

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.²¹

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.²² 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.

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).²³ 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.

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).²⁴

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

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-

maturing 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-WELTOURNEE* (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 19th century museum) as a means of calling their self-evidency with which they assert their scopic 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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-

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.²⁷ 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 19th century (Elfert 2012, 79; Jones 2010, 80). A symposium during

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 20th and early 21st 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-

cussing for as long as it takes to reach an agreement within the core team.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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."³⁰

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-

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.³¹

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).³²

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

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.³³ 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

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)³⁴

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).³⁵ 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

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.