

Returning to Chapter 4 on the Munich Biennale for New Music Theater, that chapter explored how a young generation of musical practitioners are finding ways of addressing the theatricality of musical practice, going beyond a focus on exclusively sonic material within a preset frame (e.g. of the traditional concert or opera stage). They are very much concerned with the mediation and contextualization of their works, due in large part to their more conceptual approach to musical production. It could be said that the trend towards musical practitioners considering the contextualization of their works as integral to their artistic expression is inversely proportional to the degree of freedom for acting within an unclaimed symbolic space for an approach such as that of Pozler.

As the amount of new kinds of music theatre practice grows, i.e. the amount of musical practitioners who feel invested also in the contextualization and mediation of their works as constituent of its effect on the audience, then Polzer's ability to "compose evenings" or even festival concepts himself becomes either more limited, or begins to intersect with the former group in ways not dissimilar to what has already been shown with Szeemann. It would then not be amiss to speculate that criticisms such as those expressed by Buren of Szeemann's "exhibition of an exhibition" from so many years ago are set to increase as the field of contemporary music moves more in this direction, setting up a similar kind of battle over control of meaning of the musical event, as has formed the basis of the field of curating in the visual arts.

## 5.8 Decolonizing Time

It is worth exploring one last thematic strand of Polzer's Maerzmusik festivals, namely their relationships to the issue of decolonization and what Polzer calls "decolonizing time." Since the beginning of Polzer's tenure, the festival has carried the subtitle "Festival for Time Issues," implying that it is attempting to shift its thematic scope to include a broader, more transdisciplinary investigation of the relationships between perceptions of temporality and societal structures. A further semantic shift has occurred in the festival's messaging and programming over the past three editions, in which it has increasingly trained this focus on "time issues" to specifically issues of capitalism, modernism, and colonialism as they relate to both the production of temporalities and subjectivities, as well as various ways of exploring these issues through artistic practice.

At the latest during the 2017 edition, decolonizing time became an important concept in the festival programming. This becomes clear through the prominent placement of a statement by Donna Haraway on what decolonizing time means for her in the 2017 and 2018 readers (pages 5 and 8–9 respectively), as well as the fact that Polzer played the same video of her making this statement as the opening

remarks to both the 2017 and 2018 Thinking Together conferences at the festival. The engagement with Haraway was related to the 2017 evening showing her work, and related events called "Storytelling for Earthly Survival" (see section 5.6). The topic has also become the focus of Polzer's contribution to the Defragmentation initiative (see section 1.2.2).

As central as decolonizing time is to the festival, it must still be established what this actually means in its specific actualization at Maerzmusik. Understanding Haraway's comments on the topic reproduced in two Maerzmusik readers will be the most efficacious way to approach this.

Haraway understands decolonized time as an escape from colonialized time designed to extract value. Colonized time is shaped by the needs of capital, which destroys diversity in favour of easily-governable and self-same monoculture. Inhabiting decolonized time is about seeking out temporalities that are not aligned with a majoritarian profit motive, but rather form the displaced underbelly of colonial time, which Haraway calls the "Plantationocene" named after that original deployment of this spatio-temporal project. Decolonizing time is an approach to understanding the present that looks beyond rationales of profit in order to listen to and understand the suffering and the pain of those caught up in processes of colonialization, in order to also act in practical new ways to support these non-colonialist structures. It is less so about bringing in new ideas, and more about a concerted commitment to learning and working-with communities in order to develop collective solutions. (Haraway 2018, 8–9)

In the context of the Thinking Together conferences, Polzer's programming approach emerges from this way of thinking. His programming is intended to develop a discourse that problematizes this relationship between coloniality and temporality, in ways that build a term-cluster, as Dorothee Richter proposes, around the issues of coloniality/modernity/capitalism/the West (Richter 2017). This was achieved in 2017 through conference contributions by, along with Haraway, e.g. C. K. Raju, who illustrated the Western-centrism of the clock, and Rolando Vázquez, who examined the relationship between modernity and time. This conference included also explicit relationships to Western music, with contributions by, among others, sociology of music professor Georgina Born, and artist Björn Schmelzer, who works with the early music ensemble Graindelavoix. In the 2018 conference, the direct link to Western music was much weaker, with the conference emphasizing more its function as framing the festival's commitment to issues of decolonization through contributions by prominent scholars such as Timothy Morton or Mauricio Lazzarato.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> While Morton was ultimately unable to attend, the programming gesture is most significant here.

These concepts can also be seen to be inform festival programming as well, which was strongly determined by the will to include more minoritarian positions, in various ways attempting to program works that reflect on this term-cluster. This can be seen for instance in the programming of Eastman, examined above, or the “Migrants” evening addressing refugee issues in the 2018 edition.

Rather than examine here exact instances of when Polzer has programmed works that fit into these criteria, it seems more worthwhile to take one step backwards, and consider the relationship between decolonizing time and the festival more generally, in order to take a more nuanced perspective on the specific understanding that Polzer is taking in regards to this issue.

Chapter 2 opened by looking at how the festival transformed into an ideal instrument of modernism, one that has proven highly effective in its functioning as a site for the construction of systems of international rationalist order, and crucially also their dissemination to a festival public through the mechanism of exceptionalism brought about by the festival’s spatio-temporal concentration. It has traced the many ways in which this system has proven resilient and hard to change, but also how its effectiveness can be harnessed for purposes other than the reproduction of modernism’s colonialist/capitalist values, fostering critical thinking instead, as has been shown in the tendency to attempt to “outstare the colonizer’s gaze” through the organization of particularly biennales in sites of political trauma (see section 2.2.3) (Roces 2010, 53).

For her part, Haraway’s statement expresses effectively a similar idea when she writes that decolonizing time means inheriting and taking responsibility for the troubles and wounds that have been left behind by a legacy of capitalism and colonialism, which are the underside of these processes that led to the emergence of the festival format in the first place. The concept of inheritance similarly acknowledges that the resiliency of these systems can also prove to be a strength to be harnessed, in that inheriting the legacy of colonialism means also “inheriting the inventions of precious things—for example many of the things in the Enlightenment must never be lost from our planet again— inheriting the precious as well as the terrible and opening up categories” (Haraway 2018, 8). This quote mirrors that same history of working-with and subverting exigent formats mentioned above, in that it accepts the existence of these structures, but strives to reimagine their categories in ways that subvert the destructive systems that produced them, while attempting to emphasize the critical enlightenment project with which they are also connected.

Decolonizing Maerzmusik therefore means using the functioning of the festival in order to achieve ends subversive to the system that produces it. Looking at other decolonization initiatives, these suggest that a common way of doing this is through investigation of sites, frameworks, and administrative procedures.

Approaches such as the one taken with Enwezor's Documenta 11 explored in section 2.3.2, or in Documenta 14's decision to have venues also in Athens, addressing in this way the tensions between European North and South, are a testament to this approach. This can also take place through criticism as a form of digging up the contradictions at the centre of these festivals, such as when, in the opening paragraphs of the editorial to the *OnCurating Journal* on decolonizing art institutions, the authors point out that the capital for Kassel's Fridericianum was originally found through selling soldiers to the English to quell the American Revolution (Richter and Kolb 2017).<sup>11</sup> In this way, "issues of so-called 'race,' class, and gender are always intertwined in aesthetics, in the arts, in art institutions, and their ideologies, and should therefore also be considered together in rethinking a decolonial horizon" (*ibid.*). For instance, one could ask: how have such issues determined the course of the *Musik-Biennale/Maerzmusik* since its inception, and particularly during early German unity?

However, such an approach is not the core focus of Polzer's understanding of decolonizing time.<sup>12</sup> Rather, as the term suggests, it is focused primarily on the concept of time, and not on the general decolonization of the *Maerzmusik* festival itself, though this of course also occurs by association. Decolonizing time manifests itself at *Maerzmusik* in at least two ways:

First, it is occurring through an approach to programming, in that Polzer is programming artists outside of the normative, narrow approach to contemporary music, and is programming instead musical practitioners from a much broader field unbothered to a singular majoritarian style. This move implicitly acknowledges the structural complicity of New Music in the systems that he is trying to subvert, and his programming is thus attempting to open its ears to a more diverse palette as a result.

Second, this approach to programming is combined with Polzer's music curatorial approach to carefully organizing the presentation of *Maerzmusik*'s "composed evenings," in order to produce experiences of decolonizing time that Polzer is aiming for. In this way, the focus on the constitution of the individual concert event as audience experience becomes the vessel which allows for the audience to transform their perception, allowing them to experience a time that is decolonized within the confines of the festival event. All of this fits with the experientiality contained in Haraway's approach to decolonizing time, in that it is strongly based on a situated,

<sup>11</sup> Note as well the proximity between war, capital, Capital, and arts festival, as pointed out by Roces 2010, see also section 2.1.

<sup>12</sup> Arguably however, an approach like the one put forward by Richter and Kolb (among others) is being carried out by the Berliner Festspiele on a broader level, such as for instance their *Palast der Republik* project in March 2019 addressing outstanding issues of German reunification and European identity. An analysis of such an approach goes beyond the scope of this volume.

present, performative, and affective being-with that is well-suited for translation into the concert experience.

Therefore, decolonizing time happens in the Thinking Together conference as a subversion of the discursive offerings at the festival through the presentation of critical theory attempting to navigate the term-cluster around coloniality/modernity/capitalism/the West, and in concerts through the elicitation of alternative forms of perception through a combination of diversified programming and curation (qua dramaturgy) of concerts. Together they are intended to present a festival conception that uses enlightenment structures that question their own complicity within colonialist systems to produce critical knowledge production experienced by the festival community. Decolonizing time becomes a programmatic idea that is used in order to alter the outcomes of existing systems of the music festival.

Returning to the decolonization of arts institutions, it becomes clear that this broader category includes but also goes beyond the approach to decolonizing time that Polzer is practicing with his festival. It addresses to a much greater degree also the constitution of the institution itself, and the position that it plays within circuits of knowledge-production that are most likely compromised in one or more regards in relation to issues of colonialism or, especially, cognitive capitalism. Without mistaking this approach with a search for intellectual and ideological purity (which, as Haraway argues, is neither possible nor remotely productive), it addresses also the specificity of the site, as well as the institution and community's relationship to both it and issues of colonialist importance.

Without speculating as to the absence of this more structural approach to decolonization at Maerzmusik, the centrality of Polzer's position as its intellectual and artistic leader should be noted as a potential hurdle to integrating this approach, which tends to eschew centralized or hierarchical structures of authorship. The centrality of the position that Polzer assumes is, despite the highly progressive approach that is put forward, structurally the same as the centrifugal regimes of knowledge-production seen already in 19<sup>th</sup> century festivals, and in its homogeneity of leadership in contradiction to the pluralist being-with multitudes put forward in the writings on decolonization by Haraway and others.

A more structural approach to decolonizing Maerzmusik (though admittedly more fundamental and a different project than "decolonizing time") would be an opportunity to investigate the history of the festival and its backing institution in light of matters of colonialization and capitalism.

## 5.9 Conclusion/Coda/*Konzertemacher*

Berno Odo Polzer's music curatorial approach to Maerzmusik is moving away from a sole focus on music, and heading towards a more conceptual exploration of mu-