

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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<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> "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-artisttic 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

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**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 semiotic 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 Thaemliz 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-Biennale* 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*

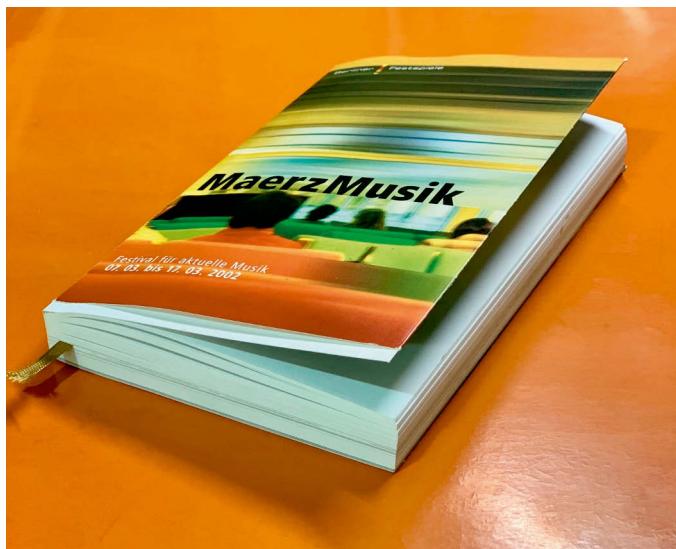


Photo: Brandon Farnsworth

*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.

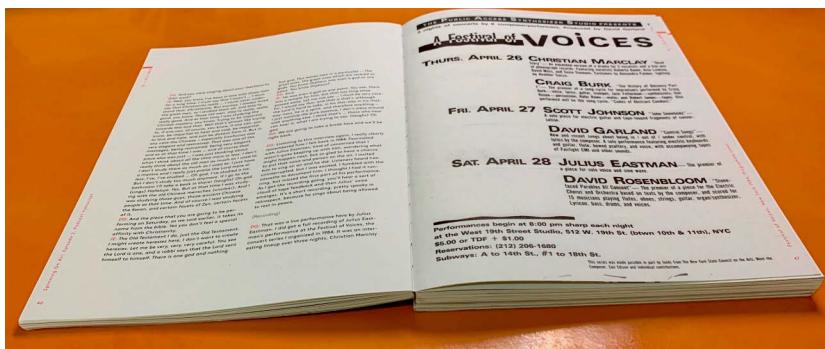


Photo: Brandon Farnsworth

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