and audience.

Thinking about DOMTS curatorially also means access to a discourse around arts leadership that can be adapted in order to enrich these discussions: For instance, reading Claire Bishop's analysis of early social practice in the visual arts in the 1990s, the concerns of those curators around finding new ways of working with artists, and the tensions that these different working methods created with audiences, create powerful juxtapositions with DOMTS' processes of experimentation

with method, and how they are presented to the audience by the two leaders. To emphasize this point, what this does not mean is that these two can be compared within the same framework; they are extremely different from each other in important ways. Rather, the point is that curatorial discourse can help tell different stories about DOMTS, and unlock the ability to understand challenges within their practice in new ways. It is thus a transfer on the level of ideas and concepts that can then be refracted through the particularities of a specific artistic discipline, site, institution, audience, or curator.

The case of DOMTS and their biennale can also be understood as a recursive shift among musical practitioners towards the mixing of media and the emphasis on creating a performative event. Recursive because this is a facet of DOMTS' platform system where transdisciplinary teams create music theatre works collectively, as well as a facet of the productions themselves that emerge from this system, which are usually intermedial, site-specific, and unrepeatable experiences.

The way that these kinds of performances intertwine many different strands of various artistic disciplines means that understanding these practices requires a matching transdisciplinary methodology of analysis. Navigating these shifting frames of reference, different disciplinary expectations and traditions, as has been done with the work of Shannon Jackson, is itself ultimately also an enactment of curatorial thinking: understanding performances at the crossroads of so many different discourses, be they about labour relations, relationship to various disciplines, or to a curatorial concept, allows for ideas about performances to themselves also be properly contextualized in ways that are productive and critical, without falling into so many interdisciplinary pitfalls.

Thinking from this background of carefully considering the disciplinary background and the particular resistances that affect a specific practice, the working method of DOMTS at the biennale is arguably both extremely innovative in regards to musical practice, but at the same time also in its earliest stages of development, both in regards to the curators themselves, and the practices that they are supporting. This detailed analysis of their work from a curatorial perspective has been with the intention of opening up a space for debate around the issues at the biennale, and in doing so help to connect it to other similar initiatives and practices, all in the name of furthering its development.

### **Maerzmusik**

While the Munich Biennale has put much emphasis on the process of developing its productions, Maerzmusik has conversely been focused on the *art* of careful programming of musical and other works into evening-length programs that together position themselves in relation to the festival's main thematic ideas, mostly related to important societal debates surrounding post-colonialism and social justice. With

this has come a new relationship to the 20<sup>th</sup> century German New Music tradition that Maerzmusik has historically been a part of. This relationship is marked by a new telling of the history of that tradition from a wider and more global perspective, showing the often-concealed ways in which it has intersected variously with the strategic interests of states, and with a positioning of the West at the centre of global experimental musical production.

Remarkable about this direction is its level of self-reflection by the festival about its own functioning. It stands out as a rare example of a music festival that is actively experimenting with its own framework, and going through a self-reckoning in order to reassert its criticality within the contemporary paradigm.

Despite the festival's high level of sophistication when it comes to its self-identity, there remains a tension between the festival and its community that seems to be widening. The first issue is that, in contrast to the emancipatory values of its programming, Polzer as an individual occupies a highly prominent role as festival *auteur*, its ultimate locus of meaning. He as *Konzertemacher* has become for better or for worse its charismatic centre. Despite the festival's self-awareness in its relationship to history, there does not seem to exist a parallel discussion around the festival's actual organization itself, which would be necessary to call this role into question.

The comparison to Szeemann continues in the director's relationship to artists. In the famous case of Documenta V, that curator experienced resistance from artists who felt they were being subsumed into his larger narrative, losing their artistic voice in the process. While a similarly vocal resistance does not seem to exist at the Maerzmusik festival, the Szeemann model helps to predict a confrontation between on the one hand musical practitioners whose work also cares for its own mediation, as has been shown in the case study on the Munich Biennale, and an artistic director who also sees the mediation of concerts and their framing as instrumental in his curatorial concept.

The two case studies that have been examined in detail here were purposefully chosen for their contrasting approaches to curating contemporary music; while the two composers, DOMTS, have spent the majority of their time and energy focused on the development and care for individual new music theatre productions related to the themes that they have set, Polzer, the career administrator, has in contrast taken the opposite route, and focused his time more on the careful coordination of concerts themselves and their perception by the audience.

Traversing both festivals is, in their respective ways, a new way of dealing with musical practices, one that seems to reflect a broader change in the relationships between both music and its audience, and music and other forms of artistic practice. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain functional categorizations of where one discipline begins and another ends without these falling into over-codification. Instead, across both festivals, music's relationships seem to be being

defined in the opposite way, namely on the basis of need rather than necessity. What seems to come first in both DOMTS' music theatre productions as well as in Polzer's composed evenings is an artistic question or idea that then, in so many different ways, finds its way to artistic practice. The format of a concert evening is thus determined by how it contributes something specific to the concert experience in the name of a particular goal. The programmed artists are not chosen on the basis of their being musicians or not, but rather based on how what they do relates to a larger composed experience.

What is important to both festivals as well is that they not capitulate the domain of reflection, writing, and criticism. They have both in a short amount of time opened large new domains for musical practice, ones that have until now received only cursory treatment on the part of musical scholarship. There still remains a great deal to be learnt and shared about these festivals and their practical experiences with curating contemporary music.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In order to bring this project into a narrow enough scope, several limitations had to be imposed in advance in the interest of being as concise as possible.

The most significant of these is the limitation to only two case studies: had more festivals been given the same level of analysis, a more detailed picture of the current state of curating festivals for contemporary music could have been achieved. Festivals also from outside of Germany could have added another dimension to this project, in that they would have had allowed for comparisons between different subcommunities of CCM. This holds doubly true because of the strong ties between festivals and national identity that have existed also historically, and still inform the format.

Maerzmusik and the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater were decided on in the end because of their centrality to the New Music community that is the focus of this work. While geographical proximity also played a role in their selection, their role in setting the tone and direction in their field helped warrant deep dives meant to be to an extent exemplary of a new approach to festival analysis more generally.

Conversely, festivals perhaps in Germany, but with historically a focus on the wider performing arts more generally could have given additional perspective on the relationship between music and other artforms, as well as between various kinds of musical practice. An analysis of the Ruhrtriennale, with a particular focus on the directorship of Heiner Goebbels between 2012 and 2014 was one such festival that was ultimately cut from the final conception of the work because of size constraints. Integrating this festival would have allowed for a perspective shift outside of only contemporary music, and led to an investigation of the interrelationships

between musical performance, theatre, and dance, as well as the particularities of the Ruhrtriennale's relationship to its site in the Ruhr valley.

Another large limitation has been the focus solely on festivals. While curating's history can hardly be separated from its rise to prominence through international biennales (see O'Neil 2012, 51ff), and CCM seems to increasingly be becoming a history that unfolds primarily at festivals, these formats nevertheless almost by definition do not make up the majority of the cultural life of a city. Their status as short, unique event lends festivals a uniquely symbolic character which makes them much easier to be analyzed as a totality than year-long cultural institutions by both scholars and by the public.

Despite this, more permanent cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, symphony halls, and independent music venues are presented with a different set of challenges, such as being spread out over the much larger scale of programs stretching for most of the year. While this is in itself another interesting avenue of research, limiting the focus to festivals, which feature much smaller, denser programs allowed for a sharpening of the central point being investigated here, namely how curating can be operationalized as a useful term for thinking in new ways about forms of leadership and mediation in contemporary music.

At the core of this book has been a project of attempting to lay out the foundation for something much larger than itself, namely a new way of understanding the mediation of contemporary musical practice. Initiatives such as the two case studies that have been focused on at length here are surely part of a new and re-configured way of approaching this issue, however both of these festivals seem to have resigned themselves to having no adequate scholarly partners when it comes to their curatorial practices.

Not wanting to reinvent the wheel in order to analyze festivals for contemporary music, the many different analysis of similar festivals and curatorial experiments in neighbouring artistic disciplines have become the raw materials to be studied in order to develop a specific understanding of curating in the field of music. While musical practice should be understood in terms of its specific history, this is an acknowledgement that this must also occur in relationship to the many other art forms with which it shares so many connections.

This is for instance what the opening chapter arguing for the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 as a common ancestor of both festivals for music and visual arts attempted to argue. Watching how these two histories have diverged since then can be an opportunity for a productive discussion around the reasons for these different developments, and a way of viewing the specificity of musical developments within their larger historical context. In the same way, the two case studies must also be understood as exemplary of a different kind of methodology for analyzing music festivals. This is one where the festival as a whole is itself evaluated on how it is experienced, and the ways in which it elicits knowledge production.



Be it via this shared history of festivals, or other similarities that have been explored in these pages, the underlying idea has been to sketch a framework for both further research and practice-based experimentation that can be filled in by others in larger teams and in more detail. This new framework has been designed with the intent to sidestep a certain lethargy that seems to be pervasive among music's thought leaders: a conservative and Eurocentric approach to the traditions of musical practice, be they contemporary classical music, New Music, or otherwise, can no longer be a recipe for producing artistic success or relevancy in the globalized, transdisciplinary arts world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In its place must come a dedication to staying with the fraught complexity of the alternatives to these easy-think narratives and linear histories. While perhaps seemingly more modest, this is how musical practice can rediscover its social relevance.♦

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## **Appendix: List of Productions at the Munich Biennale for New Music Theatre from 1988–2018**

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<b>Year</b>	<b>Name of Work</b>	<b>Category of work</b>	<b>Premiered in (Theatre Name)</b>	<b>Co-production with (Name of institution)</b>	<b>Composer/Commissioned individuals</b>	<b>Text/Libretto by (Name)</b>
1988	Leyla und Medjoun	Märchen für Musik	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	ZDF, 3sat	Dettev Glanert	Aras Ören, Peter Schneider
1988	Stallerhof			Staatstheater Wiesbaden	Berd Kühr	Frany Xavier Kroetz
1988	Fünf Kleine Opern		Alte Astronomie	Bayerischer Rundfunk/Fernsehen	Karl Amadeus Hartmann	Erich Bormann
1988	Bremer Freiheit	Singwerk auf ein Frauenleben		Staatstheater Stuttgart	Adriana Hölsky	Thomas Körner
1988	Der letzte Milkaner	Bauern-Requiem	Deutsches Museum/Alte Astronomie		Andreas F. J. Lechner	Andreas F. J. Lechner
1988	Der Trojanische Frieden	Spiel für Mimen, Tänzer, Chor und Orchester	Deutsches Museum/Kongressaal	Münchner Philharmoniker	Maximilian Beckschäfer	Herbert Rosendorfer
1988	La Sirenetta	Ballett	Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz	Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz	Alessandro Sbordoni	Alessandro Sbordoni
1988	Greek	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal		Mark-Anthony Turnage	Mark-Anthony Turnage
1990	Seid still	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Staatstheater Stuttgart	Andras Hamary	José Vera Morales
1990	Die weiße Schlange	Figurentheatre	Gasteig/Black Box	Alte Oper Frankfurt, Freies Musikzentrum München	Julian Yu	Julian Yu
1990	Judith und Holofernes	Figurentheatre	Gasteig/Black Box	Alte Oper Frankfurt, Freies Musikzentrum München	David Lang	David Lang
1990	Patmos	Music Theatre/other	Deutsches Museum/Kongressaal	Staatstheater Kassel	Wolfgang von Schweinitz	Bible

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1990	Paul und Virginie	Figurentheater	Gasteig/Black Box	Alte Oper Frankfurt, Freies Musikzentrum München	Moritz Eggert	Moritz Eggert
1990	Lucius, Asinus Aureus	Figurentheater	Gasteig/Black Box	Alte Oper Frankfurt, Freies Musikzentrum München	Paolo Arcà	Paolo Arcà
1990	Absences	Schuloper	Pestalozzi-Gymnasium	Pestalozzi-Gymnasium München	Jörg Widmann	Michael Rothert, Burkhard Stauber und Jörg Widmann
1990	63: Dream Palace		Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Bayrischer Rundfunk/ Fernsehen	Hans-Jürgen von Bose	Hans-Jürgen von Bose
1990	Träume vom Fliegen	Ballett	Marienplatz	IRCAM Paris	Marco Stroppa	
1990	The Mother of Three Sons	Dance Opera	Deutsches Theater	Westdeutscher Rundfunk/ Fernsehen	Leroy Jenkins	Ann T. Greene
1990	Hinter der Mauer	Figurentheater	Gasteig/Black Box	Beck Forum München	Betty Olivero	Betty Olivero
1990	Ikarus	Figurentheater	Gasteig/Black Box	Beck Forum München	Babette Koblenz, Hans-Christian von Daddelsen	Amalia und Hadass Ophrat
1990	Miriam	Musik Theater	Reithalle		William Osborne	William Osborne
1990	Le Précepteur		Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal		Michele Reverdy	Hans-Ulrich Treichel
1992	Teorema	Musikalische Parabel	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Maggio Musicale Fiorentino	Giorgio Battistelli	Giorgio Battistelli
1992	Antigona Furiosa	Oper	Philharmonie		Jorge Liderman	Jorge Liderman
1992	Das Gastspiel		Philharmonie		Jan Müller-Wieland	Jan Müller-Wieland
1992	Le Livre de Fauvel	Allegorie	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Bayrischer Rundfunk/ Fernsehen	Rupert Bawden	Rupert Bawden

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1992	Eréndia	Oper	Muffathalle	Staatstheater Stuttgart	Violeta Dinescu	Monika Rothmaier
1992	Sünde, Fall, Beil	Oper	Theater im Marstall	Theater Bremen	Gerhard Säbler	Andreas F. J. Lechner
1994	November		Gasteig/Black Box		Osvaldo Golijov	Kein
1994	Coco's Last Collection		Gasteig/Black Box		Elena Kats-Chernin	Kein
1992	Snatched by the Gods	Kammeroper	Muffathalle	de Nederlandse Opera Amsterdam	Param Vir	William Radice
1992	Broken Strings	Oper	Muffathalle	de Nederlandse Opera Amsterdam	Param Vir	David Rudkin
1994	La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina		Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz		Ade Gentile	Ferdinando Saracini
1994	Scourge of Hyacinths	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal		Tania León	Tania León
1994	Freeze	Oper	Muffathalle	Staatstheater Braunschweig, Holland Festival	Robert Zuidam	Robert Zuidam
1994	Der Blaue Stein	Spiel mit Musik	Muffathalle	Musikschule Neuburg	Paul Engel	Christine von dem Knesebeck
1994	Playing Away	Fussballtheater	Deutsches Theater	Opera North Leeds	Benedict Mason	Howard Brenton
1994	MR - Marina und Rainer	Kammeroper-Romanze	Muffathalle	Theater Ulm	Nikolai Korndorf	Julij A. Lurje
1996	Marco Polo		Muffathalle	Bayerische Staatsoper/LABOR, Holland Festival, Hong Kong Arts Festival	Tan Dun	Paul Griffiths
1996	Das D'Amato System	Tanzoper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Hebbel-Theater Berlin	Helmut Oehring	Helmut Oehring
1996	Solaris	Kammeroper	Muffathalle	Theater der LH Magdeburg, Bayerisches Fernsehen, IRCAM Paris	Michael Obst	Michael Obst

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1996	The Mother of Black-Winged Dreams	Oper	Theater im Marstall	Hamburgische Staatsoper	Hanna Kulenty	Paul Goodman
1997	Helle Nächte	Oper	Prinzregententheater	Bayerische Staatsoper, Bayerische Theaterakademie	Moritz Eggert	Helmut Krausser
1997	The juniper Tree	Oper	Muffhalle	Almeida Opera London	Roderick Watkins	Patricia Debney
1998	Vision of Lear		Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Shizuoka Performing Arts Center Japan	Toshio Hosokawa	Tadashi Suzuki
1998	Ramanujan	Oper	Prinzregententheater	Staatstheater Darmstadt, IRCAM Paris	Sandeep Bhagwatti	Sandeep Bhagwatti
1998	Komodie ohne Titel		Muffhalle	Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin	Jan Müller-Wieland	Jan Müller-Wieland
1999	Recherche. Über die Substanz der Zeit		Muffhalle	Städtische Bühnen Nürnberg, Bayerisches Fernsehen	Babette Koblenz	Hans-Christian von Dalden, Babette Koblenz
1999	DE AMORE. Una maschera di cenere		Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Teatro de la Zarzuela Madrid, Muziektheater Transparant /deSignal Antwerpen, Nationale Reisopera	Mauricio Sotelo	Peter Mussbach
1999	Wenn die Zeit über die Ufer tritt	Oper	Prinzregententheater	Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz	Vladimir Tarnopolski	Ralph Günther Mohnau
2000	Angelus Novus	Oper	Muffhalle		Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf	
2000	Prima... Ins Innere	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Experimentalstudio des SWR Freiburg	Chaya Cyernowin	

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2000	Über Frauen Über Grenzen	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg	Collective	
2002	Marlowe: Der Jude von Malta	Kammeroper	Muffathalle	Thomas Seelig	André Werner	André Werner
2002	Orpheus Kristall	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Siemens Art Program, Bayerische Fernsehen	Manfried Stahnke	Simone Homem de Mello
2002	Heptameron		Theater im Haus der Kunst	ZKM Karlsruhe	Gerhard E. Winkler	
2002	Monologe für zwei		Akademietheater	Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, Bayerische Theaterakademie, Hochschule für Musik und Theater München	Jörg Widmann	
2004	Benerice	Oper	Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz	Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz, Wiener Festwochen, Berliner Festspiele	Johannes Maria Staud	Durs Grünbein
2004	Versuchung	Kammeroper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Zeitgenössische Oper Berlin, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin	Qu Xiao-song	Wu Lan, Qu Xiao-song
2004	Canito		Theater im Haus der Kunst	Oskaras Korsunovas Theater Vilnius	Vykintas Baltakas	Sharon Lynn Joyce
2004	...22, 13, ...	Passion	Muffathalle	Staatstheater Mainz, Experimentallstudio des SWR Freiburg	Mark André	

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2004	Shadowtime	Oper	Prinzregententheater	Ruhrtriennale, Festival d'Automne Paris, Lincoln Center Festival New York	Brian Ferneyhough	Charles Bernstein
2006	WIR	installation	Muffhalle		Christoph Staude	Hans-Georg Wegner
2006	La Philosophie dans le labyrinthe	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	NetzZeit Wien	Aureliano Cattaneo	Eduardo Sanguinetti
2006	Barcode	Musik Theatre	Akademietheater	Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, Bayerische Theaterakademie München	Alexandra Holtsch	Cornel Franz
2008	Arbeit Nahrung Wohnung	Oper	Muffhalle	Staatsoper Unter den Linden, musicadhyo Madrid	Enno Poppe	Marcel Beyer
2006	Gamma	Kammeroper	Muffhalle	Luzerner Theater, El Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia	José M. Sánchez-Verdú	Sabrina Höfzer
2008	architektur des regens	Musiktheater	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Landestheater Linz	Klaus Lang	Klaus Lang
2008	hin und weg	Gemeinschaftswerk	Akademietheater	Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg	Collective	
2008	hellhörig	Musiktheater	Reithalle	Schauspiel Köln, Kunststiftung NRW, Theater Basel	Carola Bauckholt	
2008	Piero – Ende der Nacht	Hörstück	Muffhalle	Oper Frankfurt am Main, Experimentalstudio des SWR Freiburg	Jens Joneleit	Michael Herrschel
2008	One-Women-Opera	Musiktheater	Gasteig/Black Box	Micro Oper München	Cornelia Melián	

<b>Year</b>	<b>Name of Work</b>	<b>Category of work</b>	<b>Premiered in (Theatre Name)</b>	<b>Co-production with (Name of institution)</b>	<b>Composer/Commissioned individuals</b>	<b>Text/Libretto by (Name)</b>
2010	Mabodor	Oper	Prinzregententheater	Theater Aachen, Theater Basel	Philipp Maintz	Thomas Fiedler
2010	Die weiße Fürstin	Scene Poldidimensionali	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Theater Kiel	Marton Illés	Marton Illés
2010	Warum weiss ich nicht	5 Kurzopern	Reaktorhalle	Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, Bayerische Theaterakademie München	Collective	
2010	Amazonas	Musiktheater	Reithalle	Goethe-Institut, ZKM Karlsruhe, SESC Sao Paulo	Peter Weibel	Roland Quitt
2010	Die Quelle	Musiktheater	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Theater Bremen	Lin Wang	Lin Wang
2012	L'Absence	Oper	Muffathalle		Sarah Nemtsov	Sarah Nemtsov
2012	Mama Dolorosa	Musiktheater	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Staatstheater Braunschweig	Eunyoung Kim	Yona Kim
2012	A Game of Fives		Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Universität der Künste Berlin	Collective	
2012	Wasser	Musiktheater	Muffathalle	Oper Frankfurt am Main, Ensemble Modern	Arnulf Herrmann	Nico Bleutge
2012	NUCLEI bis 8	Opera Abstract	Muffathalle		Collective	
2012	An Index of Metals	Video Oper	Reaktorhalle	Piano Possibile, Hochschule für Musik und Theater München	Fausto Romitelli	Kenka Lékovich
2012	NEDA – der Ruf, die Stimme	installation	i-camp/Neues Theater München		Alexander Strauch	
2012	Andersartig	Musiktheater	Münchner Kammerspiele/Spielhalle	Musik zum Anfassen, Deutsche Museum	Collective	

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2012	mystery – mach dir kein bild	Video Oper	Schwere Reiter	Schwere Reiter MUSIK	Helga Pogatschar	Kenka Lékovich
2014	Vivier - Ein Nachtprotokoll		Muffathalle	Staatstheater Braunschweig	Marko Nikodjjevi?	Gunther Gelfinger
2014	Wüstung (Vastation)	Oper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Theater Regensburg	Samy Moussa	Toby Litt
2014	Utopien	Musiktheater	Muffathalle	Konzerthaus Berlin, Musik der Jaurhunderterte Stuttgart	Dieter Schnebel	Roland quitt
2014	Die Befristeten	Musiktheater	Cuvillies-Theater	Residenztheater München	Detlev Glanert	
2014	Das Geopferte Leben	Kammeroper	Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Theater Freiburg	Héctor Parra	Marie Ndjaye
2014	Innen	Installation	Gasteig/Foyer	Schwere Reiter MUSIK	Manuela Kerer	
2014	Kopernikus	Oper	Reaktorthalle	Hochschule für Musik und Theater München, Bayerische Theaterakademie München	Claude Vivier	Claude Vivier
2014	Sommertag	Kammermusiktheater	Schwere Reiter	Schwere Reiter MUSIK, Zeleven ?? zeitgenössische musik projekte	Nikolaus Brass	Nikolaus Brass
2014	de: conducted		Gasteig/Black Box		Dieter Dolezel	
2016	Staring at the Bin	Ausstellung	Muffatwerk		Meriel Price, Aron Kitzig	
2016	Sweat of the Sun		Muffathalle	Theater Osnabrück, Münchener Kammerorchester, Festival Operadagen Rotterdam	David Fennessy, Marco Štorman, Jil Bertemann, Katharina Urtmann	



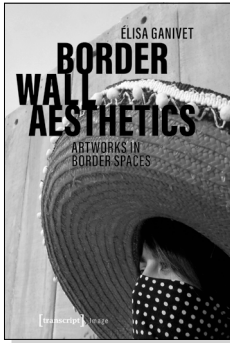
<b>Year</b>	<b>Name of Work</b> if this then that and now what	<b>Category of work</b>	<b>Premiered in</b> <b>(Theatre Name)</b>	<b>Co-production with</b> <b>(Name of institution)</b>	<b>Composer/Commissioned individuals</b>	<b>Text/Libretto by</b> <b>(Name)</b>
2016	Hundun		Gasteig/Carl-Otto-Saal	Staatstheater Mainz	Simon Steen-Andersen	
2016	The Navidson Records	Ein Musiktheater als Installation	Muffatwerk Lothring13 Halle	Konzerttheater Bern, Hochschule der Künste Bern, Lothringer 13	Neo Hülcker, Judith Egger Ole Hübner, Kristian Hvring, Rosalba Quin- dici, Benedikt Schiefer, Tassilo Tesche, Tili Wylar von Ballmoos	
2016	ANTICLOCK (OmU)		Public Space		Mirko Borscht, Christian Beck, Hannes Hesse	
2016	Pub - Reklamen		Gasteig/Black Box	Gare du Nord	Georges Aperghis	
2016	SEZNER	Lesung mit deutschen Untertiteln	Gasteig/Black Box		Arno Camenisch	
2016	Phone Call to Hades		Public Space	Theaterakademie August Everding, European Network of Opera Academies	Cathy van Eck, Isabelle Kranabetter, Blanka Radoczky	
2016	Für immer ganz oben		Müllersches Volksbad/ Kleine Schwimmhalle	Munchner Volkstheater	Brigitta Muntendorf, Abdullah Kenan Karaca, Vincent Mesnaritsch, Sita	
2016	Mnemo/scene: Echos		Einstein Kultur		Pauline Beaulieu, Ariel Farace, Stephanie Ha- ensler, Yvonne Leinfelder	
2016	HolyVj \$Digression no°1		Muffatwerk/Ampere		Charles Sadoul, Adelin Schweizer, Dietermar Lupfer	

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2016	GAACH – quasi eine Volksoper	Ein Partizipationsprojekt	Gasteig/Foyer		Catherine Milliken, Robyn Schulkowsky, Dietmar Wiesner	
2016	Speere Stein Klavier		Gasteig/Carl-Orff-Saal	Theater Augsburg	Christian Grammel, Benoël von Lilienstern, Elisabeth Tropper, Yassu Yabara	
2016	Untertline		Muffathalle	Deutschen Oper Berlin, Universität der Künste Berlin	Devile Cohen, Hugo Morales Murguía	
2018	Wir aus Glas		Muffathalle	Deutsche Oper Berlin	Yasutaki Inamori, Gerhild Steinbuch, David Hermann, Jo Schramm, You-Jin Seo, Dorothea Hartmann, Elda Laro, Strefn Hoppe	
2018	Bubble <3		Lovaas Gallery	Musik der Jahrhunderte Stuttgart, West Kowloon Cultural District	Lam Lai, Wilmer Chan, Nadim Abbas, Vanissa Law, Fiona Lee	
2018	Skull ark, upturned with no mast		whiteBOX.art	Musik der Jahrhunderte Stuttgart	Clara Ianotta, Anna Kubelik, Eva Alonso, Johanna Zimmer, Truike van der Poel	
2018	TONHALLE (Max-Joseph-Platz 1b)		Max-Joseph-Platz	Festival Rümelingen, KlangKunstBühne	Ruedi Häusermann	
2018	Interdicator		Museum Villa Stuck	Kolumba	Marek Poliks, Christian Smith	

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2018	Ein Porträt des Künstlers als Toter		Schwere Reiter	Staatsoper Unter den Linden	Franco Braidaroli, Davide Carnevali, Sabine Heymann, Charlotte Pistorius, Roman Reeger	
2018	Nachlassversteigerung		Lovaas Gallery	Musik der Jahrhunderte Stuttgart	Frederik Neyrinck, Isabelle Kranabetter, Sarah Hoernske, Andreas Fischer	
2018	Third Space		Gasteig/Black Box	Hiatus, Klangforum Wien	Stefan Prins, Daniel Linehan	
2018	Königliche Membranwerk - Nomatic Solutions		Villa Waldberta	Villa Waldberta	Miika Hyttiäinen, Nicolas Kuhn, Christiane Plank, Babytonia Constantinides, Anna Maria Münzner	
2018	Bathub Memory Project		Muffatwerk/Studio	Onassis Cultural Center Athens	Eleftherios Veniadis, Eleftherios Efthymiou, Leonidas Giannakopoulos, Natasa Efstathiadi, Vassilis Selimas	
2018	Alles Klappt		Theater im Marstall	Residenztheater München, Theaterakademie August Everding, ENDA	Ondřej Adámek, Katharina Schmitt	
2018	Up, Close and Personal		whiteBOX.art Gastatelier	Musik der Jahrhunderte Stuttgart, SPOR Festival	Kej Duncan David, Troels Primdahl	

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2018	liminal space		Reaktorthalle	Hochschule für Musik und Theater München	Caio de Azevedo, Robin Becker, Felix Bönigk, Alexander Mathewson, Philipp Christoph Mayer, Jakob Stillmark, Maximilian Zimmermann	
2018	regno della musica - TERRA		Lovaas Gallery	Musik der Jahrhunderterte Stuttgart	Saskia Blatt, Anna Sofie Lugmeier	
2018	„Die München „Ø“ Triologie (Episoden 13, „The Temptations of St. Anthony“), 14, „The Mark Ø“ and 15, „Die Nacht der Welt“); Neo-Hippie-Interventionistische-Anti-Internet-Peripherie-Welt-tournee-Roadshow und Meta-Opr. „The Followers of Ø“ feat. Der Heilige Geist“		Einstein Kultur	Norwegian Opera Oslo	Trond Reinholdtsen	

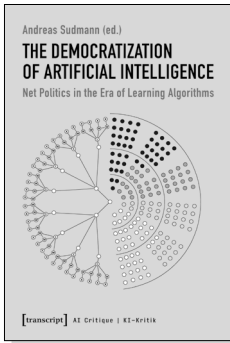
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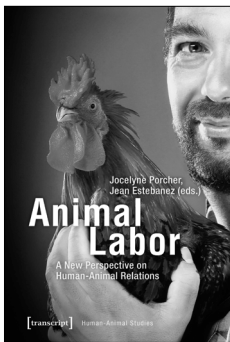
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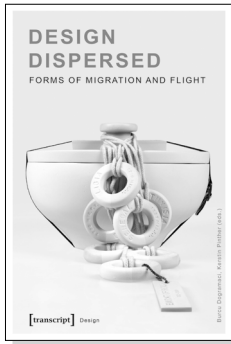
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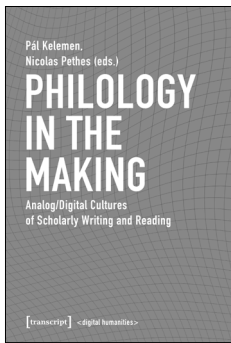
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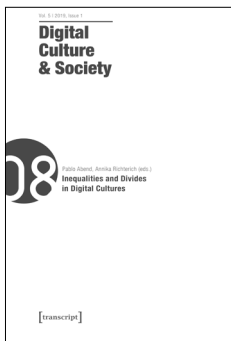
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