

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.5.1 Manos Tsangaris

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>11</sup> “Der Betrachter ist im Bilde. Seine Wahrnehmung, seine Sinnes- und Sprachebenen werden in Bewegung und ins Verhältnis gesetzt. Es entstehen Werke, in denen nicht die Musik, das Theater, das Wort in der Musik oder im Theater thematisiert sind, sondern die Dynamik und Art und Weise, wie Mensch den einen Raum aus unterschiedlichen Wahrnehmungsebenen konvergiert, erlebt. Dieses Erleben ist Teil seines schöpferischen Prozesses.”

there. This resembles the theorization of a network-based model of perception within interdisciplinary performing arts practices that was presented in section 3.2. Arguing with interdisciplinary arts scholar Shannon Jackson, the artistic event must be viewed from the perspective of the audience, who untangle for themselves the complex webs of references based on their own disciplinary backgrounds, but also how the work itself forms and informs this same reception in a kind of co-operation. In this understanding of the event of artistic practice, the curator, or in this case the artist, becomes only one node within the network of connections, albeit one that takes responsibility for composing the context of a particular frame within a larger network.

In a text called *Schalte Zelte*, Tsangaris addresses this form of composing with context through the concept of focusing on staging a “scene.” The word, Tsangaris points out, is related to the Greek word *skene*, meaning tent, hut, or stage, in that before Greek theatre took place in stone theatres, it took place in tents. Tsangaris composes contexts, but at the same time acknowledges the complexity of that proposition, solving it through the concept of delimiting a “tent” in which he works. The metaphor captures well those limited spaces where some degree of control can be exerted; it allows for understanding how, within an immense and complex interconnectivity, a certain positioning within this web can be taken and held by an artist. (Tsangaris 2015, 184–186)

This concept of a scene or tent differentiates itself from the earlier position on the purity of media seen with Fried and Greenberg in that it acknowledges the conceit of its fictionality within a very narrowly-defined situation. A work like *Mauersegler* is aware of, and plays with, the absurdity of “pitching” its tent in the middle of the city. It sketches a pre-composed experience for the audience, but allows for the boundaries of that experience to bleed into all manner of other things at its edges. Furthermore, as has been argued with W.J.T. Mitchell, it is a music theatre whose medium is also inherently mixed. It consists of all manner of elements chosen for how they affect the receiver, rather than their perceived medial purity.

#### 4.5.2 Daniel Ott

Daniel Ott is a Swiss-born composer whose influences include John Cage, Dieter Schnebel, and Mauricio Kagel. A driving question of Ott’s practice could be said to be “why do I write music and for whom?,” arising from his studies with composer Nicolas A. Huber. Running through Ott’s practice since his student days has also been an emphasis on using composition as a tool for instigating and catalyzing performance by the musicians he views as his co-collaborators, rather than understanding it as a solemn text to be interpreted. Musicologist Christa Brüstle puts

forward that Ott's works emerge from *teamwork* with others, and in relation to a specific place, saying that Ott believes that

composition does not start with one's own constructive activity: when composing his musical pieces and music theatre projects, what is there is much more the starting point and field of work at one and the same time. (Brüstle 2012, 260)

Ott's starting point is already the specific what and whom of the performance situation. Here, the same kind of permeability and openness of works seen with Tsangaridis can be glimpsed at again with Ott's working method. His work is not built on a *tabula rasa*, but rather acknowledges and works-with its relations to its surrounding contexts and influences, suggesting a more horizontal understanding of the compositional process, rather than one based on the immutable purity of a score created first under the pretense of ideal conditions of presentation.

This can for instance be seen in his pair of works *Hafenbecken I & II* (2005/6), composed for a specific decommissioned warehouse on the Rhein in Basel. The works, while composed, were based on the specific sonic landscapes that existed in the warehouse as a product of their surroundings and acoustical properties. The work was also a team effort, involving also a costume designer and light designer in the creation of the event. (Ott 2008, 271–273)

In a 2001, manifesto-like text entitled *Voraussetzungen für ein Neues Musiktheater-Gesamtkunstwerk* (“Conditions for a New Music Theatre Gesamtkunstwerk”), Ott lays out a series of his aesthetic principles that detail his approach to the composition of music theatre—many of which resonate with how he also conceives of the music theatre biennale today. Certainly Ott's choice of the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* (used also in the text's title) should be looked at skeptically here; it represents exactly the kind of closed work conception that Ott is decidedly trying to avoid. Nevertheless, focusing on the spirit of the text, what becomes clear is that music theatre is for him a space where music undoes its specificity and acknowledges that it is always already a mixed medium, and from that perspective approaches the concept of the total art work.

He argues that the music/theatre relationship is one that must always be figured out anew in each project, answered through the unique and specific way that a particular team's skills work together to create a whole. This implies a consistent challenging of pre-established disciplinary categories on the basis of the performative act of composing-together. Music theatre must then always be thought of as work together with the various performers and other artists that work collectively on an inherently interdisciplinary product (Ott 2001, 50–51).

This view is supported by Ott's further comments as he attempts to describe the role of the interpreter/performer within the concept of music theatre that he is advocating. While relating the story of a performance by a Bolivian theatre group, he remarks that the group made no division between musicians and actors among

their ranks, and that for them, “theatre becomes audible and music becomes visible” in a kind of productive ambiguity between these disciplines that he found to be exemplary (Ott 2001, 51; translation added).<sup>12</sup> Most important for Ott is that these relationships between movement, sound, performing, etc. all be fluid, and thus at best renegotiated with each new performance, based on what is for the entire group the most appropriate and interesting way of composing them all together. It means a focus firstly on artistic ideas or concepts *before* focusing on their executability by the given constellation of people.

This demonstrates Ott’s approach to composition as being a collective activity. Starting from ideas means for Ott not just his own, but those of his co-authors working on the piece with him together, allowing space for performers to also contribute directly to the formation of the work through bringing in their own knowledge, insights, or particular viewpoint, expanding the work’s potential horizon beyond that of only the composer themselves. The score thus becomes permeable, consisting first of observations and ideas, questions that can be answered by the performers. The answers to these questions then can be reintegrated into the compositional process, which culminates in a score—made by Ott—as a kind of negotiated document and outcome of a collaborative process. The score then takes on the role of being both documentation of a working process, but also still the locus of musical meaning, and is always returned to during the process developing the performance. Returning to Brüstle’s writing on Ott’s practice, she highlights however a contradiction in this working method related to the scores he produces:

There is no question about the authorship of the works, however, as the artistic direction and organization of processes is in the hands of just one person’s (or a management team). (Brüstle 2012, 275)

While ideally it seems that Ott aims towards working methods that are collective, traditional compositional singular authorship over the work still prevails. In the end, though the composer for instance laments being cut off from the social world while sitting at his writing desk, there still exists an elision from authoring the final score to taking authorship over it (see also Ott 2001, 52).

Many of these ideas can be seen also in the composer’s leadership of the festival Neue Musik Rümlingen, near Basel, Switzerland, which he shares with a group of five other artists. Unique about this festival is the way in which its form is developed out of the programmed performances, instead of the other way around. If as Ott says, each performance is a new opportunity to reconsider the relationships between performers, then here that approach is applied to the festival as a whole, in that each new edition is an opportunity to reconsider the relationships between the works and each other, as well as the works and their audiences.

12 “THEATER IST HÖRBAR UND MUSIK WIRD SICHTBAR.”

This means that the Rümlingen festival does not rely on a fixed venue, rather its leadership team (who rotate their positions) work out how best to bring a certain work to a given audience. This can involve performances that take place at night in an open field, as in the 2016 edition, or in a mini-concert hall in the town square, as in the 2018 edition (in Häusermann's *Tonhalle*, which originally premiered at the Munich Biennale).

Furthermore, because the festival so carefully tailors its presentation to the experience of the audience, it becomes a much more intimate and direct kind of experience. As with Tsangaris' experimental systems, the festival experience as a whole becomes only possible through its completion by the audience themselves. This effectively removes the "outside" spectator perspective from the audience, transforming them into participants whose view on the festival becomes a total perception consisting of their unique individual experience of the festival taken as a whole, rather than a pre-set frame for the experience of specific works.

#### 4.5.3 Concave and Convex

Bringing these concepts together, a picture of Ott's artistic practice begins to emerge. His is a practice that composes (with the) community, and attempts to mould and shape the relations between musicians, audience, space, etc. through the practice of composition. This happens on a different scale to Tsangaris, making for interesting contrasts between the two composers in leading the biennale. In describing their differences, Ott uses the terms "concave" and "convex" as a simple shorthand to describe the differences between their two practices, which prove to be an apt way of highlighting the key differences between the two leadership styles.<sup>13</sup>

Tsangaris' works can in general be characterized by the concept of being "concave," curving inwards and being focused on the singular interaction and on the movement from the many towards the one. It can even be taken to its extremes by Tsangaris in pieces such as *Winzig* (ongoing, first version 1993) which consists of a collection of miniatures to be performed over the course of an evening in unconventional spaces for small groups of only a couple people at a time. Many of his pieces are targeted *at* the perceptive apparatus of the individual—going as far as definitive moments of hailing, such as pointing a flashlight at the audience, saying in effect "you, specifically" (as occurs in the miniature also called *Winzig*, within the larger set).

Ott characterizes his practice in contrast as "convex," going from the one to the many, as when one of his scores helps to coordinate and organize a large ensemble's movements and sounds through a vast open landscape in what he calls

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Ott, interview by the author, Berlin, 28 October, 2017.

a “collective landscape compositions” (*Landschaftskollektivkomposition*), such as *Der Klingende Berg* (2010). Such an interpretation also fits to Brüstle’s point from the previous section regarding his persisting adherence to a compositional authority. This one-to-many concept seems to fit there too; there is still an individual, still in the end the compositional work of a single subjectivity who in the end oversees the structure. What is clear here is the persistent necessity of a schema of authority moving from composer to performer.

What most closely connects the two composers is the emphasis on bringing together and adapting to *heterogeneous* materials into a musical assemblage, whether it be a festival or a composition. This means for both of them an emphasis on individual, made-to-measure organizational and staging structures that always produce out of the composition of various parts a particular attunement of their materials, one that reimagines the relations between audiences and their surroundings. This applies as much to Ott’s coordination of different musician groups in large open spaces as it does Tsangaris’ constitution of small and intimate situations targeted at the individual audience member.

By extension, rather than seeing the biennale as a fixed frame, a supportive administrative framework, DOMTS see this mediating step as itself also able to influence the meaning of individual productions. This is because be it through setting up an experimental system in public space with *Mauersegler*, or working with the soundscape of a warehouse with *Hafenbecken I & II*, DOMTS already have significant experience and know-how working on similar kinds of large-scale projects as composers, i.e. as artists. What this means is that they already possess the proficiency for working at this scale, with all the skills and challenges that brings, while realizing their artistic goals. How these goals shift with the change from working on large-scale compositional projects to a large-scale festival will be examined in the next section.

## 4.6 The 2016 and 2018 Biennale Editions

### 4.6.1 Overview

#### 2016 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater

The 2016 Munich Biennale for New Music Theater took place from 28 May to 9 June, 2016. DOMTS’ first biennale featured a total of 14 productions over the course of that 13-day period. The Gasteig complex and the neighbouring Muffatwerk cultural centre created a spatial concentration in which the majority of festival productions took place, with other venues either being within walking distance (e.g. Lothringer13, EinsteinKultur) or had their starting point at the Gasteig (as with the production *ANTICLOCK*). This first edition would feature also an academic sympo-