

5.6 Storytelling for Earthly Survival

The seventh of Polzer's “10 composed evenings” of Maerzmusik 2017, “Storytelling for Earthly Survival” consisted of an entire evening dedicated to an exploration of the work of Donna Haraway, joined with artistic works connected in various ways to her philosophical ideas and her writings. The event itself can be understood more as the high-water mark of the 2017 festival's engagement with Haraway; her ideas would frequently reoccur in various places in the program, and were clearly influential on Polzer's thinking while conceiving the festival. This was reflected in the reader, too: next to Polzer's editorial appears a statement by the philosopher on “decolonializing time,” a transcription from a video call between the director and Haraway that was also screened as the first presentation on both mornings of the festival's “Thinking Together” conference.

This section will examine this concert in detail, showing how Polzer's curatorial practice was able to produce this unique event. Starting directly with the material will help present the festival's core thesis as emerging out of the synthesis of its material. The program to the evening was as follows:

Story Telling for Earthly Survival

Venue: Haus der Berliner Festspiele (Schaperstraße 24, Berlin)

Date: Tuesday, 21 March, 2017

Time: 18.00 – approx. 23.30

Part 1 – 18.00

DONNA HARAWAY – Story Telling for Earthly Survival

Fabrizio Terranova, director

90 min., colour, Belgium (2016)

Part 2 – 20.00

(NB: The order of works on the program was reversed in the concert. The actual order in concert is reflected here)

Chorus in cc.

A vocal gesture (2017) WP

Myriam Van Imschoot, concept & composition

Caroline Daish, Jean-Baptiste Veyret-Logerias, Anne-Laure Pigache, Mat Pogo & guests, co-creation & performance

Participants of the “Thinking Together” voice workshop “Chorus in cc.”

Fabrice Moinet, co-creation & sound design

Staying with the Trouble

Donna Haraway

Introduces and reads from her new book (*video recording*)*California Bird Talk*

A public radio project produced and hosted by Rusten Hogness

Audio recording played for the audience.

“The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” (1986)

In: *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (Grove Press, New York 1989)

Ursula K. Le Guin

Read by Lendl Barcelos (*standing in the audience*)

“The Author of the Acacia Seeds and other extracts from the ‘Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics’” (1974)

In: *The Compass Rose* (Pendragon Press, 1982)

Ursula K. Le Guin

Read by Amy Ireland (*standing in the audience*)*Bird and Person Dyning* (1975)

Alvin Lucier

for performer, binaural microphone, amplifiers, loudspeakers and electronic bird-call

Alvin Lucier, performance

Hauke Harder, sound direction

Part 3 – 22.00

An Ecosex Journey with Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle

(video and presentation with Q & A)

Presented by Isabelle Carlier

Donna Haraway – Storytelling for Earthly Survival

The evening began with a 90-minute biographical documentary video on Haraway by director Fabrizio Terranova. The film introduces Haraway's personality and thought to the viewer, but also formally enacts her call for the telling of new kinds of stories that often traverse between the very personal and local, and the deeply political and philosophical. This is done through a number of lightly surreal SFX interventions, often achieved with the use of a greenscreen. For instance, during long verbal elucidations by Haraway, the view out of her window in the background

may change in an instant from one forest scenery to another, gradually unsettling the viewer's perception of reality.

These small interventions increasingly tell their own narrative, and as well serve to make space in the film for various "critters" ranging from Haraway's dog to jellyfish wandering across the background that together form an important cornerstone of Haraway's philosophical argument. Highlighting these various kinds of living beings (as she calls them, the "chthonic ones," after the Greek *chthonios*, meaning that which is under the earth or sea) is part of the philosopher's project to argue for a decentring of the human from the locus of the world and its future (Haraway 2016, 53). Instead, she argues that we must understand humans as part of a larger whole, writing for instance that

the chthonic ones are not confined to a vanished past. They are a buzzing, stinging, sucking swarm now, and human beings are not in a separate compost pile. We are humus, not Homo, not *anthropos*; we are compost, not posthuman. (Haraway 2016, 55)

Changing the perspective of humans to their surroundings, understanding themselves as part of a vast network of entities that are co-becoming together is the story that Haraway sets out to tell—and that Terranova in his film seeks to show—in order to spread her message of "earthly survival," not coincidentally the title of the film. For Haraway, as she would explain during the evening via a pre-recorded video, this survival is in the face of mass extinctions and reductions in biodiversity, the threat of global warming, and the massive changes to the planet that have been caused by the processes of "capitalism, extraction, colonialism" in which humans play such a large part (Odo Polzer and Engels 2017, 159). This shift in perspective happens for Haraway only through a shift in the kinds of stories we tell, a position that has led the philosopher to engage deeply, also in her own writing, with science fiction, and with other such kinds of speculative fabulations (she uses the abbreviation "SF" as an open signifier to mean various related concepts such as these). As Haraway writes:

What used to be called nature has erupted into ordinary human affairs, and vice versa, in such a way and with such permanence as to change fundamentally means and prospects for going on, including going on at all. (Haraway 2016, 40)

The stories we tell do not just describe reality for Haraway, they are constitutive of it. Therefore, changing these stories to reflect this rupture that has occurred, as she attempts, are for her efforts at changing reality. For this reason, the inclusion of non-human actors in *Storytelling for Earthly Survival* is no coincidence or whim of director Terranova. Allowing for instance Haraway's dog to play its own unique kind of role in the film, or intervening as he did in the visuals and backdrops of the documentary, are the director's attempts at realizing in filmic form the content that

Haraway is detailing in spoken word. Like with Terranova, many artists and writers that engage with Haraway's writing will often realize her suggestions through an emphasis on telling alternative stories and narratives in this way.

Functionally, screening this kind of documentary at the beginning of the evening served as a handy and accessible introduction to both Haraway's philosophical positions, as well as, because of documentary's style, to some of the ways in which her writing has influenced and inspired a great number of artists.

Regarding staging, the entire evening would take place on the main stage of the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, with the audience sitting on cushions and bean bags on risers onstage as well, facing the empty theatre seats. This approach to putting the audience onstage was reminiscent of Polzer's transformation of the backstage area during the 2016 edition of Maerzmusik into a makeshift black box theatre, effectively giving him two kinds of stages to work with in a single evening. The difference was that in 2016, the stage curtain was drawn, creating a separated space onstage, whereas during this evening—as during the opening concert—the curtain was up, affording the audience a reflexive view of the theatre itself. The Terranova film was projected onto a screen framed by the proscenium arch, with the hall's grand dimensions providing a backdrop.

Chorus in CC

Part 2 began with a performance by members of one of the conference's "Thinking Together" workshops that had been taking place during the past several days. The work, entitled *Chorus in cc.* and conceived of by artist Myriam Van Imschoot, was described by her as an "insect chorus" (Imschoot, n.d.). The piece was performed by a group of 30 mainly non-performers, and, because it was the first piece of the second section, would set the vibe and energy for the audience for the rest of the evening. It proved to be a slow and rather atmospheric kind of performance, setting a calm and reflective tone after the film that would continue for much of the evening.

The performance provided the audience with an opportunity to get involved and participate in Polzer's highly-detailed programming in a different way; through developing a collective performance. While the importance of this should not be overstated, within festivals for music, particularly those analyzed so far, it is rare for there to be moments of audience engagement that are presented as part of the main programming, and without in some way being presented with a caveat of one kind of another implying they are not the "real" or significant works but rather presentations out of necessity or obligation to financial sponsors. Polzer with this project opens his meticulously-coordinated concert to an element of unpredictability and engagement from the festival community with whom he shares the time of

the festival.⁹ Because this performance was organized by a commissioned artist, Van Imschoot, it is also an example of Polzer's tendency to compose evenings with a "block-based" approach: he programs the workshop as a time block, but does not interfere with its content once set (see also section 5.4.2).

Staying with the Trouble

Haraway then addressed the gathering via pre-recorded video (though originally supposed to be livestream), and read an excerpt from one of her *Camille Stories*, a series of science fiction stories written by Haraway and others (among her collaborators is Terranova) about the fictional, future community of New Gauley, West Virginia. Haraway relates in her book *Staying With the Trouble* how this series of stories came about as the result of a workshop with Isabel Stengers on speculative fabulation, and how this style of writing has become so integral to her work and philosophical project in the interim (Haraway 2016, 134). As already mentioned, storytelling as a practice is for Haraway a means of realizing new network connections through the speculative interlinkings that narrative affords, a challenge to traditional philosophical writing.

The story itself tells of Camille 2, born in 2085. Haraway explains of her fictional world that "[b]odily modifications are normal among Camille's people; and at birth a few genes and a few microorganisms from the animal symbiont are added to the symchild's bodily heritage" (Haraway 2016, 140–141). Thus,

at initiation at age fifteen, as a coming-of-age gift the second Camille decided to ask for chin implants of butterfly antennae, a kind of tentacular beard, so that more vivid tasting of the flying insects' worlds could become the heritage of the human partner too, helping in the work and adding to the corporeal pleasures of becoming-with. (Haraway 2016, 152)

The story continues like this, following Camille 2 through her exploration of this additional set of sensing appendages, and the unlikely connections to various communities and species that it enables.

Haraway herself was once again presented on the video screen, though because the video now consisted of a statement filmed simply from the philosopher's webcam, the aspect of editing and video-intervention no longer played a role in the content, shifting the audiences' focus more on the sound of Haraway's voice. The story of Camille 2, read by Haraway, became an acousmatic experience, bridging in

⁹ It should be pointed out that these participants would have had to rehearse for several days in advance of the performance, an aspect that further highlights their membership in the festival community (more than just attending this one concert), in that they are participating in a moment of spatio-temporal concentration, and isolation from their daily lives.

a way the gap between the festival's focus on sound and the vibrancy of the opening movie and its enticing image-world.

California Bird Talk and Stories by Ursula Le Guin

These two presentations were followed by several episodes of Haraway's partner Rusten Hogness' *California Bird Talk*, which documents, in short segments, the birds of California and their various calls. The audience, in need of a break by this time in the evening, listened with one ear, while chatting quietly amongst themselves, creating once again a relaxed, casual atmosphere for the evening. This work, played back over the hall's speakers, was the first to have no visual component at all, leaving the audience free to listen and contemplate the hall, with a kind of reflexivity also about their own position within the evening's happening.

California Bird Talk was followed by readings of two stories by Ursula K. Le Guin, a fantasy and science fiction novelist, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (1986), and "The Author of the Acacia Seeds and other extracts from the 'Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics'" (1974). The stories were read aloud by people standing in the audience, disrupting a frontal stage set-up and making once again for a more intimate experience of the evening. Once again, nothing was set up onstage, affording a sweeping view of the cavernous, empty hall that seemed to stare back at the audience.

With the exception of *Chorus in CC.*, the material presented during the evening until this point consisted of works that have some kind of strong connection to Haraway's writing, in particular to her 2016 book, *Staying with the Trouble*. Terra-nova's film saw Haraway present and repeat in various reformulations her central positions that are present in the book, while the filmmaker himself was also a co-writer with Haraway of the Camille stories. One of these was read at the end of Terra-nova's film, and another, which also appears in Haraway's book, was read aloud by her via video. Adding to this, she makes explicit reference to Le Guin's carrier bag theory from "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" as part of her second chapter. She uses the story to point out the bias towards certain kinds of stories in our culture that themselves focus too much on the human, rather than their accompanying objects, or in this case their containers (Haraway 2016, 39–40ff). "The Author of the Acacia Seeds" also makes an appearance in her book, "populating," in her words its sixth chapter, which attempts to "tell an SF adventure story with acacias and their associates as the protagonists" (7; 117ff). So too does Rusten Hogness in many places.

Bird and Person Dying

The evening was however not entirely a direct illustration of Haraway's book and position. Following these presentations of different kinds of temporal materials re-

lating to Haraway, Polzer then presented *Bird and Person Dyning* (1975), performed by composer Alvin Lucier himself. The work utilizes the principle of heterodyning (hence the name) to create difference tones between two sound sources; a chirping bird sound, and a person wearing binaural microphones, which create various feedback loops. Depending on the exact position in the room of the microphones, the resulting difference tones will change. Thus as the performer moves their heads to listen, they are simultaneously composing the piece. (Rusche and Harder n.d.)

Taking from Dieter Mersch's analysis of *Music for Solo Performer* (1965), which Lucier created a decade earlier, Mersch writes of this category of Lucier's work that "the piece is a direct product of the technical set-up that is at once instrument and player" (Mersch 2017, 28). The same can be said of *Bird and Person Dyning*, with its particular combination of performer, microphones, speakers, and chirping bird. Not only do the specific motions of the performer inform the production of the difference tones, but so too do aspects of the *situated* reality of the performance event. The size and shape of the hall, the position of the listener, the distance between the different elements of the setup can all significantly impact the listening experience. The difference tones for their part are created psychoacoustically by the individual listener themselves, and can only be captured by a microphone should a "knot" of heterodyning occur by chance where the microphone is positioned (Rusche and Harder n.d.).

As Mersch writes, this means that the piece transforms "the sensory dimensions of physical phenomena and scientific procedures into veritable *aesthetic* phenomena. This might justify calling them experiments in perception" (Mersch 2017, 28). Their experimentality binds them to the present, and makes audible an ensemble of actants, both human and non-human, connected together in a given situation. The work's interaction with the agglomerated acoustic medium of a given space is thematized explicitly, revealing itself via the experimental setup (31). It is singular and unique to the moment of its being heard, dependent on "the time and space in which they are performed and the location of the listeners listening to them" (Mersch 2017, 32).

In contrast to the other authors programmed during this same evening so far, Lucier himself would certainly not relate his work directly to the writings and ideas of Haraway, preferring to focus more on his own pragmatism of approach (see on this Beyer 2017, 25). There do exist similarities between the two approaches though, significantly made perceivable via Polzer's programming strategy, which itself relates to Haraway's philosophy.

Haraway's call to "stay with the trouble," also her book's title, is in part realized for her through the making of what she calls "oddkin." Rather than focus on filial relations, or "natural" connection, she focuses on relationships of kinship, shared interests, friendship, or affinity. The "oddness" of these oddkin is the unexpectedness of connections—once again moving away from a human-centric understanding of

the world to one where humans co-occupy it with many other entities. Returning to Haraway's book, she lays this out in the beginning of her introduction by saying that

staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplace, entangled and worldly. (Haraway 2016, 4)

These "unexpected collaborations and combinations" could easily be a way of describing Lucier's experimental systems, which, as has been shown with Mersch's analysis, are singular and situated "kinships" of walls, ears, electronics, etc., that produce "odd" or "unforeseen" results. These sonic results are the sonification of the "hot compost piles" of the particular concert settings themselves. Haraway speaks of a vitalism of material, and calls for exploring the limits and hidden facets of the world that surrounds us: Lucier devises artistic experiments whose results allow the audience to perceive differently their surrounding environment—of which they themselves are of course co-constitutive.

5.6.1 Storytelling for Earthly Survival Part 3: Composting is so Hot!

After Lucier's *Bird and Person Dyming* closed out the second part of the evening, there still remained one final element on the program for the evening—a screening of the rushes (dailies) of the documentary *An Ecosex Journey with Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle*, presented by Isabelle Carlier during the last hours of a lengthy evening. Carlier exemplified the concept of show and tell as well in her presentation, alternating between showing rushes (of substantial length), and contextualizing them for the audience.

The film itself presented a series of provocative portraits of workshops the Stephens and Sprinkle have done, and the ideology of their ecosexual movement. A provocatively-literal take on the same strain of ecological thinking argued by Haraway, the two seek to grow their community of people who have an erotic connection to the earth and to nature. To quote from their manifesto:

1. WE ARE THE ECOSEXUALS. The Earth is our lover. We are madly, passionately, and fiercely in love, and we are grateful for this relationship each and every day. In order to create a more mutual and sustainable relationship with the Earth, we collaborate with nature. We treat the Earth with kindness, respect and affection. (Stephens and Sprinkle, n.d.)

Like with much of the other materials presented in the evening before it, Haraway also makes explicit reference to Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle's practice, relat-

ing that they even made her a special bumper sticker that reads “Composting is so hot!” (Haraway 2016, 32).

As the film presentation wound to a close, it became clear that the audience was exhausted by the end of this long evening of materials relating to Donna Haraway, which began at 18.00, and ran to just before midnight, with only two short breaks. What became clear as the audience began to fatigue was how this particular program was able to attract many audience members because of their interest for Haraway’s ideas, rather than their membership in the Maerzmusik festival community. Their apparent difficulty with the long, loud, and very intense performance of *Bird and Person Dyming* earlier in the evening supports this. In any case, what Polzer managed to create was a distinctly musical composed evening, while at the same time creating it in such a way as to attract a non-specialist audience interested in the ideas and themes being addressed, rather than the way in which they were presented.

Just as it has been shown that the receiver is the one who ultimately untangles the complex webs of interdisciplinary arts practices, Polzer’s practice here shows one possible way that musical practice can participate in this interdisciplinary arts field. The Haraway concert, though obviously also attracting a music audience watching most of the festival, was directed much more at an audience sorted by issues or ideas rather than by knowledge of a singular artistic discipline. Musical knowledge was used, but routed in such a way as to enhance the presentation of Haraway’s ideas via the temporal form of a concert.

5.6.2 Compos(t)ing the Evening

The example of “Storytelling for Earthly Survival,” which contained few musical works, can help give insight into how Polzer conceives of the events in his programming also more generally. He writes in his introduction to the 2017 festival that it consisted of “ten composed evenings,” notably using “evening” to describe the events, instead of concert (Berliner Festspiele 2017, 4). In doing so, he therefore de-emphasized the expectation of featuring mostly music, as well as the norms of the concert ritual. As seen with the conceptual similarities between Haraway and Lucier’s work, this “kindred” relationship is significant not because it is groundbreaking, but because it shows Polzer’s way of assembling concert programs in a way similar to Haraway’s concept of making oddkin. The music curator assembles together different kinds of works, such as film, speech, story, radio show, science fiction, and CCM performance, and fashions them into a cohesive and coherent whole “evening” of his own devising. Polzer is thus using the *logic* of musical composition, bringing works into relation with each other, spatializing them within a concert hall, even experimenting with the audience’s seating arrangements, in order to make a result that is, while musical, not specifically a musical performance,

but rather is related to a conceptual theme—here calls to “tell new stories” and “make oddkin” in Haraway’s sense.

This odd mix presented as a cohesive whole creates a hybrid form that is less related to the concert tradition as it is to the transdisciplinary field more generally. This is because the evening can be best described by the concept of theatricality as it has been developed with Mitchell and Jackson in section 3.2.1. Theatricality is a useful concept for understanding the mixed media of the performative milieu created by this composed evening, in that what it forms is not any one precise medium (such as even the “concert medium”), but rather a complex moment of performance, in which various media, in this case video, readings, and performance, are brought into relation with each other using a musical logic of composition.

Music is nevertheless present in the understanding of this situation in two ways. Importantly, it is the background that informs the approach of the music curator and determines the methodological toolbox that he approaches the evening with. It is also present in the relation that Polzer is proposing with the festival between music and time. Maerzmusik as a “Festival for Time Issues” (the subtitle given to the festival by Polzer, which also notably does not contain the word music again) is meant to explore issues of temporality, which is the way that Polzer is extrapolating a primary concern of the discipline of musical production to wider societal issues (i.e. music-making as an artistic practice dealing with temporality). That this evening is focusing on Haraway, whose philosophical project is concerned with a shift in our perception of agency, and ultimately also with a shift to inhabiting the temporalities of non-human actors, is in turn then no coincidence; it becomes in other words recursive form and content of the evening at once.

What can be drawn from this is Polzer’s vision of music’s relation to society that is comparable to how Lepecki conceptualizes dance’s social relevancy in section 3.3.1, where he identifies certain characteristics inherent to dance practice, such as corporality, allowing it to act as a space for addressing certain kinds of societal issues. Applied to music, and specifically to Maerzmusik, this means that the festival’s focus is shifting away from an emphasis on musical works, and towards an emphasis on characteristics of musical practice that can challenge certain aspects of contemporary society. The difference here being an interest in symptoms instead of a category.

From this evening, one of these characteristics of musical practice that the festival focuses on can be identified as *composition*, understood as a way of creating meaning out of juxtaposition, and forming a narrative out of heterogeneous materials via a skill of working with their various medial characteristics. Another is *inhabiting alternate temporalities*, like Haraway suggests, as is performed in various parts of the evening, such as through the reading science fiction, or inhabiting the world of the ghost tones formed in Lucier’s piece. The heterogeneity of materials means that these aspects are then not understood to be the exclusive domain of

one strand of artistic practice, but rather one that appears in many areas, and is focused on intensely *also* in musical compositions. Said differently, reading sci-fi can allow for the experience of different temporalities, like Lucier.

Taking this one step further can allow for an articulation of Maerzmusik's curatorial concept to emerge. This is namely that Polzer seems to be focusing the festival's programming on exploring ways in which musical techniques relate to and interact with society. This is instead of the traditional approach to this festival and others in the field, whose curatorial concept is focused instead on discrete works, and, through the use of e.g. a festival theme, becomes a way of helping mediate these works to the festival audience. In this later case, such issues of the relationship between a work and society thus emerge either explicitly in a composer's work, or implicitly through the reproduction of certain values and practices. By foregrounding this aspect of music's relationship to society, Polzer also seems to be taking this definitional power for himself.

This is seen clearly in this evening, whereby the various works exist in an indexical relationship to the larger direction of programming set by the curator. This creating of a subjective narrative of the curator is what then allows for him to easily mix works from different disciplines and that have different artistic concerns; their meaning becomes re-stabilized through the higher order of the curatorial concept, here an evening of Donna Haraway.

5.7 Curating and the Maerzmusik Festival

5.7.1 Curating Concerts

Theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann distinguishes between three kinds of text; the linguistic text of the theatre play, the text of the staging or *mise-en-scène*, and the performance text, explaining that the latter is produced through the interpolation of the former two (2006, 85). He explains that in post-dramatic theatre, the performance text has undergone a shift in its understanding; it has expanded to encompass the realization that the entirety of the performance situation, of the different various sense-giving actants that make up the theatrical situation, constitute this performance text, rather than it just being narrowly defined as the discrete actions onstage (*ibid.*). Post-dramatic theatre is less about a change in how works are staged, and more about exploring the repercussions of this more fundamental expansion of the understanding of the performance text, which encompasses both the entirety of the theatre event, and is regulated by the individual viewer.

In a similar fashion, Polzer does not go so far as to change what can be understood as the analogy to the linguistic text—the score—of the individual works, for this would not be supported by a musical community that places an extremely high