

## Dragan Klaic

### Vitality and Vulnerability: Performing Arts in Europe<sup>1</sup>

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According to a legend, Sheherezade told the blood-thirsty sultan her imaginative stories consequently for 1001 night until she conquered his remorse, resentment and cruelty and won his trust and love. In the European theaters, 1001 stories are being told every night, about remorse, resentment and cruelty, about trust and love, found, lost and betrayed. The immense diversity of stories, topics, genres, narrative strategies and styles, the large number of storytellers and huge, diverse audience make any generalizations about the present conditions of the performing arts in Europe a treacherous effort. Attempting to squeeze a mind-boggling variety of traditions, forms, systematic solutions and burning issues in one study paper, the author risks to lose with his story the trust of his own audience, love being in this situation not too relevant.

#### A technological environment

A curious spectator entering a theater practically anywhere in Europe would be dazzled in the first minutes of the performance by the richness of the stage lighting, its precision, sharpness, capacity to render and transform space, highlight objects, follow movement of the actors and give depth to their faces. Thanks to digital technology, stage lighting has become a means of dramaturgy, as Adolph Appia dreamed more than hundred years ago<sup>2</sup> and not just a means to make the stage event visible in the darkness. Digital sound equipment makes it possible to mix several sound tracks, vary registers and give an impression even to a distant spectator that the actors speak directly to him/her. Above the auditorium, dozens of lighting instruments hang. An experienced spectator will also detect discretely placed microphones in various places and in the musicals with a large capacity auditorium, actors perform with a wireless microphone glued to their face. In the back of the auditorium, behind a glass wall, one can see in a dim light the stage manager running the performance with the sound and light technicians, using several computers with prerecorded and pre-arranged effects and positions. In the program booklet, the names of the lighting designer and sound engineer (nowadays also called sound designer) appear prominently in the cast list.

The intensive development of stage light and sound engineering, especially in the last 20 years, makes us easily forget that only some decades ago acting tended to be a hard shouting business and that the actors, fearing they won't be heard nor seen well by distant spectators, tended to compensate this handicap not only by straining their voice cords but also by the excessive vivacity of their movement. For sure, technology brought about significant changes in the artistic styles and modes but performing arts became at the same time a high-tech field of great complexity, increased cost and refined specialization of tasks.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Dragan Klaic, Professor of Theater Studies, University of Amsterdam, was asked to prepare this paper by ERICarts in a personal capacity.

<sup>2</sup> A. Appia, *Die Musik und die Inszenierung* (1899).

## **Keeping track**

Anyone studying or teaching theater knows that early 1970's are sort of a watershed. Before that, reliable pictorial sources of past stage performances included photography and rarely a film recording. Afterwards, it has become possible to almost everyone to record the entire performance with at least one video camera and keep a documentary track more complete and eloquent than any other sort of material before. With the digital technology, video recording became easier, cheaper and sharper but the old Beta and Umatic tapes need quick transfer to a digital platform, before they fade away and that is a time demanding and costly endeavor. That so many important productions of the last 30 years have remained unrecorded despite available technology is often due to paranoid attitudes of professional unions which banned cameras from the theaters except in rare, strictly controlled circumstances, fearing that the intellectual property of the authors and performers will be abused through unlicensed copying and distribution. It is true that with directors, choreographers, designers having their copyright also acknowledged, allocating copyright, reaching some legal arrangements with the accord of all the artists involved in a production, and distributing eventually royalties has become a job of considerable complexity. Since mechanisms to carry out these negotiations often were not in place, the easiest response of some unions was an outright ban. A part of the contemporary performing arts history has been irrevocably lost as a consequence.

Video recordings that exist are in most cases made within the company, for internal use only and the quality varies a lot. Broadcast quality recordings made by public or commercial organizations for educational purposes are rare. Sometimes they contain compilations of fragments only, in the recent years digitalized and included in some educational CR ROMs. How many recordings of live productions have been made by the broadcasting organizations since the full fledged development of television in 1950s varies from one European country to another, depending on the programming habits and importance attached to theater on-air distribution. In general, the inclination of television organizations to record and air television versions of live productions is strongly reduced everywhere in Europe nowadays since this form of mediation is increasingly seen and second-hand theater and third-rate television. To make matters worse some television organizations have erased old magnetoscopic recordings or keep them in badly catalogued and inaccessible storage.

If available, visual documentation is not only a blessing for students, teachers and researchers but has also a tool in the publicity practice of the performing arts. The promotional capacity of a company in relation to the potential distributors and presenters, but also in direct communication with the potential public has been strongly increased with the availability of video recordings. Video fragments of the performance are being used as a tease-up in television advertising but appear nowadays also on the web sites of theater companies, venues and festivals. Furthermore, complex data bases of theaters and promoters, beside providing information on a dizzying amount of stage events in various places in forthcoming weeks and months, serve to sell tickets electronically to distant buyers, per phone, fax or Internet, without an extra trip to the box office. These could be commercial ticket sale agencies like Ticketron, or subsidized non-for-profit alliances, set up on the local level to increase audience participation in all sort of cultural outings, big and small, commercial or not, established or experimental, such as the Uit bureau in Amsterdam.

## Esthetical consequences

Creative use of technology in the artistic process includes the use of pre-recorded and edited digital image to alter or supplement the live action on the stage, offer a simultaneous alternative angle or enrich the perception with a close up of the actors face or a part of the body. Space and time frames are further multiplied and juxtaposed in the interplay of the virtual and live action. In dance, special software “Life forms” enables the choreographer to prepare the rehearsal in detail and keep a record of what has been developed and fixed in each session. Interactive dance floors and special sensors and transmitters, fixed to the body of the performer, enable him /her to directly interact with sound and light and achieve a synchrony of expressions that surpasses wildest Craig’s dreams of what a Super-marionette could achieve.<sup>3</sup> With Internet and a large screen beam, parallel live events in different spaces can be fused as a combined virtual event or one combining live and virtual tracks. Once Internet transmissions channels become more propulsive and some copyright hurdles are overcome, it will be possible to watch an entire performance alive on the web, changing the shape of the image and re-arranging the sound, even fusing various simultaneous web-cast events. One can only hope that this future internet spectator will also sometimes take the trouble of going to real theater in own neighborhood, if nothing else, then to experience the sociability of the event in the lobby and in the auditorium. For theater has always been a social and not just an artistic event and this appeal it has not lost with its increased technological dependency.<sup>4</sup>

## A trying, dangerous profession

Paradoxically, theater remains even in this high tech-times fairly old-fashioned, akin to a craft. Increased specialization in technical and administrative departments have made the whole endeavor more complex and rather expensive while technological advancements bring very limited productivity increases, if any. Theater has been highly dependent on unique sort of human labor, on professionals with rare talents and stamina, and demands from them repeated maximal effort, each evening again and again. The rehearsal process has become longer because of higher artistic standards and technical complexity. A production, once made, can be in principle repeated endlessly but the human material tires too, routine diminishes the artistic quality so that the long-run shows need to refresh and renew their cast, at extra rehearsal and promotional costs. Some high caliber productions, usually high-budget musicals, are multiplied in various cities, with exactly the same text, music, directing, choreography, décor, costumes, lighting effects, even the same visual identity of the publicity, making *The Phantom of the Opera* in Hamburg virtually undistinguishable from the one that runs simultaneously in London or Vienna. But there too, each performance is a unique event and demands a new artistic investment of talent and energy.

Strict standards and regulation have made theaters much safer than they used to be 100 years ago but catastrophic theater fires still occur (La Fenice in Venice, Liceo in Barcelona...), now most likely due to a short circuit and not any longer because of the use of gas for lighting. Despite the increased safety measures, much improving the comfort of the viewers, performers are often involved in dangerous accidents : they get electrocuted, fall or have

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Art of Theatre* (1905) and in *The Mask* (1905-1929).

<sup>4</sup> Comp. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*. Frankfurt/M: Verlag der Autoren 1999, 401-39. See also Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck, The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1997, 154-182.

something fall on them.<sup>5</sup> To stand on the stage is still a demanding profession, of high risk and coupled with a constant prospect of unemployment. In some large cities a great majority of actors is unemployed or temporarily employed outside the profession, but even in the Netherlands, with its generous funding of culture and a sophisticated social welfare and labor regulations, only 4% of actors has a year-long contract, others work on engagement lasting from a few weeks to four months.<sup>6</sup>

With venerable institutions such as Burgtheater, Comédie Française or Royal Shakespeare Company, employing hundreds of people and presenting hundred of performances per year, theater is no longer a fly by night operation as in the times of Lope de Rueda, when a band of actors wandered through the countryside with 2 planks, some wigs and false beards, begging food for performance, as the old chronicles claim.<sup>7</sup> But even 500 years later, theater has remained a volatile business and a profession plagued by hard work, uncertainty, frequent failure and low income. Fame, stardom and wealth are a privilege of very few and those blessed with such huge success quickly switch to film and television. Besides a small group of well known, prestigious and well subsidized top theater institutions, there are thousand of theater companies where passion for creative act is inseparable from steady poverty, low budget productions, minimal salaries, shabby venues and minimum of technical equipment while the audience response remains unpredictable. Much as the enthusiasm of the public is supposed to redeem all the artistic investment made, this is a short-lasting reaction and not a substantial sort of loyalty. Too often artists are re-numerated with public indifference.

In many countries, performing arts professionals are able after several months of paid engagement to collect unemployment insurance for a limited time. Also to have every week that they have worked with wages count towards their retirement benefits. Dancers, who have often international careers, moving from one country to another, have difficulties connecting a firm thread of unemployment, disability, health and retirement insurance through the patchwork of national legislations and regulations, with a myriad of national agencies and funds. In addition, their carriers are inevitably short and end usually in the early thirties, even earlier if there is a serious, incapacitating injury. Transitions schemes to help stopping dances receive professional training in some other field and then embark on a second carrier are still a rarity.<sup>8</sup>

Some actors and other performing arts professionals, at least those living in larger cities, supplement their stage income working occasionally for film, radio and television. Other take part in corporate festivities and other entertainment gigs, or seek temporary jobs using their talent and skills in education, social services, health facilities, prisons, working with various problematic or disadvantaged populations, in situations where a certain educational, social or therapeutic impact matters more than artistic excellence and originality but where specific artistic resources come very handy. In order to reach these specific realms of additional

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<sup>5</sup> There is no systematic monitoring of occupational hazards in the performing arts so no separate incidents statistics for the sector are available but some incidents reported in the press are noted every year in the "Chronicle", compiled by R. Engeland, for the *Nederlands Theater Jaarboek*, Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland, 1995-2001. See also Chpt. 6 "Safety in Dance" in *Not Just Anybody*, a report of the conference with the same name, held in The Hague in 1999, Toronto: Ginger Press 2001, 95-103.

<sup>6</sup> Source: FNV/KIEM, the Dutch artists trade union.

<sup>7</sup> As described by Cervantes in his preface to *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos* (1615). In English, in Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, Eds. *Actors on Acting*, new rev. ed., N. York: Crown Publ., 1970, 67-8.

<sup>8</sup> See S. Jary, "Dancers in Transition" in *Not Just Anybody*, 71-4.

employment as an alternative, even if only as a temporary compensation for a stranded artistic career, performing arts professionals need specific networks, additional training and expert support.<sup>9</sup> This para-theatrical sphere appears as the only probable growing employment prospect for actors, dancers, directors, dramaturgs and choreographers, and yet a majority of professional training programs continues to prepare students for a very limited and somehow obsolete notion of theater. Traditional notions of the profession and training clash with new set of employability demands.

## Subsidies and earnings

The production and distribution of the performing arts are organized today in Europe in a broad scale of models and types, in terms of finances, permanence and mobility.<sup>10</sup> Commercial theater, utilizing popular genres, entertaining material and well known performers, proves its vitality in many parts of Europe. Taking advantage sometimes of indirect forms of public subsidy, this sector is able to make money despite hefty investment in the production, if the run lasts long enough to recoup it. Practically every government in Europe subsidizes theater in some way but the regime of subsidies and what they buy and under what conditions vary considerably across the continent. Those performing arts organizations enjoying some sort of structural subsidy, a level of public assistance that can more or less be taken for granted in perpetuity can consider themselves truly privileged. Even they are discovering that the prevailing norms of accountability and efficiency, coupled with the shrinking or sort of *démontage* of the welfare state make their subsidy less automatic than they used to be. Most theater organizations receive public money in amounts renegotiated with public authorities and fixed every year. The Netherlands and the Flemish part of Belgium guarantee a four-years subsidy cycle. Everywhere, many productions depend on the uncertain flow of project subsidies.

Shrinking public expenditure and the overwhelming ideology of the market have put an increasing pressure on the companies to generate their own income, from the box office, sponsors, donations, and spin-off activities which in practice means that even subsidized theaters attempt to guess and fit what they perceive is a taste of the public, sponsors or foundation executives. The importance of the box office and the desire to find, please and keep a sponsor inevitably influence the repertory choice, artistic style, degree of innovation, and prompt working with well-known titles and well-known actors. Income considerations further influence the size of the auditorium and the tickets pricing policy with consequences on the quality of interaction between the performers and the spectators and on the composition of the public in terms of age, education, socio-economic position and shared cultural background. In some major tourist centers such as London the show biz is by and large dependent on tourist industry that generates up to 70% of ticket sales. The same would apply to the opera houses in Vienna, Milano, Paris, Amsterdam and some other cities. This strength can quickly turn into weakness when the tourist market collapses because of recession or political instability, as at the time of the Gulf war in 1991 or in the aftermath of

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<sup>9</sup> See Final report of the international "Transmission" project (2001), available from the Educational Dept. of the National Theater, London or Theater Instituut Nederland, Amsterdam.

<sup>10</sup> *Theatre Worlds in Motion*, ed. by H. van Maanen & S.E. Wilmer (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi 1998) offers a detailed survey of theater systems in 17 countries of Western Europe. See also more recent analyses of some West and East European theater systems in the conference reader *...en de ton die viel in duigen...*, ed. D. Klaic and Maaike van Geijn (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland 2000), and the final conference report edited by R. Engländer, *Theater as a System. A Reconsideration*, Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland 2001.

the recent terrorist acts in New York and Washington in September 2001. The latter caused a 80% drop of tickets sales on Broadway and the premature closing of 5 productions.

Commercial theater relies on stars, popular genres and topics (musicals such as *Elisabeth*, *Titanic*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Miserables*, melodramas and crimi-comedies), accessible style, entertainment value and spectacular effects and tends to concentrate on large scale venues in major cities but also engages on prolonged tours, replicating to some extent the American Coast-to-Coast tour model. In some major European cities the boundaries of the commercial and non-commercial theater have become somewhat blurred. Well-known artists tend to work in both realms. A production made in the heavily subsidized Royal Shakespeare Company might after a limited run start a new life as a commercial endeavor on the West End, even in some cases count on a Broadway transfer, earning a hefty income to its original producers. For an average spectator it really does not make much difference whether a production is subsidized or not, in most cases he/she wont be able to notice the difference, except perhaps in the price of the ticket.

### **Ensemble, company, collective**

If ‘company’ once meant a steady team of artists working together on a long term, thus an ensemble, today it means chiefly a producing organization, employing for a limited time some individuals in shifting, changing composition of teams. Life term contracts are a rarity, an anachronistic leftover even in Central and Eastern Europe where they once were a norm.<sup>11</sup> Limited time contracts years prevail in companies that call themselves repertory theaters. In fact, most repertory theaters are not any longer worth that name since they cannot keep a range of productions on the repertory throughout the season nor take them along into next seasons. Repertory today means increasingly a sequential limited run of several productions throughout a season. Each production runs for several weeks, alone or in alternation with some other production, and is performed by a core team engaged for a season, supplemented by individual actors, engaged for this particular production for several weeks of rehearsals and a limited run. If a production is brought back later, this is possible only because some new actors will jump into the cast and take over the roles of colleagues who are now engaged elsewhere.

The true repertory system, with several productions on the repertory, alternating virtually every evening of the week throughout the season and made by a consistent ensemble has obvious advantages in terms of artistic development, harmonization and refinement of the acting style and diversity of engagements and relations members achieve among themselves thanks to the continuity they enjoy. But the disadvantages are also well known and often described in theater memoirs and satires from Molière to Bulgakov: routine, productions that wane because they stay on the repertory too long, a monopoly of stars on the most desired roles, rigid hierarchies and generational discrimination, underutilization of human resources. In principle, this system offers some variety to the audiences in a in smaller cities where there is only one resident company that throughout the season can offer 4-8 or even more productions, perhaps supplemented with some guest appearances. If the company is mediocre or badly lead, this supposed variety will have not much attraction power, however. To the artists, the rep system offers some precious socio-economic security but sometimes shortchanges them on artistic challenges and adventures. While there are companies in

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<sup>11</sup> See D. Klaic, Ed. *Reform or Transition: The Future of the Repertory Theatre in Central and Eastern Europe*, N. York: Open Society Institute 1997.

Germany, Scandinavia, Central and Eastern Europe which still can permit themselves to engage between 20 and 80 actors, usually on 1-2 years contracts, thus ensuring a diversified output of productions that run at least throughout the season, this stability often goes on the expense of artistic vibrancy and is increasingly experienced by the actors themselves as stifling and limiting, despite the security it offers. From the technical and communication point of view, a sequence of productions, each staying for a few weeks, with some overlapping perhaps, is much easier to organize and market than a complicated schedule of constantly changing titles. The audience, once willing to accept a set repertory choice for the season and dates of a visit to the theater fixed well in advance, also prefers nowadays more freedom and flexibility, in fact helping erode the original repertory system, based on subscription.

A company thus implies in the first instance today an artistic leadership with some technical and administrative staff, producing several productions a season. Each of them could be cast separately from a large pool of free lancers and realized with more steady or more shifting groups of artistic collaborators. An esthetic continuity resulting in recognizable identity is build up by a repertory line and by the stylistic markers of the artistic leader- usually a director - rather than by a steady group of actors. In dance companies, the identity is shaped primarily by the choreographers and some choreographies made seasons ago have a prolonged life, performed by changing teams of dancers. In many opera houses productions from the classical repertory come back periodically with a changing set of singers and sometimes with a guest conductor, but with the same *mis-en-scène* and design.

Some companies prefer to call themselves a collective, a rather vague term, much fashionable in the anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical 1960s, but one that still appeals to the artists who believe in the shared adventure of artistic exploration, uniting several individuals around the same set of values, stage ideas and interests. To what extent such a collective is really egalitarian or is there an informal but indisputable leader in the background matters little here. There is a continuity of a certain idea and method of work, developed throughout a series of productions, but also a necessity to expand the steady core with people who'll play in one or more productions before they earn the status of a full-fledged collective's member or drift away.

Against this model stands a company that is indisputably under the leadership of one prominent artist, actor or more often a director, who provide its direction, continuity, guarantees its uniqueness and determines what productions will be made. Companies such as Carlos Santos', Michel Laub's Remote Control or Jan Fabre's Troubleyn. Roberto Ciulli's Theater a.d Ruhr, shows that this model of a collective with a strong leadership could be sustained even in a small town such as Muelheim a.d Ruhr (on the edge of Duisburg and Oberhausen). True, this is the densely populated Ruhr region of Germany and thanks to incessant tours through the country and abroad earned income significantly surpasses municipal and government subsidies. After 20 years of operation Ciulli's company is with its collective structure and *modus operandi*, subsidy vs. earned income ratio and remarkable mobility still an exception in the rich and dense German landscape, harshly divided between some 260 well subsidized rep companies on one side and a pauperized "free sector" run on meager project subsidies on another.

While theater remains a collective endeavor, at least in technical sense, some artists evidently underwent a profound alienation from any sort of collective creation and opted for a single, lonely processing of diverse material which they themselves conceive, render, shape and

perform. Here one can think of dramatic monologues, solo dance pieces, the hybrid genre of post-modernist performance, edged between the performing and visual arts.<sup>12</sup> The solo performer stands in the center of the public attention but even then the complexity of the enterprise demands an involvement of several producing and technical collaborators. The performer, say Bobby Backer, becomes a trade mark on her own, the author and interpreter at the same time, she grooms a role that finds its continuity in a series of differently shaped thematic and social context with surprising alternations within the same esthetic line. This sort of solipsism has been a mark of theater history since the early Renaissance as much as the variants of the company model. Subsidized or not, artistically challenging or just comfortably entertaining, this solo performer seeks an access to the audience via various presenters and appears on podia in many cities, often on an international scale.

### **Mobility and internationalization**

Well established companies have as a rule their own venue which they manage and exploit, often with a big and small hall, thus offering a range of formats and even styles. In order to fully utilize the artistic resources contracted, many companies turned their rehearsal rooms into small scale stages while some also sought to develop peripheral venues in former factories or stage set storage space (Teatri di Roma, Schauspielhaus Bonn), hoping that an esthetic and location diversification will also bring a diversification of the audience. Large performing arts organizations, producing around a dozen productions per season for various venues they run and employing several hundred professionals, are forced to put the complexity and rigidity of planning above the artistic anarchy of a creative process. Such companies are not interested in hosting other companies in their space since they anyhow struggle with so many capacity bottlenecks. They also can hardly move. To go on tour demands tremendous logistic effort, initiated well in advance, and a sponsor who will cover the exuberant cost. A prominent German repertory company will go abroad for 2-3 performances if the Goethe Institute foots the bill, a British Council sponsored foreign tour of RSC demands at least two years of advanced planning.

Against this backdrop, some new companies appeared whose identity is derived from their intensive touring practice. Conventional dramatic theater has difficulties with this pattern, language still being a barrier despite all the advances in various simultaneous translation devices and methods. Dance companies, companies with a marked visual dimension and reduced role of text and language have taken full profit from the internationalization of the theater and expanded their (subsidized) market across national borders.

Two phenomena have furthered this development: the explosive multiplication of festivals with international programming in a dizzying variety of formulae and concepts; and the growth of subsidized venues that program various domestic and foreign companies on the basis of artistic selection (unlike booking houses that could be hired for any production for some evenings, on own risk), often bringing the same foreign companies back with their new productions from one season into another. Together, the festivals and the open venues have developed the curiosity and sophistication of the audience, enlarged the prevailing notions of theater in their own environment and sometimes strengthened the tensions and oppositions between the theater of local focus and international, globetrotting theater. Most importantly, many performing arts professionals have developed the experience of playing abroad, having their work assessed by another public than their home audience, other critics and foreign

colleagues, while at the same time seeing how theater is conceived, made and done elsewhere. A great majority of performing artists values these experiences as stimulating, inspiring, important for own artistic growth. The logic and purpose of internationalization of the performing arts could therefore be seen chiefly in a stimulating impact it has on artists, critics and audiences rather than in the exportation of the national culture and national prestige as was so markedly stressed in the Cold War times.

Increasingly, performing artists who tour extensively grow tired of the airport-hotel-venue-hotel-airport routine and complain of the limited contacts and insights this international dynamics allows. They seek more complex and prolonged collaborative engagements on the international scale as sources of innovation, renewal, inspiration and learning. And indeed, 1990s have brought a strong increase of international co-productions, bringing together not just several individuals of international standing but sometimes 2-3 groups, or a group and a venue, or a venue, a festival and a group.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes whole consortia of co-producers emerged sharing the risk. Festivals, once pleased to present foreign work, now actively co-produce it with other festivals: Avignon, Edinburgh, Aarhus, Holland festival, Automne de Paris, Wiener Festwochen and many others have often joined forces with other festivals and venues. Hebbel Theater in Berlin, Rotterdam Schouwburg, De Singel in Antwerp, Maubege, Theater de Ville in Paris and other open venues without a steady company appear also as co-producers, going further from their initial presenting role. They invest in companies, offering them residences, resources and conditions to complete and launch a production, give workshops, collaborate with another company. In many cases complex co-producing arrangements are chiefly about pooling of financial resources and splitting of financial risk of a new production among several parties. They are co-financing deals rather than artistic collaborations, enabling a prominent artist - Robert Wilson or Silviu Purcarete or Declan Donnellan - to make an ambitious production with a guaranteed minimal run in several cities.

This sort of international practice has highlighted the mobility of individual artists and groups across national borders as a precondition for their artistic development. Internationalization involves today more than an elite group of directors, designers, choreographers, composers and producers and programmers. International co-productions and tours, but also stages, workshops, seminars, conferences involve thousands of professionals with increasing regularity, as part of their professional development, testing the cultural markers of the profession and its training models, prevailing notions on various professional roles, matters and procedures, attitudes to tradition, technology and audiences. The shifting but productive ground for this dynamics has been provided by several networks that offer informal exchange of information, promote good practice and reflection, pass experience from one generation of operators to another and shape opportunities for one to seek and select appropriate partners for further collaboration.<sup>14</sup>

A critique that could be made of this dynamics is probably that it fabricates hypes and fashions, that the co-producing consortia make and break international artistic careers and reputations and produce over-exposure and overt, ubiquitous presence of the same artists and

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<sup>13</sup> See articles of theater operators in R. Engelder & D. Klaic Eds., *Shifting Gears*, Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland 1998, 89-120, 133-165. Also in French, *Changer de Vitesse*.

<sup>14</sup> On the dynamics of international networks, see Gudrun Pehn, *La Mise en réseau des cultures*, Strasbourg: Conseil de l'Europe 1999, and *How Networking Works, IETM Study on the effects of networking*, carried out by the Foundation Fitzcarraldo (Torino), Helsinki: The Arts Council of Finland 2001.

groups, and sometimes simplification of the stage language and style to make it more palatable across linguistic and cultural boundaries to many audiences in various countries. The heavy international traffic is not well balanced across Europe, North and West Europe being most active and most involved, not just because of their orientation but also because organizations from these regions can afford it. Internationalization has given boost to some prominent Eastern European artists who certainly deserve it (Nekrosius, Dodin, Purcarete,) and special schemes such as Theorem, initiated by the Avignon Festival, offered professional producing opportunities to some younger and unknown artists in Central and Eastern Europe to make new work and tour to the West – but not through East however.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, international engagement in the performing arts tests constantly not just the primary professional but also the intercultural competence of the artists, producers, presenters, critics and ultimately of the public as well. The gains achieved have besides an international impact also a clear local benefit, in enhancing the intercultural communication and engagement among artists and organizations of various cultural background and orientation, sharing the same urban space.<sup>16</sup>

### **A matter of space**

Contemporary urban developments pose other challenges to the performing arts: that of location of performance within the urban map and of spatial organization of the performance and its viewing. So many theaters have been built in Europe after the WW2 and most of them perpetuated the traditional pattern of Italian stage, posed frontally against a fan shaped or semicircular auditorium. Despite all the architectural innovations applied in other types of buildings and technological advancements applied to the stage itself, in the global configuration of the performance space and viewing space very limited innovations have occurred. After the small pocket theater movement of the 1950, multidisciplinary cultural centers became fashionable in 1960s, putting various artistic disciplines and activities under one roof, creating in the center of the city or at its periphery modern culture factories which in due time proved to be of problematic productivity and efficiency - artistically, socially and economically, their checkered and even disappointing results outnumbering success stories. In the aftermath of 1968 turbulences and anti-authoritarian protest, some squatted, unofficial spaces, popular among the youth, have been renovated, legalized and allowed within the subsidized cultural system. In 1970-80s, recycling of post-industrial spaces and conversion of various peripheral, abandoned and derelict sites for incidental or continuous theater use became frequent. In these appropriated venues various alternatives of space organization have been attempted, changing communication lines, perception patterns, and overall dynamics of the event. Less static and more flexible patterns allow for an ambulatory performance, with the audience moving along the players through the space, or simultaneous performance tracks in subdivided spaces, with the audience itself divided in groups and moved from one space into another.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> On changes and transformations of the perf. arts systems in Central and Eastern Europe and collaborative ventures, see spec. issues of the magazines *Frakcija* (14:1999) and *Alternatives teatrales* (64: 2000).

<sup>16</sup> See international contribution on the urban context: G. Opsomer, Ed., *City of Culture*, Brussels: VTI 1995 and Mark Deputter, Ed. *Practicas de interculturalismo / Practices of Interculturalism* Lisbon: Dancas na cidade 2001.

<sup>17</sup> As in *Euroalien* (1998) and *Hotel Europa* (2000), both written by Goran Stefanovski and modularly produced by Intercult Stockholm with a range of artistic teams from the Baltic and the Balkan.

International festivals have been the pioneers of discovery and incidental conquest of new sites in most unexpected locations, outside the city center where the cultural, political and economic infrastructure is traditionally concentrated and intertwined. With the sunset of the industrial era, the conversion of the ex-industrial sites has become a major challenge for urban planners, architects and cultural producers, ultimately also for artists. India, an old leather factory near Tiber that Martone opposed to the 18<sup>th</sup> century splendor of Teatro Argentino, or Cartucherie of Mnouchkine in Bois du Vincennes, the Roundhouse in North London (so irregularly used nowadays), ex-Fiat factory Linate in Milano, Tramway in Glasgow, Westergas Transformatorhuis in Amsterdam and so many others altered the performing arts map of Europe, challenged directors, dramaturgs, designers, actors as well as critics and viewers. The potential of surprising juxtapositions and confrontations prompts Gerard Mortier in 2001 to announce his move from the Salzburg Festival (where all his innovations, including spatial displacement from the city center, have been met with cranky resistance of the reactionary elites in charge) to Ruhr festival, where his polygon in principle consists of hundreds of abandoned industrial objects.

## **Audiences**

Future artistic challenges are to be found in the unorthodox use of the traditional theater venues (before architects convert them to some future post-theatrical use) and in staging of performances in various urban and rural locations. One line to pursue is making theater there where people already are gathered (museums, shopping centers, airports, railway stations, urban squares with cafes and playgrounds) rather than to deploy expensive marketing machines to lure spectators away from other consumerist pursuits.

The public, its extension and development remain the major and critical issue for the performing arts in Europe today. In general, audience figures remain stable in many countries. Initial drop of theater attendance in former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been by a large margin corrected but the number of performances given continues to shrink, at least in the subsidized theater. More than a sheer size, the question of composition of the audience is being posed in a radical manner. Those who wonder whether many youngsters will ever enter a theater or if they do, are they to perceive it as a very old-fashioned and rigid form of entertainment, are usually told that wisdom comes with age and that at some later point in time many of these youngsters might become fans of Shakespeare or opera. Perhaps. But the ability of theater to link new generations of viewers must not be taken for granted. With the development of the zapping popular culture, new standards of interactivity and 24 hours economy several well established notions need to be reconsidered: is the evening the most appropriate time for theater performance? how long should a performance last? what sort of freedom of movement and response should the audience enjoy? These questions cannot be dismissed with a single set of answers.

More worrisome than a shifting taste and unstable loyalty of some parts of the theater public is the fact that most people, perhaps 90-95% of urban population, never, never, never go to theater. This statistics makes it difficult to legitimize public subsidies because they seem to benefit a narrow cultural elite. Yet, the imperative to achieve cultural diversity of theater public remains a huge undertaking of enormous complexity, one that baffles marketing departments, artistic leaderships and boards of theater organizations. Individualization and multicultural composition of the society make in most European countries the traditional repertory cannon less obvious, known and binding than it used to be – despite the efforts to make it palatable in a range of radical stage re-interpretations. Those who stay away from

theater invoke a variety of reasons for their abstinence: ticket prices, complexity of advance arrangements, pretentiousness of the social occasion, lack of free time, richness of alternative leisure activities, excessive length of shows, and a sort of esthetic alienation from the medium itself, coupled with a high failure rate, translated in the disappointment of a viewer over a wasted evening. At the beginning of this century, theater in Europe is not experiencing any outright hostility but is certainly being threatened by indifference of many.

## **Recommendations**

In the preceding pages an attempt was made to give a synthetic picture of the main developments and issues facing the performing artists in Europe, without a pretension to discuss specific conditions in single counties or regions. However, Europe has become a very checkered cultural-political landscape where sometimes not only the impact of specific traditions but also contemporary developments take surprising twists and turns on a national, regional or local level. Therefore, the notion of subsidiarity, often invoked as some sort of a EU mantra, does indeed have a real meaning and logic: often public authorities on a lower level can better assess the needs and shape more effective instruments of interventions that public authorities on a higher level. In conclusion, here are some key attention points for the public authorities to consider and translate into policy mechanisms and instruments in order to stimulate the developing of the performing arts. It depends of national political systems and specific constellations on which level these points could most efficiently be turned into a policy and action.

- Facilitate access of performing arts institutions and initiatives to multiple sources of subsidy on various levels, with clear objectives, transparent distribution mechanisms and consistent evaluation criteria, applied by independent experts. Mix mid-term (4 years) subsidy distribution with yearly cycle and ad hoc subsidies.
- Develop a plurality of organizational models of theater production and distribution within the national theater systems, including community initiatives and amateur theater as a precondition for esthetic diversity.
- Stimulate collaborative ventures, alliances, networks among the performing arts organizations and between them and other artistic, cultural, educational and civic organizations, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The aim is to prevent self-centeredness and auto-ghettoization and make theater a vital community resource. Especially in smaller towns, collaborative arrangements should combat monopolies and uniformity and offer instead both continuity and diversity of the performing arts programming.
- Enhance mobility of individual artists, groups and their work as a stimulus of artistic development and audience development (circulation of information, training, collaborative ventures). Investment in these activities on the EU level will stimulate more complex and more enriching multilateral initiatives instead of sheer bilateralism and bridge the gaps that will always remain among mutually not fully compatible national culture systems. Subsidiarity notwithstanding, European political and economic integration is worthless without a cultural dimension that is needed in order to make the European project felt by the citizens.

- Consolidate the socio-economic position of the performing arts professionals, taking into account the irregularity of their professional engagement, diversity of working contexts, mobility and specific working conditions, including short career spans of dancers (professional transition programs etc). Stimulate artists to combine their artistic engagement with engagement in the educational, social and health spheres (employability programs). International artistic collaboration (rather than just exchange) is more fruitful if allowed to be artists-driven rather than to run on some government interests and contingencies.
- Recognize the mutual dependence of the performing arts and cultural industry and encourage their interaction; demand that subsidized organizations generate a realistic amount of own income, but stimulate commercial organizations to contribute to the research and development function that is anchored in the subsidized organizations.
- Encourage the emergence of innovative cultural infrastructure, a new typology of cultural organizations and initiatives in suitable objects - in new buildings and in recycled, converted objects, fusing artistic, educational and social functions. Stimulate artistic intervention in various urban contexts and public spaces (for a recruited audience and a found audience).
- Insist on cultural diversity of the audiences. Consider and evaluate performing arts organizations (and other cultural organizations) not for their capacity to express identity constructs but according to their capacity to further intercultural competence of engaged professionals and citizens (audience) as a critical skill that would guarantee social peace, cohesion and dialogue, in each multicultural community, in the culturally diverse Europe and in the world.
- Invest in systematic information processing, documentation, research, reflection and debate among the performing arts professionals as means to strengthen field's critical self-evaluation and constant re-alignment with other cultural, economic, technological and political developments that shape the context in which performing arts function today.