

# Mobility Aesthetics

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24.03-3.04.2012  
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Conference Reader  
2018

# Introduction

## Rethinking the mobility of aesthetics

In past years, the image of mobility as departing from one stable place with certain sets of values, ideas, cultural patterns, customs and also aesthetics has been challenged: the idea of distinct cultural sets of values meeting with those of others at crossroads, in theatres, shopping malls, galleries and concert halls, thus initiating a multicultural dialogue, seems no longer valid in a “liquid” modernity. Today, many people experience culture itself as mobile – not because they left a “home”, but because from the very beginning their reality is characterized by a state of constant movement. On the other hand, we are witnessing the return of a certain longing for stability, for the acknowledgment of stable “sources” and identities. These two perceptions both provoke a rethinking of the concepts, potentials and problems of cultural mobility.

How can culture and aesthetics be mobile when the whole world is liquid?

What could be a response to the growing number of those who do not want to be mobile any more and who act strongly against those who try to cross the borders?

And is it appropriate to discuss the fluidity of culture when people’s mobility is increasingly involuntary and violently forced?

The conference poses these questions in the context of the arts and aesthetics by challenging the consequences and potentials of moving narratives and images, problematising the relations between and within cultures and their aesthetics.

On October 12th and 13th, 2018, artists, artistic directors and festival curators discussed the topic of mobility in the arts with theatre scientists and culture journalists as part of the international conference *Mobility of Aesthetics*, which was coorganized by Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute and International Theatre Institute Germany, supported by ENICPA and On-the-move.

The presentations and outcomes of this conference are presented in this booklet. We want to thank all participants and contributors of the conference.

Zbigniew Raszewski  
Theatre Institute

International Theatre  
Institute Germany

ENICPA

## Table of content

### Key note 06

Günther Heeg  
*The Raft of the Medusa*  
Mobility, Instability and the Idea of Transcultural Theatre

### Programme of the conference 17

#### Panels

#### Origin and Originality 20

panel discussion with  
Anastasia Patlay  
Olga Sorotokina  
Wojtek Ziemilski

panel host: Anna Galas - Kosil

#### Moving Narratives 29

panel discussion with  
Marta Keil  
Krystel Khoury  
Iulia Popovici

panel host: Michael Freundt

## Table of content

### Call for papers

#### Mobility in Focus

Tom Ruetten and Jorrit Janssens  
(Re)framing the International.  
New ways of working internationally in the arts 41

Jonas Vanderschueren 44  
Towards an emancipatory space in aesthetics

Nina Vurdelja 48  
An observation of contemporary Turkish imagery in Brussels:  
spaces of leisure and body care

#### Stable / Unstable

Miljena Vučković 54  
Aesthetics travel with goods

Nika Parkomovskaya and Alexandra Dunaeva 60  
"Stable" and "mobile" elements of structure of  
the *Apartment* project in Saint-Petersburg, Russia

### Participants 64

### Imprint 69



# Key note

Günther Heeg

## *The Raft of the Medusa* Mobility, Instability and the Idea of Transcultural Theatre

### I. "At full speed and without support"<sup>1</sup>

1939, Svendborg, Denmark. In exile, Bertolt Brecht writes the play *THE LIFE OF GALILEI*. In it, three texts take different positions on the challenge of a new era, which we would call globalization. First there is Galileo's explanation of the new Copernican world view. It paints a world completely in motion and culminates in the sentence:

"The old idea was always that the stars were fixed to a crystal vault to stop them falling down. Today we have found the courage to let them soar through space without support: and they are travelling at full speed and without support just as we do, at full speed and without support."<sup>2</sup>

The instability, the experience of groundlessness which is expressed here, is praised by Galilei: "At full speed and without support" – this means progress! Galilei regards instability in motion as liberation from the hierarchical-authoritarian order of the Ptolemaic world view and its social counterpart, the feudal state order.

The little monk, whose position is also expressed in Brecht's play, sees things rather differently:

"My parents were peasants in the Campagna, and I grew up there. They are simple people. They knew all about olive trees, but not much else. (...) They are badly off, but even their misfortunes imply a certain order. (...) They have been assured, that God's eye is always on them – probing, even anxiously – that the whole drama of the world is constructed around them so that they, the performers, may prove themselves in their greater or lesser roles. What would my people say if I told them that they happen to be on a small knob of stone twisting endlessly through the void round a second-rate star, just one among myriads?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brecht, Bertolt: "Life of Galileo", edited with an introduction by John Willet and Ralph Manheim, translated by John Willet, New York 2008, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.62.



The randomness and superfluousness of such an existence, an existence "Like a Rolling Stone", as Bob Dylan calls it, is difficult to endure. It is therefore easy to give in to the security and comfort of the world as seen from the Ptolemaic point of view.

Its promise of happiness is formulated in *THE LIFE OF GALILEI* by the very old Cardinal:

"I am not just any old creature on any insignificant star briefly circling in no particular place. I am walking, with a firm step, on a fixed earth, it is motionless, it is the centre of the universe, I am at the centre and the eye of the Creator falls upon me and me alone. Round about me, attached to eight crystal spheres, revolve the fixed stars and the mighty sun which has been created to light my surroundings. And myself too, that God may see me – the mankind, God's great effort, the creature on whom it all centres, made in God's own image, indestructible."<sup>4</sup>

Here, by combining the Ptolemaic worldview with the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, the world is turned into a Ptolemaic Stage, which perfectly serves to the old theatrical longing: to play the lead, thus to stand in the centre of everything! To be the protagonist in the spotlight of the stars, complacently viewed upon and securely led by the heavenly figure of the author and director – that's what the Ptolemaic perspective promises.

Although we live in times of motion, the longing for the world to be set up as a Ptolemaic stage is still virulent today. Its means are the predominance of author, drama, director and continuous narrative over theatre, the embodiment of the meaning of dramatic action by the actors and the penetration of all material and physical through the logos of the godlike author and director. The Ptolemaic stage presents a world full of meaning, a place where everything makes sense: a world in standstill. Captivated and immobilised by the conventions of the 19th and 20th century – immobility of aesthetics, aesthetic of immobility.

Imagine a theatre which would incorporate the Copernican revolution: what would it look like – a theatre and an aesthetic of a theatre in motion?

2018. Warsaw. The mobility of aesthetics is the reflection of and the response to a process of fundamental social mobility in times of globalization.

Predominantly involuntarily, people are moved, or rather dislocated, by means of economic pressure, social marginalisation and political persecution. People in Germany and Europe are forced to leave their habitations – not to speak of homes – in order to find employment. In order to get a job and to keep it, as Richard Sennett has pointed out, one has to be a „flexible person“ who is willing to keep moving and who is able to adapt to any new place and situation. This innercapitalist mobility is reflected by the migratory movements of those, who are escaping from

civil war, social and ethnic marginalisation or political persecution – causes, which all together originate to a great extent from the battles for resources and in the asymmetries of the globalised chaos which seemingly has been accepted to serve as world order.

Along with people, cultures are in motion and get carried around the globe. Cultural practices of different origins suddenly find themselves brought into a confusing mixture in one and the same place.

All this makes clear: the forms of mobility, which at the moment determine our lives, are neither designed to nor are able to make people feel secure and to give them confidence in the future. Disorientation and fear caused by cultural hybridisation, socio-economical precarisation and the feeling of complete instability are the reactions towards the mobility of humans and cultures in the era of globalisation. Disorientation, fear, precarisation and instability are the breeding ground for fundamentalist movements worldwide. They want to re-build borders – economical, social and cultural – they want to erect borders to prevent mobility. Their aim is to withdraw into a "Retrotopia", as Zygmunt Baumann called it, the "heartland" of an imaginary original community that is ethnically pure, socially homogeneous and culturally identical.

Such fundamentalist movements can take place on the streets or in the coalition with right-wing parliamentary parties – as is the case in Germany. They may also already have gained power and from there are restructuring the state and society. Not only the United States but also some states in Eastern Europe are good examples of this.

The ominous dialectic of global mobility and fundamentalist countermovement – isn't it a paradox that the fundamental order, which is aimed for, also seems to need a sort of movement? – this ominous dialectic marks the historical set-up in which we – theatre makers, scientists, mediators – are moving. This dialectic is the prerequisite for a cross-border mobility of aesthetics.

The networks and collaborations, which we aim for and which we build, are essential steps on the way towards a mobilisation of the arts and of artistic concepts. Building networks and fostering collaboration are essential in those countries, which are under fundamentalist rule, in order to strengthen opposing forces.

But a mobility of aesthetics is not enough: it will remain on the surface if it is not supported and inspired by an inherent aesthetic of mobility. The motion, which this aesthetic follows, is that of a life in transit, that of a transit-existence.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. , p. 50 and following pages.

The ominous dialectic of global mobility and fundamentalist counter-movement [...] marks the historical set-up in which we theatre makers, scientists, mediators are moving.

Günther Heeg

## II. Aesthetics of transit-existence. Elements of a transcultural theatre

1819, Paris. Théodore Géricault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa* is based on an actual ship disaster: the sinking of the frigate *Medusa* with almost 400 dead, a scandal in the Naval Ministry which led to the dismissal of the minister and of 200 officers.

The motive quickly became a metaphor for a life as a precarious, turbulent journey, without foothold, without solid ground under one's feet, without a native shore or a saving port. Beyond the pathos of the representation, Géricault's painting appears as a premonition of images we are confronted with these days: of those barely seaworthy boats with refugees onboard. The ones exposed on the raft of Medusa are an early testimony of what I call transit-existence.

In 1943, New York, the German philosopher Hanna Arendt, who as a Jew had to flee from Germany, writes her famous essay "We Refugees". Arendt describes the existence of the refugee as that of an outlawed pariah, who lives in a permanent in-between of departure and arrival. She equally refuses to look back regressively or to assimilate in the future.

For those glorifying the past, she tells the tale of the "forlorn émigré dachshund [who] in his grief begins to speak: 'Once when I was a St. Bernard...'", For those hungry for assimilation she tells the story of "that Mr. Cohn from Berlin who had always been a 150% German, a German super-patriot. In 1933 that Mr. Cohn found refuge in Prague and very quickly became a convinced Czech patriot" until 1937, when he was chased away by the Czech government, and went to Vienna, where "to adjust [him]self", he paid homage to Austrian patriotism for a short time, until he was forced to escape to Paris, and to become a real French man. "I think I had better not dilate on the further adventures of Mr. Cohn", Arendt concludes this episode.

According to Arendt, the wish to return to an idealised homeland, as it materialises in parallel societies, is not appropriate to the reality of a world characterised by flight and migration.

Neither is an easy adjustment to the new whereabouts of an existence on escape.

The history of those on the move is extinguished as they make themselves at home nowhere and everywhere at the same time.

To live indiscriminately, facelessly and without traces of history in a ubiquitous here and now is the ideal, which is promoted by the propagandists of globalization.

In view of the phantasmatic character of both attitudes, Arendt rejects both, the regressive transfiguration of the past and the flexible adaptation to any new place and any new situation.

Though hardly bearable, the life of the refugees and migrants pre-configures an idea of a transit-existence as a form of life to come. A form of life which is shaped by the experience of the other – a past which has become alien, a future in a strange surrounding – and that aims to transform this experience into something positive.

In this sense, Arendt comes to the surprising conclusion: “Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples [...]”. She appoints the status of the refugee a “Utopian reference potential”<sup>5</sup>. Contrary to current reality, Arendt sees the transit-existence of refugees and migrants as the pre-experience of a way of life that is about to arrive.

It is time for the idea of a transit-existence, as it goes beyond the concepts of origin and telos, the defining characteristics of the fiction of a coherent life story. It is time, as this idea exposes the phantasma of fundamentalist original forces such as religion, nation, ethnicity, and cultural identity, which we can see returning with new momentum and irreconcilable hatred for everything foreign. It is about time for this idea, as it is the basic condition for cohabitation among strangers.

Only those who have distanced themselves from their environment of origin without denying their history, those who look at the culture of their origins from the perspective of a foreigner, will be capable of living together among strangers.

Finally, it is the time for the idea of a transit-existence, as it prepares the ground for a transcultural theatre practice in a migration society, for the configuration and elaboration of which all, refugees as well as natives, can participate in.

What characterises the idea of transcultural theatre?<sup>6</sup>

As a basic principle, it does not assume the existence of singular cultures, which it aims to bring in contact with each other. It rather starts with experiences of difference(s) in one’s supposedly very own, so-called national culture.

The alien passing through its supposedly very own of culture, a certain trans-motion which crosses the alleged security of what one considers to be one’s own culture, is the motive of transcultural theatre.

Three essential elements come into constellation in the idea of a transcultural theatre: the urgency of a “Theatre among Strangers”, the necessity of a “Theatre of Iteration” and the moving force of a “Theatre of Gesture”.

Theatre among Strangers: Transcultural theatre is a decisive medium for the orientation towards the other. But it does not seek the other, the foreign in the distance but first and foremost that within what is regarded as one’s very own cosmos which it lets appear in an unfamiliar light.

5 Mayer, Ruth: *Diaspora. Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung*, Bielefeld 2005, p. 12. [Own Translation]

6 See for: Günther Heeg: *Das transkulturelle Theater*, Berlin 2017.

Only if the border between what is considered one’s own and what seems to be the other’s is challenged and only if what seems to be one’s very own has become alien, a free approach towards Alterity and Otherness – that of one self and that of others – will be possible.

The foreigner, the other is not something you could point your finger at. Refugees, migrants and post-migrants are not foreigners in this sense. If they are regarded as such, they are simply turned into something exotic. Wherever the theatre sets out in search of the foreign, of the other, it is crucial that it does not create or reproduce exoticisms. That it does not presumptuously speak on behalf of others and it does not fall back into dramaturgies of opposition that allow the obsolete friend-enemy scheme of political action to recur, not even in the struggle for a supposedly good cause.

Transcultural theatre creates space for experience, it leaves no room for identity politics. The other is not a thing, the others not a subject. Otherness is an experience, which occurs to us. It alienates our perception of the foreign in such a way that our own perception becomes foreign to us. The experience of otherness is the experience of unfamiliarity, that of a foreignness within ourselves. Only on the grounds of this experience does living together in a transcultural world become possible. Therefore, theatre of the other and theatre of the others is not simply made by and made for so-called strangers from outside, but also for the strangers that we are. It is a theatre among strangers, a theatre among transit-existences. The kind of theatre that takes place on the raft of Medusa. However, transcultural theatre as well as the idea of transit-existence is fundamentally different from the reality of those escaping on small rafts and boats then and today: Transcultural Theatre takes up the struggle for bare life in transit, but it does not seek to represent it on the scene. It refuses any form of realism that seeks to reproduce reality as it (supposedly) is and thus to enlighten humanity about the state of the world. Transcultural Theatre draws on the reality of life in transit and transforms it into the experience of a possibly different, transit-existence as a form of life to come. It does not turn its gaze away from the horrors of reality, but takes them up transformingly in order to propose ways back into the realm of life.

2017, Bautzen in Saxonia. The performances which were created and presented in the context of the festival “Willkommen anderswo [Welcome elsewhere] – sich spielend begegnen [meeting playfully]” are a good example for felicitous transcultural theatre work. The performances were made by and in collaboration with both refugees and locals. Almost throughout, they brought newcomers and locals together into play. If the original dramaturgy of a text asked for two rivalling groups, as was the case for the Bautzen production of ROMEO UND JULIA AUF PLATTE, the groups were represented by young refugees and locals alike. The line of confrontation along which the groups of the Montagues and Capulets had competed was literally danced away. Thus, the frights of cultural identity and confrontation were not concealed but rather clearly spelled out. However, at the same time, the dancing bodies freed themselves from the constraints of confrontation.



The other productions of the festival also did not centre around cultural singularities and identities. They rather concentrated on shared fears, hopes and expectations. No longer did a specific group of people play the role of the protagonist or was subject of the theatre. The productions did not show a theatre of refugees, migrants or post-migrants, but rather a theatre among strangers. Those strangers, new arrivals and locals are united by the stories they tell each other. They emphasize the need for a Theatre of Iteration on the raft of Medusa.

Theatre of Iteration: history holds the potential for resistance and a future which transcultural theatre brings into position against the defensive castles of fundamentalism as well as against the levelling of all different life worlds by the dynamics of globalisation. The figure(s) of Iteration is therefore central for the perspective of a transcultural theatre. It is fundamentally different from the desire for restoration of supposedly original circumstances. Iteration does not refer to an origin or an original. It does not repeat in order to restore but rather to bring the remains of history into contact with the present.

Conscious iteration of history – a history conscious of its non-originality – corrodes the phantasm of a homogenous community of essence and identity. Collective phantasms such as the Western World – the Christian “Abendland” – national cultures, the imaginations of “America first” and “Deutschland den Deutschen!” [Germany is for Germans!] are based on obscure myths of origin, constructions of history, overcome traditions and commemorative rituals, which ban history into a stand still. The theatrical practice of iteration destroys the alleged cultural unity and integrity of these constructions and seeks to preserve the remains of history by transferring them into different times and contexts therefore opening history for transcultural discussion.

The stories that were told on the raft of Medusa at the festival in Bautzen are examples for such a practice of the iteration of history. For it was not the immobilised original history of different cultures – this is the Occident, that is the Orient – which was presented there, but the discontinuous histories of individuals. These stories are cut both from their origin and from their current location. The border no longer runs between one's self and the foreign, but crosses right through the self. The current state of migration society invites us to distance ourselves from the supposed familiarity of one's own history and to look at it from an altered perspective. At the same time, the fragments of one's own life story, carried into what's here and now, alter the view of the present. Such stories of multiple border crossings – between origin and current situation, past and present, familiar and foreign, self and other – are open and connectable to the stories of others. They are different and alien to themselves and to the other, while at the same time they feel close and familiar precisely through the shared experience of alienation.

Theatre of Gesture(s): the agent of transcultural transgression is the gesture. For Benjamin and Brecht, gesture(s) originate(s) from interruption, from discontinuity.

„Gestures, the more often we interrupt an actor, the more we receive them.”<sup>7</sup> is Benjamin's famous explanation of Brecht's gesture. According to Benjamin, gestures are essentially defined by two characteristics: they can be fixated and they can be cited. Their citability is precisely what enables them to depart from any accustomed context of life and to open up new possibilities for action. It is a departure into foreign regions and surroundings. Gesture is the migrant par excellence. This is not metaphorically meant, but – referring to Brecht – the result of a painful experience. In a peculiar relationship of continuity and discontinuity, the gesture connects one's own past, which has become alien, with an uncertain future in a foreign place. The gesture is therefore a paradigmatic medium of transcultural communication. Gestural communication is that of strangers who have given up their attachment to a cultural tradition and community. At the same time, however, they acknowledge their differences by the recognition of certain fragments of memories and the past which remain present in their gestical citations. Gestures are abandoned history. At the same time, they are open and connectable to new history(s) in constellation with different geographic contexts and times.

### III. Theatre for all by all

Berlin, end of the 1920s. Transcultural theatre is also a cultural practice for and by all. Brecht has developed a model for such a theatre: the *Lehrstück*. Contrary to what the name suggests, it does not impart any concrete teaching, but is meant to enable learning through the experience of theatre. The *Lehrstück* opens up a space of experience in which those involved can perceive themselves as strangers. The *Lehrstück* mediates the experience of playing among strangers, with the aim of distancing one from oneself through interaction with others. Brecht particularly emphasized the importance of this “moving away from oneself”: “Players and spectators should not get close to each other, rather they should move away from each other. Everyone should move away from themselves. Otherwise the horror that is necessary for recognition will disappear.”<sup>8</sup>

The practice of the *Lehrstück* could be described as “playing (with) strangers”. One of its rules is that the players exchange roles in order to be able to put themselves in the position of the other, that they imitate, even copy, the gestures of the others in order to experience the attitudes and feelings associated with them – and the differences between copy and what is copied.

Another part of the practice of the *Lehrstück* is that the role of the *Spielleiter*, who determines the arrangement of the scenic experiment and changes constantly. Thus new courses for the play can be set into action. And last but not least, the role of the participants alternates between playing and observing, they are actors and spectators at the same time.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin, Walter: “Was ist das epische Theater?” (1), in: Benjamin, Walter: *Gesammelte Schriften* Bd. II.2, Frankfurt a.M., p. 519-531, here p. 521. [Own translation]

<sup>8</sup> Brecht, Bertolt: “Dialog über Schauspielkunst”, *ibid.*, p. 280. [Own translation]

The Lehrstück, understood as a transcultural theatre for all and by all, makes it possible to perceive oneself as a stranger in the adaptation of roles, texts, rhythms and forms of movement and to experience what makes one afraid and what one desires – and this can happen without the threat of immediate danger, because the sanctions, the imagined and the real ones of everyday life, are set aside in this particular space which is characterized by its peculiar connection between fiction and reality.

In this space, fears of the “others”, particularly the fear of strangers, can literally be put at risk and brought into play. Bringing into play means: no position, no attitude remains what it used to be. To bring into motion what was solid and the desire to move without ground, while learning not to give in to the desire to (re)create stability, is the ultimate goal of the Lehrstück. This aim is reached by means of ever new iteration of scenes and story lines according to the rules of the model mentioned before. Thus, seemingly immobile positions are set into motion and are brought into connection with those I am in play with.

Thus, identity narratives – my story, who am I, immovable, irreversible – function as material for scenes and alternative plot lines, they become set pieces, which can be (re)assembled with the fragments of the histories of the other strangers.

Theatre on the RAFT OF MEDUSA as interaction among strangers in motion – that is the nucleus of a transcultural theatre. It bears witness to a mobility of aesthetics as well as to an aesthetic of mobility.

# Programme

## Programme of the conference

Fri, October 12, 2018

Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

14.00	<b>Welcome</b>
14.15 - 15.15	<p><b><i>The Raft of the Medusa</i></b> Mobility, instability and the idea of transcultural theatre</p> <p>Key note by Günther Heeg</p>
15.15 - 16.30	<p><b>Session I</b> <b>Mobility in Focus</b> Tom Ruetten and Joris Janssens Jonas Vanderschueren Nina Vurdelja session host: Attila Szabó</p> <p>What does the state of constant mobility imply for the artist's self organisation and self perception? The presentations of this session approach the changes in the artist's surrounding, due to increasing (international) competition but also due to permanent transformations in one's own local settings.</p>
16.30 - 16.45	Coffee break
16.45 - 18.00	<p><b>Origin and Originality</b> panel discussion with Anastasia Patlay Olga Sorotokina Wojtek Ziemilski panel host: Anna Galas-Kosil</p> <p>International work and mobility is a main anchor for today's performing artists. But how does constantly moving from one place to another influence artists' intellectual and societal background and thus maybe their aesthetic expression? The panel discusses questions of the originality discourse in the arts taking into account the (possible) discrepancy between cultural-geographical approaches to the process of art creating/making and a delocalized discussion of aesthetics.</p>

## Mobility of Aesthetics

Sat, October 13, 2018

Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, Warsaw

9.00 - 10.30	<p><b>Moving Narratives</b> panel discussion with Marta Keil Krystel Khoury Iulia Popovici panel host: Michael Freundt</p> <p>When being mobile, the artist and his/her work meet audiences with different life experiences, different histories, different language backgrounds. Often the artist him/herself is much more confronted with his/her own local background, when entering another cultural area. (How) Do artists react to this challenge? Is there a need for linguistic and cultural translation to be understood by a local audience? Or is it even necessary (or possible) to "invent" narratives which are understood in a globalized theatre world?</p>
10.30 - 10.45	Coffee break
10.45 - 11.45	<p><b>Session II</b> <b>Stable / Unstable</b> Miljena Vučković Alexandra Dunaeva and Nika Parkomovskaya session host: Attila Szabó</p> <p>When making art, artists react to the environment, directly or indirectly surrounding them. How do social and political conditions and changes influence the creative process? How do artists balance ideas and reality in their work. The presentations of this session focus on questions of stability in art making, intended and unintended.</p>
11.45 - 12.30	<p><b>Synopsis of the conference</b> Open discussion</p>



# Panel: Origin and Originality

## Panel “Origin and Originality”

In the panel “Origin and Originality”, Anna Galas-Kosil discussed with Anastasia Patlay, director of *teatr.doc* in Moscow; Olga Sorotokina, director of *New space* in Moscow, coming from Belarus; Wojtek Ziemilsky, Polish theatre director and visual artist and Nika Parkhomovskaya, Theatre Curator and Producer from Moscow, who helped translating from Russian to English.

*Anna Galas-Kosil: In the publication (2008) “Mobility matters”<sup>1</sup> cultural mobility is defined as temporary cross-border movement of artists and other cultural professionals. Certain forms of mobility relate to individuals like residencies. Other forms of mobility are more connected to performances and works in other countries. Mobility is not only understood as occasional movement that may be useful to gain professional experience but more as an integral part of the regular work life of an artist.*

*I would like to ask you – as mobility is a strong part of your professional life – does this experience change the aesthetic of your work? And, speaking with Rancière<sup>2</sup> : does mobility help you to make visible a certain topic that you want to underline in your own work?*

Anastasia Patlay: I was born in Tashkent, which is the capital of Uzbekistan. My grandfather was born in Moscow, his parents were Jews from Warsaw. From my mother’s side my grandparents came from the Ukraine. So, you see I am a child of mobility. In fact: The whole 20th century is an era of mobility. It’s not something which is happening only now. I think this is important because the era of the Soviet Union was an era of huge migration flows. So being mobile is not a new challenge for the artists. It seems that all the time we are talking about some new challenges for the artists today. But in my opinion the whole sense of the work of theatre makers is to find different ways to penetrate different borders. Now in Russia we face new migration movements from Central Asia to Moscow. We reacted in *teatr.doc* to these movements by creating a production – a witness performance with guest workers from the South East. The participants told their stories and they sang their songs from their home towns. There were really impressing people on stage. Another interesting production in this sense is our production: *Köngrad* about the situation in Kaliningrad after the second world war when new Soviet settlers had to come into dialogue with the German population, which was still there. Also, a discussion of mobility within the arts.

<sup>1</sup> Mobility matters. Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, Published by the European Commission, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Rancière, Jacques: The Politics of Aesthetics, Translated from French, Continuum International Publishing group, 2004.

The whole  
20th century is an  
era of mobility.

It's not something  
which is happening  
only now.

Anastasia Patlay

Olga Sorotokina: I came from Belarus. For ten years now, I live in Russia. I have to say that the fact of globalisation in Europe is most probably not the same as the process of globalisation in the former Soviet countries. There is a definite need for the countries of Russia and Belarus to look more at the effects of inner mobility. We must be able to open to new cultural experiences and challenges. For my artistic projects the exchange with other cultures was a big enrichment for me. This dialogue in between countries but also within countries plays a crucial role. Just when you get in contact with other cultures you can understand who you are.

Wojtek Ziemilski: Though I have lived in many places, I consider myself Polish, being from Polish parents. It is very simple to build a general idea of a world in flux. But I'd like to think of leaving the maybe Post-Baumanian idea of everything is in flux, of a liquid identity. It's not like anything goes. If you look, for example, at Trajal Harrell – he was given as an example of an artist who is so mobile that you can't find him on a map and he'd not be New-York-based anymore. But yes, he is New York based. If you talk to him for five minutes you will know that he is New York based. What Bauman was suggesting is that we are going into this world where everything seems to be moving, but we cannot handle it, because it is too much. We get too much information, too many things, too many references. It's not just like: we flow out there as artists and can do whatever we want. No, we got too much information, too many references. So, the question would be: what are we going to do about this, and not about the fact that we've lost everything.

Anastasia Patlay: Some short time ago, Robert Wilson staged *Pushkin tales* on the Theatre of Nations in Moscow. And this was the same Robert Wilson as in the US, as in Europe, as everywhere. On the other hand, I wanted also to mention the co-production with Milo Rau of the *Moscow trials*. This was very important for us as it was about the conflict between orthodox church's activists and contemporary artists. Nobody in Russia could have done the same. Milo Rau presented three days of theatrical trials; one case was the one of Pussy riot. And we invited a jury, and this couldn't have happened like that in the reality of modern Russia as we don't work with juries. But it was possible to be shown in the way Rau invented it. All the participants were in fact real participants of the real trials, which were conducted in reality without a jury. This show felt like a revelation of the artists against the church activists. The latter ones won the real trials but in this case the decision of the jury was 50:50.

Nika Parkhomovskaya: I wanted to add that Milo Rau is less mobile now, as he isn't allowed to come to Russia anymore because of this show. He didn't have a chance to get his visa to be able to come to Russia to get the European Theatre Prize he was awarded. Further, another show of his: "The reprise" hasn't been allowed to tour in Russia either (even without him). So, this is also a side of mobility today.

*We live in the Schengen Zone. With easy transport, with new technologies, we can easily move and we can go everywhere. But this is only one side of mobility. We have guests*

Mobility can let  
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Wojtek Ziemilski

*here from Russia and from Eastern Europe, outside the EU. There it is already much more complicated to be mobile. But even for artists from these countries it is still not so difficult as it is for example for African artists. These people cannot travel so easily. On the other hand, everyone can contact each other easily. Our aesthetic can be mobile via new media. We have mobile phones, we can show performances on social networks, share aesthetics. What do you think about this bias?*

Wojtek Ziemilski: Do you know any artists whose aesthetics developed only because they were watching things on YouTube? I think this type of mobility is not an effective way of sharing aesthetics. We don't work that way! Your mobile or your YouTube is not an effective way of sharing aesthetics.

Olga Sorotokina: I don't know. I was talking today in the morning with my friend from Sweden. She is crazy about Japan and she was taking lessons in Japanese via Skype. And I thought about this: in former times, in her place, I would have wanted to visit Japan, to absolutely go there. But now: Skype is enough. I wouldn't deny the importance of mobile phones. It helps me to be at home but at the same time being mobile. So, I see that things are changing.

Wojtek Ziemilski: Okay. It becomes a substitute. Then the question is if we are becoming a world of substitutes. In a production of mine, most of the rehearsals with the producer take place via Skype. And that's weird. It changes something. This mobility lets you feel as if you were free but on the other hand it forces you into a situation which you are stuck in later. But this is not an example of being liquid, it's very structured, because you only come up with certain ideas that fit into that little screen. You create another form of presence. And that's probably why we are here, because there is something eerie about it. It's an attack on the stable identity.

*When talking about mobility one has also to talk about this shift to the right-wing ideas which are very much focussed on the locality. Do you think your origin is still important in your work?*

Anastasia Patlay: One must talk about this obsession regarding borders. There are so many people who want to build new borders. Between Russia and Poland there is definitely a new border. People are afraid of migration. People are afraid of everything. In my opinion this is of course a question of defining identity.

Wojtek Ziemilski: I really like being different. I really like the fact that someone has very different ideas of mine and that I have to cross a border to go to somebody else's world. We had two very different ideas of mobility in today's presentations. One was the idea of mobility as kind of synonymous with freedom. And the other one is that mobility is a disaster where everyone has to constantly move around, and has to be everywhere and nowhere, because there are no borders. It is a constant negotiation with the rest of the world of how much you allow these borders to exist in the work you do towards the rest of the world. I recently made a performance "The Polaks explain the future" [Polaks = Poles, but also a sur-



Just when you get  
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you are.

Olga Sorotokina

name of the main actor] and for a big amount of time I kept thinking: is it going to be understood by somebody who is not polish? Why would I ask myself this question? Because I want my show to tour ... because I know that my colleagues and friends are part of this big scene. It's about being visible in this universe. But at the same time, I am losing things which are mine, which might be only understood by Poles. And yes: it doesn't make sense for an international audience. It does make sense for a local audience. So, by creating, I can decide where borders are suddenly strong borders which someone cannot cross.

Olga Sorotokina: I am Belarussian wherever I am. This origin is inside me. It doesn't matter whether I live in Moscow or in Berlin or anywhere else. It's like a question of my personal integrity. When we are talking about our personal originality in culture it's good when we deal with our cultural traditions. It's some kind of a search. But when it becomes some fake ideological abuse, some kind of manipulation as it is now quite popular in Russia then it becomes a big problem.

*What can you tell about the transferability of performances?*

Wojtek Ziemilski: I have an example for the limits of transferability. My show *One gesture* deals with sign language. It's been touring quite a lot. Then, there were some curators from the US who haven't seen it but who were super-interested in it. And I sent them the video of the show and when, having watched it, they said: We're not going to take it. I didn't understand why and asked them for an explanation. They wrote a long e-mail to me and said that the US is so far ahead that they have already been worked through this already. The show seemed retro for them. I was really upset first, but then I understood that there are limits and that's okay.

Anastasia Patlay: Our performance *Out of decoded* is a performance about gays in Russia. A lot of people told me that this is only a show for Russians as the problem of the non-acceptance of gays isn't solved in Russia but abroad nobody will be interested in it. This summer the performance was invited to Stockholm and the reaction there was the same as in Russia, very emotional. And the audience in Stockholm told us that it was even an extremely new way of how to talk about the topic of gayness. So there is a way.

*It is interesting to see that we are talking so much about topics like the LGBT community or performances about disabled people in our countries. At the moment, we see that the context changes regarding cultural progress. Who would have thought that Trump would win in the US and that the situation for women, the LGBT community and disabled people there will get worse? We thought, everything is clear in the US, they worked through so many things and the bad situations will not come back. But it shows: not everything is done and reworked.*

*But now I would like to open up the discussion. Are there any questions or comments from the audience?*

Guest 1: I am a curator. We had a quite intense discussion about artistic mobility. In my opinion you also have to focus on the position of the audience which is often not mobile at all. I have been to some festivals lately and it can happen that you sit there, and you don't have a clue as the codes are unreadable, but you see, there are codes. And sometimes that's the important thing. What do I as a curator do to see if I can invite a performance? I have three lines for my decision:

1. Do I really get what it is about? The substance?
2. Does it enrich my senses as it did not before? Is there something going beyond my levels of understanding?
3. Can locals understand it? Is it transferable?

Guest 3: Is it that mobility puts aesthetics in danger? Because once you hear that somebody did not like your show and then next time you try to artistically consider that fact and try to make something more global, more generic, would this put your aesthetic in danger?

Wojtek Ziemilski: That is a huge question. I think the word generic is risky. I made *One gesture* and there is this European festival which wanted this piece – in Polish. I made an English version of it. And I think the English version is the one they should see, because they will understand it. But they wanted it in Polish. Because this way they'd be able to feel this special thing of the Polish language. And maybe I did the generic thing by translating *One gesture* into English so that everyone might understand it.

It's a double-edged sword. I can work in a direction which is risky because I take away the beauty of the Polish language. On the other hand, no one would ask a Norwegian theatre group which is making a piece to not present it in English. It can be very gentle and subtle. Am I washing away the specific character of a performance or am I negotiating with the audience? I think it is for anyone to judge but to be conscious of it is very important.

[Revised version of the recorded panel]

# Panel: Moving Narratives

## Panel “Moving Narratives”

In the panel “Moving narratives”, Michael Freundt debated with Krystel Khoury, cultural anthropologist and artistic director of the Open Border Ensemble at the Münchner Kammerspiele, Marta Keil, cultural scientist and former director of the Konfrontacje festival, which was discontinued by the Polish government, and Iulia Popovici, cultural journalist and curator of the Temps d’images festival in Cluj-Napoca.

Michael Freundt: *Günther Heeg made the point that almost everyone is currently living a transit existence. Today, we have the idea of moving narratives. Artistic works are moving, artists are moving, narratives in themselves might move, might change, shift, be flexible and fluid. What does it mean to translate works for another audience?*

Marta Keil: We had been curating the festival Konfrontacje in Lublin, Poland for the last five years, but had to stop it last year. When I think about this experience and the role of a curator today, the main responsibility of my role was to first of all map the context. What does it actually mean to organise a festival in Lublin? We were thinking about the current social-political contexts of the city with its particular tradition and history, but also about the history of the festival, which came from the alternative political theatre movement in Poland and then shifted its scope to the repertory theatre. We were somehow trying to provide a link between the tradition of this alternative political theatre movement and the current programme. The question for us was: what does it mean to bring a certain production into that very festival? Who are we doing it for; what does it mean; what makes it a gift to the local community both for the artists and the audience? In terms of translating or bridging certain contexts, our role was to provide the best possible working conditions in terms of safety and openness for the artists brought to Lublin. We tried to have them stay as long as possible – hopefully the whole ten days of the festival – so that they could see where they actually were and how their practice might resonate with the other productions. I would say that I was mostly focused on the working conditions and less on the mobility of aesthetics.

*Was the title “Confrontations” a strategy to prepare the audience to have an open attitude, hopefully to go into these confrontations?*

Marta Keil: It was the other way round. What we were trying to do was to offer a space that would create safe conditions both for the artists and the audience to establish a dialogue, to waste some time together, really get to know each other and exchange ideas, thoughts and experiences. In addition, the very name of the festival “Confrontations” came from the festival’s tradition, which was based on the idea of presenting the ‘other theatre’, the independent one and to confront it with a common understanding of the ‘real’, meaning repertory or drama theatre. Even

today, Poland is dominated by repertory or city theatres that are mostly based on drama productions. We tried to present some other possible ways of working, for example, in collectives. Our first edition was titled “Forget the Theatre” and was based on bringing, presenting but also inspiring new or different work methods and conditions. In that sense, it was coming back not necessarily to the aesthetic levels of production, but to the working conditions. We were aiming at presenting a possible alternative to the dominant model. That also meant emphasizing how working conditions or art production methods and modes were shaping artistic practice itself.

*Iulia, what is your experience as a curator when it comes to the question of translations?*

Iulia Popovici: My most extensive such experience was with the Temps d’Images festival in the city of Cluj. Like Marta was saying, it’s always about mapping and aiming at a certain outcome of this more or less complex narrative. It always addresses different contexts within the context. For instance, one of the sections of Romanian productions was also aimed at a group of international curators that we invited every year. The kind of work that we presented couldn’t necessarily interest both local contexts and the contexts that our international guests came from at the same time. What we had to negotiate, and I think we might not have succeeded, was to contribute to a more complex kind of negotiation between theatre as a local art, as a local form of communication and theatre as a form of translating the local context at an international level. For me, the value of theatre in terms of narratives is that it is extremely local. It will never be as global as the visual arts are or as music is. How to make theatre and theatre narratives more mobile is a question of how we all become more interested in the local issues of other countries and other places.

*That’s the challenge: to be open for issues that are of local interest on the one hand, and benefit from the confrontation with issues which come completely out of another context on the other. It’s necessary to actively create a dialogue and foster awareness for these kinds of exchanges.*

Iulia Popovici: The question here is how willing people are in general. How open are they to diversity? How interested are we in accepting a contradiction to our inner thoughts and ideas about the world? It would be helpful if we were equally interested in being contradicted as we are in being confirmed. I think for the context I’m coming from; the main issue is how we can confront the narratives that others have about us. It is a matter of reproducing power structures that really work through detachment, for Western Europe in the detachment from Eastern Europe, for Eastern Europe in the detachment from Romania, in Romania in the detachment from rural and ethnic minority groups. It’s within the field of reproducing structures of power where theatre has a huge power.

Marta Keil: In addition, there’s also the question: what is really the reason why we would like to make the theatre and performing arts more mobile in general.



# How to make theatre and theatre narratives more mobile is a question of how we all become more interested in the local issues of other countries and other places.

Iulia Popovici

Sara Vanhee's statement in the *Kunstenpunt* magazine<sup>1</sup>, where she states that wherever she travels, to festivals or to art venues, she always meets the same audience, is a perfect example. Basically, working within the festivals is very much being part of the industry. In many European festivals, you constantly see the same names. What is the purpose of doing so and how can you be part of that circle but take a critical or political position to it? Maybe one of the answers would be to disobey this drive. For instance, one of the solutions might be to propose to the artists to take their time and let them stay a bit longer to read into a certain local context.

Krystel Khoury: Yes, one of the possibilities is to have artists stay in a place for a longer time to understand where they are and how they are producing. This brings me to the very specific experience of managing the Open Border Ensemble. We invited Syrian actors from Damascus, after we did auditions in Munich and Beirut. One can, of course, wonder how come, when there are so many refugee artists now in Germany. However, this somehow shaped our project in a fluid way in terms of resisting to the isolation of artistic scenes in conflict/war - which I can say deeply challenges mobility as a concept but also as a practice. Those artists also had their stories to tell.

And here comes the question of narratives. What stories are we constructing, for whom, and are they also relevant for the actors themselves? The first experience we had was a mobile play that went to the outskirts of Munich. The main idea was that the actors from the Open Border Ensemble would act with German actors from the ensemble of the Münchner Kammerspiele. However, although we made a great effort in planning and giving them their time to understand what kind of city Munich is, they arrived - due to visa problems - at the last minute and they immediately entered into a rehearsal process. It was a very confronting thing for them and very difficult, because the habits of working were completely different. They were somehow overwhelmed and lost for a while. What was interesting about this project was the process they went through. They had to be on stage and present their stories, but the question was what kind of stories... Translation in the literal sense of how we communicate, knowing that there was a language barrier, and the translation of aesthetics made it a very intense, painful process. Moreover, what they probably really wanted to say maybe didn't really make sense to a German audience; and what made sense for a German audience maybe wasn't really said in the piece.

*How is it possible to reach an audience, for example in suburban and rural areas, that you normally don't reach?*

Iulia Popovici: We as a festival saw ourselves as neighbours. We wanted to continue the tradition of the festival which was born to serve the needs of the independent art community and facilitate a connection between them and the various audiences that we had in Cluj. The moment when we stopped having the

<sup>1</sup> Sara Vanhee in conversation with Tom van Imschoot, in: *Re/framing Magazine*, 2018.

Basically, working within festivals is very much being part of the industry. [...]  
What is the purpose of doing so and how can you be part of that circle but take a critical or political position to it?

Marta Keil

resources to answer the needs that the community and the artists had, we decided to stop because we were in risk of becoming just a presentation platform: just repeating and not creating a context and just presenting what already existed in a context. Because in the end, the mobility of narratives doesn't concern the artists as much as it concerns the audience. Artists are the ones who are ensuring the mobility of narratives; the only purpose of this for me is to enable more communication and understanding and a higher degree of understanding of the world that the audience doesn't have direct contact with. I come from a country where 46% of the population lives in rural areas. Although we have a lot of public theatres, they only serve the other half of the population. The question is how we can use theatre to translate various realities to various groups in order to reduce the economic, mental and cultural gaps.

*The discussion of diversity and cultural as well as artistic exchange is in my perception an urban phenomenon. Most festivals take place in bigger cities, so it's an urban experience to feel enriched by the confrontation with other cultures and other artistic concepts. It is something that you won't find in rural areas. How can we create a communication of the arts beyond the big city borders? How can we reach another audience?*

Iulia Popovici: In October, we had a referendum in Romania to change the constitution in order to forbid same-sex marriage forever. Against all expectations, participation was lower than the threshold of 30%, even though no one expected this result. There was an aggressive and violent discourse accompanying the referendum, but it led to a huge mobilisation in the theatre and dance community in developing and presenting a very large variety of productions that dealt with what relationships between family, religion, contemporary life mean and about homosexuality. In the year and a half between the original initiative, which three million idiots signed, there was a significant change especially in socially aware and independent theatre. That included people and artists who had never been interested in socially aware theatre or in documentary theatre, because this discourse against homosexuality and the discourse against everything that was not a reflection of traditional religion affected their own lives. This discourse was in theory about changing the constitution, but it was accompanied by a huge discourse about abortion, reproductive freedom and reproductive rights, women's rights in general and minorities' rights. It was the equivalent of a wake-up call. I'm very curious about what will happen now after the referendum's big failure. I ask myself: what are these wake-up calls and can you also find them in countries like Poland?

Marta Keil: In a Polish context it already happened far before the government shifted in a really right-wing direction. In a way, our theatre community seemed to be so happy to have the critical political theatre, that we were not really interested in asking ourselves to whom we were actually talking to. We ended up in our own bubble. The question is: how do we reach out of it? I would say that one of the basic questions right now is not only how to break out of this bubble, but also how to finally start practicing what you preach and stop declaring your polit-

Being able to travel and meet other people [...] is and should be crucial to being able to see that in other parts of the world people act differently and think differently.

Krystel Khoury

ical or critical or leftist or democratic ideas and start really incorporating them in your own practice. I would say that this is the urgency now.

*Where can this change of working practices happen? Krystel, you described your work in Munich as a mutual learning environment.*

Krystel Khoury: For the actors who came from Syria, it was very important, and it was very enriching to be able to play in the streets. In contrast, for the German actors it was hard to see an appeal in this street theatre as they wanted to play on a big stage. This means that the perception of the apparatus, the dispositive of the mobile stage had two completely different meanings and created two different experiences. I think we shouldn't underestimate the cultural understandings and experiences that people come from, but without entering a relativist discourse. I also would like to add something to this notion of audience regarding what the Münchner Kammerspiele are trying to do. I think to change or to reach another audience takes a lot of time. We are really living at a very fast pace, and we think that creating one edition or two editions of a festival might be enough and hop – we changed the audience. Sometimes it takes ten or fifteen years. I do think that the audience has changed in the theatre I work in right now. However, of course there is this whole institutional theatre system around it, a director comes for a period of time and then leaves, someone else comes, so the question is always how to proceed? In continuation? In rupture? Go back to the previous audience or continue building up on the new path? Nevertheless, a clear shift happened but then it needs time. It's like revolutions. It's really a process.

*From the curator's or observer's point of view, what does it need besides time? What kind of conditions would be necessary for artistic works to start dialogues with different audiences, to really get into the different narratives, moving narratives?*

Marta Keil: In these five years that we worked for the festival in Lublin, we attempted to go against the drive of the festival, to change it into a public institution and get rid of the event-like mode of working. We tried to offer artists safe and welcoming conditions for as long as possible and to open some time and space within the festival or during the year, to offer a framework for artists, thinkers, curators and researchers to waste time together. For instance, we organised a lot of artistic residencies or seminars or workshops that weren't product- or production-driven. It was also about giving the opportunity to have some time, to try one path, to go into a certain direction, then resign: to be able to try out, to test, to make mistakes. Again, it was all about creating safe, democratic and open working frames. To give up the overproduction drive and constant self-promotion, to dare not to always know, to ask questions.

Iulia Popovici: Thinking about time and presenting productions in different countries, I might be a conservative – but I don't think that every production must be mobile. I don't see mobility as an inherent virtue of a production. At some point, mobility becomes a purpose in itself. That's for instance the problem that some

of us have with the contemporary dance financing system based on residency only. In the end, everybody is in residence and nobody is presenting anything to anybody. It would be time to stop this craziness of mobility as a purpose in and of itself and stay put for a while and rediscover the potential of the performing arts and especially theatre as being relevant locally. It's important to integrate a larger portion of the audience with us in this general process of recreating contexts, because we are sort of leaving many of them behind.

Krystel Khoury: I do believe there is a difference between the touring of productions and the touring of artists as individuals. We are lucky in the Schengen Zone; for artists, this condition is very beneficial. However, in other parts of the world this is not a possibility. Here, it continues to be very important to fight for more mobility. Although, I agree that not all productions need to tour, and not all productions need to be shown everywhere. Sometimes they target a certain audience and that's it. This is where they are very powerful, fruitful and productive. Nonetheless, being able to travel and meet other people instead of staying in your own cocoon is and should be crucial to being able to see that in other parts of the world people act differently and think differently.

[Revised version of the recorded panel]



Call  
for  
papers

## Call for papers

With a call for papers the conference organisers invited artists, researchers, curators and other actors from the arts field to contribute to the discussions about mobility in the arts and culture.

Five proposals from seven contributors were chosen out of the many submissions to show diverse perceptions of and approaches to the question of mobility.

A first session takes mobility in general into its focus and discusses topics of geographic and social hierarchy and valuation, economic and ecological consequences, transferability, exchange, understanding as well as transparency in the funding systems.

A second session discusses the oscillation between stability and instability that occurs in the arts process and that makes art itself mobile. Contributors present their ideas of an aesthetical understanding of the term of mobility.

Participants of the call for papers came from all over Europe. Presenters in the sessions were:

### **Session I** Mobility in Focus

Tom Ruetten and Joris Janssens  
Jonas Vanderschueren  
Nina Vurdelja

session host: Attila Szabó

### **Session II** Stable / Unstable

Miljena Vučković  
Alexandra Dunaeva and  
Nika Parkomovskaya

session host: Attila Szabó

We asked all presenters to sum up their presentation, that they gave during the conference and send us a report. The following pages show these reports and reflections.

## Session 1 Mobility in Focus

Tom Ruetten and Joris Janssens

### **(Re)framing the International.** New ways of working internationally in the arts

#### **Abstract**

We really need to talk about the internationalisation of the arts. Simply too much has happened lately. For some time now already, working internationally has been a matter of course for many musicians, visual artists and performing artists. Due to economic, technological and cultural-policy developments, their practice has become heavily internationalised. The figures show growth. That is a very good thing and it is something we can boast of. At the same time, there is growing unease. Artists and performers, organisers, companies, curators, managers and producers report that they have to work harder and harder to achieve the same results in an increasingly competitive market. It is also becoming more difficult to explain to public authorities and other stakeholders why investing in the internationalisation of the arts is so important. In addition, when we travel, we are increasingly plagued by ethical and environmental concerns. As we work on international even intercontinental success, there is a growing awareness of the environmental concerns. As we work internationally, we quite often remain within a bubble of like-minded people, without much time for meaningful exchanges. There is also a growing realisation that access to the international arts system is unbalanced. A Belgian artist can get a visa for virtually any country in the world, but the opposite is not true. In Flanders, we find ourselves in that sense in a privileged position. In short, working internationally may seem self-evident, but that is far from being the case.



## Six frictions and contradictions<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Inequality in a bull market

Markets are growing, but who reaps the benefits?

### 2. Freedom or precarity?

The precarious situation of artists that are working transnationally

### 3. Inspiration or routine?

The promise of inspiration, the reality of life on the road...

### 4. Geography or demography?

The promise of reaching new audiences, the reality in the hall.

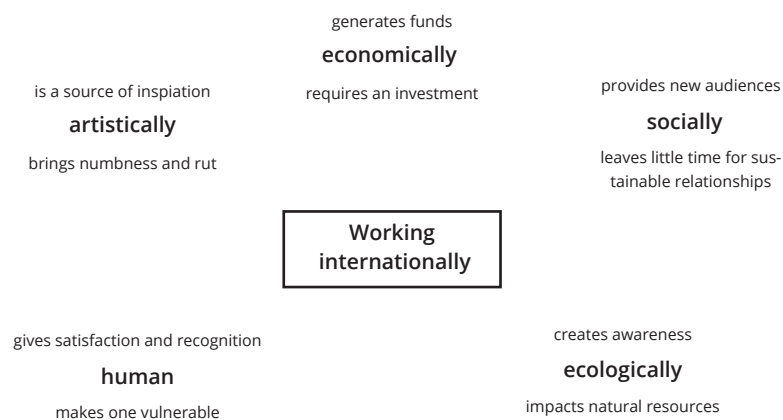
### 5. Hypermobile or isolated?

Being mobile internationally is a privilege. Who has access, who hasn't?

### 6. The gap between thinking and doing

The difficulty of translating the increasing ecological awareness to our own daily practice

## The new international practice



## Twenty five concrete tracks for a sustainable international arts practice

### Economic value

1. Professional management
2. United we stand
3. Technological headstart
4. Solidarity beyond borders
5. From 'projects' to 'trajectories'

### Social value

16. Revalue the local
17. Break out of the bubble
18. 'Flip the table'
19. A new way of programming
20. Take time, make space

### Artistic value

11. Work local, share global.
12. Call things by their name
13. The artists as the intruder/fool
14. Art as an intercultural laboratory
15. Make choices, dig deeper

### Ecological value

21. The flexitarian ethos
22. Work on your footprint
23. Train Time, Quality Time
24. Design global, manufacture local
25. Practice what you preach, make a good example

### Human value

6. Define your borders
7. Artists are humans too
8. Kill your darlings!
9. Equal access to mobility
10. Connecting people

### Sources

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<sup>1</sup> Flanders Arts Institute: Kunstenpocket #2 | (Re)framing the International, 2018; [https://issuu.com/kunstenpuntflandersartsinstitute/docs/kp2\\_en\\_web](https://issuu.com/kunstenpuntflandersartsinstitute/docs/kp2_en_web).

## Towards an emancipatory space in aesthetics

### Abstract

In this abstract I propose to reframe the concept of “Mobility of Aesthetics” to become an “Emancipatory Aesthetics”. For two centuries now there has been an acceleration of mobility, proximity and exchange (of information, goods and people). With the development of digital technology and new network technologies exploiting those capabilities, these characteristics have entered a new phase of development in which they are radicalizing beyond anything imaginable in the previous two centuries. Yet thanks to the prevailing global power dynamics they are today exacerbating existing inequalities and fueling the creation of new ones, turning access to global mobility into a major source of inequality: the difference between a banker flying from New York to Frankfurt on a weekly basis and a Syrian refugee fleeing war is stark.

The question of how aesthetics can be mobile in a fluid world should, therefore, take into account these profound inequalities. If we accept this, a whole host of different (sub)questions arise: how do aesthetics relate to (political) power; how does access to mobility relate to the narratives and images prevailing within any given culture; what images are shown and why; what narratives are created and why; how can aesthetics contribute to a (radical) emancipation out of inequality and (symbolic) violence? Instead of monolithic cultures becoming more fluid, it proposes that cultures are always (to varying degrees) polyphonic and contain within them a dominant narrative striving for hegemony, and (to varying degrees) attempts to create alternative narratives to emancipate from the dominant narrative – a process reflected in our (thinking about) aesthetics. It might, therefore, be productive to reframe the question from being about loss of homogeneity, to being an opportunity to repoliticize aesthetics and find its emancipatory potential.

### Report

For two centuries now there has been an acceleration of mobility, proximity and exchange (of information, goods and people). With the development of digital technology and new network technologies exploiting those capabilities, these characteristics have entered a new phase of development in which they are radicalizing beyond anything imaginable in the previous two centuries. Yet thanks to the prevailing global power dynamics they are today exacerbating existing inequalities and fuelling the creation of new ones, turning access to global mobility into a major source of inequality: the difference between a banker flying from New York to Frankfurt on a weekly basis and a Syrian refugee fleeing war is stark. This raises the question of how theatre, both as an art form and as an institution, can relate to society. What do we show to whom, and why?

### Theatre and inequality

In answer to this I propose a radical direction, in which we attempt to create an emancipatory space within existing theatre institutions as a first step to create more solidarity within the theatre field. How can theatre contribute to a (radical) emancipation out of inequality and (symbolic) violence? How can we use the reproductive force of theatre as a way to challenge dominant narratives striving for hegemony, and use it instead to create a polyphonic space where alternative narratives can flourish. Through its social nature, theatre is one of the most political of the arts: therefore it is essential to think about how that political power can be used to contribute to the struggle for a more democratic, a more equal, and a fundamentally more emancipated society.

This can be done in several ways and on several levels. First of all there is the level of the theatre performance, which can raise awareness and spread ideas. On the other hand there are plenty of small, independent initiatives across the globe which try to develop different relations between spectator and performer on the one hand, and the area in which they operate on the other. Yet, these initiatives often remain at the margins of the mainstream in the theatre field, and even if a major institution engages with them this is often as an additional project which does not challenge the main mode of production. Therefore it is important to look at the major theatre institutions, which hold important financial and symbolic power over the rest of the theatre field.

### Reproductive power

A theatre institution today largely reproduces the unequal power relations in society-at-large. In doing this, it carries in its institutional workings profound memories of inequality, racism and patriarchy. Therefore most theatre institutions are (often unconsciously) reproducing a conservative ideology which legitimizes power abuse in society-at-large. The idea that the theatre should be a haven for “high culture”, automatically makes it a space closed to the vast majority of society. In this, it does not support democracy or radical change, but actively slows it down.

However, the power of reproduction does not necessarily have to reproduce a conservative ideology. That power can also be harnessed to break down long-seated inequalities, since it is in the very nature of theatre to reproduce. It is the power of reproduction that can create an emancipatory space, a performative act which allows alternative narratives, images and memories to be produced. A good example of this is the radical changes at the Warsaw-based Teatr Powszechny, which is more and more becoming a “Volksbühne on the Wisła”.

Through a thorough democratization of the theatre’s institutional structures, such as tearing down the barriers between artistic and technical staff, the creation of a workers’ council on which representatives of all staff members sit, and

the active support of unionization, the theatre has managed to create a truly emancipatory space which links up with other social movements and allows for more radical theatre. It would be unthinkable to see a theatre production like Oliver Frlić's *Kłqtw*, which challenges the immense power of the Polish Catholic Church, made in any other Polish theatre.

This makes it a powerful example of the dialectic between the institutional and the artistic level within a theatre institution. If the latter reforms, new theatre performances become possible that can remember and reproduce different narratives, images and memories. If the hierarchical structure of the theatre institution is reformed to be more democratic, if labour rights are respected, if structural sexism and power abuse is tackled, the possibility becomes very real that the theatre-as-an-institution can move beyond its traditional role of supporting the ruling class and actively support a more open, polyphonic/pluralistic and democratic society.

Theatre institutions need to allow in other memories, narratives and images to make this a durable possibility. At the same time, it should make a conscious move to tear down its self-imposed walls and show solidarity with other parts of the theatre field. An example of this can be found in the relations between the independent Komuna//Warszawa, Teatr Powszechny and Nowy Teatr.

Although the latter has not embarked on the same radical democratization as *Powszechny*, it still performs solidarity with the independent theatre field by providing rehearsal space and funding for independent productions that would otherwise not be made. *Powszechny* has given similar support in the past, and actively fights the corner of the independent theatre scene.

## Conclusion

A consequence of this is the fact that a truly emancipatory theatre institution cannot ignore the fundamental inequalities existing today, especially in wealth and mobility, and should open its doors to all people: the working classes, the immigrants, the refugees. If theatre institutions do not reform to become more democratic and equal, even if they create 'radical' performances, they will only serve global capital and the global art markets, reproducing a conservative ideology and a profound cynicism amongst people about its true aim and purpose, fuelling precisely the unease that allows right-wing populism to flourish.

Theatre still holds a profound place in society, and theatre institutions especially hold a significant position of power (especially in countries like Germany or Poland) which could be used to show solidarity towards others. If they refuse to do so, they not only fail in their social responsibility, but are doomed to irrelevance and obscurity, constantly trying to survive in a world in which profit margins become ever more important.

If the mobility of ideas and people is to be developed to the same level of mobility as capital, and if the mobility of capital is to be put to the use of the people, then theatre institutions hold a unique position in European society to support that struggle in its reproductive and remembering powers.

## An observation of contemporary Turkish imagery in Brussels: spaces of leisure and body care

### Abstract

In my paper, I want to discuss the aesthetic of Muslim communities in Brussels, Belgium, with a special emphasis to the Turkish diaspora and imagery belonging to the spheres of leisure (bars, squares) and beauty care services (hairdressers, hammams). There live an estimated 400,000 to 450,000 Muslims in Belgium, of whom some 150,000 are of Turkish and 200,000 of Moroccan descent. Geographically, half of the Muslim community is located in the region of Brussels. In the several neighbourhoods (Schaerbeek, Saint-Josse-ten-Node) the Muslim community is representing a majority.

The presence of the Turkish community in these areas has shaped the public space and its visual discourse in a direction of patriarchal, heavily masculine culture, with a very particular image of the new Turkish-European “macho”. The selection of names – *Crazy horse*, *Mystic*, etc. – and bold visuals – neon lights, posters and corresponding music – inserted in the monumental landscape of Brussels, generate an emerging form of intercultural kitsch that calls for an elaboration and definition from the perspective of politics of aesthetics and appropriation theories – in this case: appropriation of public space, but also specific areas of human activity. Next to that, qualitative discourse analysis proposed in my work will encompass aspects of gender studies and multicultural theories.

I will also pursue a comparative analysis of the similar visual codes in the respective homelands (Turkey, Morocco, Albania, etc.) and Western Europe-Belgium, with a goal of explaining fluidity and mobility of aesthetics in an interculturally globalised society.

### Introduction: The performative aesthetics of micro-spaces

In my presentation, I want to discuss the aesthetics of Muslim communities in Brussels, from the perspective of changing, fluid notions of visual culture and performative appropriation of public space. In the work itself the context of the globalised multicultural society is taken as a wider frame of observation.

The special emphasis goes to the Turkish diaspora and imagery belonging to the spheres of leisure (bars, squares) and beauty care services (hairdressers, barbers). There lives an estimated 400,000 to 450, 000 Muslims in Belgium, of whom some 150,000 are of Turkish and 200,000 of Moroccan descent. Geographically, half of the Muslim community is located in the region of Brussels. In the several neigh-

bourhoods (Schaerbeek, Saint-Josse-ten-Node) the Muslim community is representing a majority. This dense concentration of respective Muslim communities has been followed by the strong visual mapping of the localities in question, creating particular micro-imagery of everyday life, and thus appropriating and transforming the urban cityscape of Brussels.

How a space is written, governs how it is used. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre defines a three-layered concept of space: space as it is perceived; representations, or rationalized, theorized conceptions of space; and representational spaces, the spatial imaginary of time, which governs how people live. My research has been oriented towards what belongs to the representational space, and in particular to the multimedia and performative text emerging in them. In the myriad of appearances and spatial performances, I focus on places of leisure and beauty care-bars and hair salons, and the particular storytelling they allow to emerge. The main reasons for this are the common aesthetics of the two, and the specific intervention in the public space they create.

My methodological toolkit is grounded in performance studies, and in particular in the performance of everyday life. Throughout the research, I have engaged with observation, notation and media documentation. I have pursued several informal interviews with consumers/carriers of observed social spaces and observers/passers-by. I am ambitious to carry on the quantitative content analysis of the collected material and draw more consistent conclusions on the topic in question. I find my sources relying on the potential of the subversive, creative practice of everyday life as a learning tool about social realities constantly produced from the abstract narratives we inhabit.

In regard to this, my investigation has emerged from an observation of the collective cultural practices and the initial anticipation of otherness as an act of disruption and social delinquency (de Certeau). Describing the general attitude of tactical subversion in the telling of *Spatial Stories*, de Certeau writes, “Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to subjects or groups symbolic outlets and expectations of spaces, where there is no longer any alternative to disciplinary falling-into-line or illegal drifting away”.<sup>1</sup>

It is a refusal to use the rules of the game, the grammar of the code, as it was intended. It is not illegal but exists in the gap between the law/language and its practice. This non-acceptance and rejection have deeper political ground that won't be discussed in detail there, but I would rather concentrate on daily practices of individuals and groups that embed non-hegemonic performance of class, gender, and related social categories, in the context of transforming intercultural society.

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<sup>1</sup> de Certeau, Michel: *Practice of everyday life*, translated by Steven Rendell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 130.

## CASE STUDY ONE: Spaces of leisure: Muslim bars in Brussels

Walking along the Rue Rogier and the neighbouring streets in the neighbourhood of Schaerbeek, one passes numerous bars remarkable for their neon lights and names often carrying a reference to the western mass culture: *Broadway, Montana, Hollywood, My Place, The Crazy Horse, Wild Lions, Apocalypse*. In rare cases, they stand for the opposite, existing through the self-exoticized establishment: *Cleopatra, KEOPS, Babylon*, etc.

These bars are a meeting place and a specific agora of a Muslim community in Brussels, with ethical background of its most frequented customers varying among Turkish, Moroccan, Albanian-Bulgarian, etc. The interior represents an homage to hyper-screen society in the way large TV screens are centrally positioned against the fluorescent wall colours and flashing lights. The space of the bars is marked with a threshold: inside/outside. Extending in many cases to the open public space of a sidewalk, these spaces continue their fiction, interrupting the liberal idea of commons in the cultural macrospace. The boldest performative layer belongs to heavy gender representations, notable for male only territorialisation.

In most of the cases observed, the only woman in such places is a waitress (thus with clearly defined role, positioned out of the leisure zone, but at work). The female spaces of the similar purpose are situated strictly in the realm of the private, and, in some cases, in open space of squares and playgrounds. I want to point out how these characteristics of the space in question are based on the unwritten consensus and articulate themselves only in relation to pre-assumptions and estimations about dominant interpretations of the abstract qualities of the space itself. Also, another component to take into consideration is cutting across (de Certeau) from the micro-narratives in the macrospace of control and order, as the space of the bars is being observed in relation to the wider social space with different constellations of social roles and functions (gender equality; non-restricted access, gender non-separation).

Here resides a fluidity of examined cultural spaces and aesthetics they possess. A macrospace and its dominant discourse of intercultural Brussels provide a multiplicity of possible readings of available assemblage and with its linked estimations of openness, hospitality/hostility, etc.

## CASE STUDY TWO: Spaces of beauty care: Muslim hair salons and barbers in Brussels

The spaces of beauty care are included in my presentation due to their common aesthetic characteristics with spaces of leisure explained above and the familiar, yet very different narrative they represent. Due to an element of intimacy embedded in their function, at one side, and a sensitive treatment of the body and, in particular hair, in Islam, they do significantly differ from bars and cafes. At the other hand, the shared, common idea of the space and its potential of articulation of difference and disruption offer an interesting comparison and a parallel.

Firstly, the gender discourse is way more defined and contained in the purpose of the space itself (male/female hairdresser). It informs the separation coming naturally.

However, what I would like to discuss is a very intriguing deviation from the rigidity of gender as conventional in Islam. The male imagery at the shop widows and posters decorating the interior have gone through a transformative encounter with diverse gender ambiguities: with its heavily stylised look and use of cosmetics, they cross and embrace the notions of what is primarily, in Muslim societies, associated with female. I would notice that in that sense, they traverse a curious itinerary of appropriation and place themselves in the undifferentiated realm of what in macro-discourse they belong to would be mapped even as queer. It is the space of emergence of the new man, freed from the traditional cultural patterns, yet extremely bold in its un-becoming. The strong, frontal images of posing men provoke a curious distraction for the gaze of a passer-by, creating an extended zone of possibility and multiplicity of meaning.

The particular attention in my field work and documentation was devoted to the multimedia text of a specific bricolage nature and a postmodern cut-up aesthetic value.

On the other hand, less in number female hairdressers and beauty salons are lacking their transparency and visual power, what further evokes thought of considerably less political potential residing in them.

## Conclusion

The examined performative spaces of leisure and body care articulate strong cultural otherness and a contra-discourse to the dominant narrative they are inserted in. Playing along the identitarian categories of ethnicity, religion, gender and class, they represent a rich source for the performative reaction of groups and individuals that are associated to them.

Observed in the context of changing and unstable intercultural society, they represent a space of discontinuity, camouflage of protest and collectively lived parallel reality – a heterotopia of a kind. The discussed material offers a lot more to explore and deconstruct beyond its signification and the cultural dynamics at its surface.







## Session 2

### Stable / Unstable

Miljena Vučković

#### Aesthetics travel with goods

##### Abstract

This paper explores the mobility of aesthetics, the long-lasting influence and the consequences of this mobility through its representation in particular by objects that are transported and traded to be used in domestic surroundings and everyday life. In Serbia (observed on the case of the City of Novi Sad), long years of scarcity and deprivation that followed war and embargo in the 1990s, combined with the need to beautify and bestow home, resulted in the welcome and adoption of new aesthetics offered and brought with (new) items that were sold cheaply. On the basis of my long-term observation of consumers' behaviour and on the basis of research on the gradual change in private and public places, I am arguing that the affordability of these new items, together with the general rise in the promotion of shopping-culture and of consumerism overall, is leading to us wrapping ourselves in and cluttering our (domestic) environments with unnecessary things. Places we inhabit, together with our bodies, become showcases and exhibitions of our collections.

In this talk, I will examine two main sources of cheap goods that led to change in aesthetics and behaviour – Chinese stores and flea markets, that both further led to second hand shops, as a new source of affordable clothes. The long-term effects and consequences of this phenomenon are yet to be analysed and understood, but they certainly resonate far, within and outside of domestic and office environments, nightclubs and subcultures of certain groups. It will exit physical space, slowly invading our future decisions and attitudes, changing our worth-scale and sets of values. This is yet to be observed, analysed and evaluated in future times.

##### Introduction

Serbia, understood as a geo-political entity, was often on historical crossroads, influenced by various cultures and changes in political system, so it is not surpris-

ing that it itself has shaped aesthetics by being a mixture of different values and impacts. Novi Sad is the second-biggest city in the Republic of Serbia, growing steadily since 1990, now flourishing and vibrant due to the rising student and IT population. It will be also one of the European capitals of culture in 2021. It is the capital of the northern Province of Vojvodina, home to various ethnic groups, with local cultures mixing and influencing each other. Likewise, there are fine nuances which change from regions with many local distinction developing under different powers, events and traditions. Like before, same today – cultural influences shape and reshape space, on every imaginable and perceptible level – from those on a small scale, like domestic surroundings, to spaces of a global scale, like megacities and anything and everything between. Two major changes occurred, influencing domestic and public landscape and the way people dress and present themselves. In recent past – at the end of the 1990s / beginning of 2000 – the first major “flood” of new aesthetics brought by new products – visibly influencing the environment of architecture – came with mass-opening of Chinese stores abundant with various cheap items, mostly poor quality, very colorful, made of (recycled) plastic. Short duration for a low price has developed a pattern of behaviour of buying-and-replacing in society with small financial means. The human need to decorate their surroundings has led to the adoption and adaption of an imported aesthetic.

Just as space defines its inhabitants and their particular sets of values, so do these sad objects communicate our current state of mind and the conditions we live in. Our interiors and streets communicate who we think we are and what we want to be. Humans surround themselves with items they cherish or find beautiful, important, and precious. Buying unnecessary and unfamiliar stuff just because it is easily affordable, speaks volumes about modern consumerism culture and the external expectations people are exposed to.

Coming from the field of stage and production design, I believe that our spaces present who we are, and I pay much attention to their look and atmosphere, and the planned and unintentional messages they send. I observe and analyse the relationship between people and objects, and the presentation of identities through space – from micro to macro level, from interiors to cities, states, etc. Noticing how rapidly my environment is changing, I started to explore this occurrence carefully. These changes covered previously organically-designed space, leading to uniformity and sameness. (My opinion is that this sameness is not particularly good, and that it creates a sort of numbness. We can see this on a larger scale in almost all European capitals and bigger cities – in chain restaurants and identical chain fashion store which are erasing distinctions and “flattening” images while creating digested versions of them.)

The previous complexity and patience in slowly building a home - of layers of years of collecting objects of importance and value, cherishing memories present in family photos, souvenirs and gifts – has slowly been upgraded and replaced with the affordable plentitude of invaluable and replaceable objects. Significant changes in ways of living has formed patterns of desirable and acceptable

behaviour regarding consuming and possessing objects. Modern society considers it common and inevitable to receive and declutter the innumerable abundance of toys, clothes, and anything else imaginable, while growing up. This discourse and attitude has led to easily (sometimes compulsive) buying and changing one's wardrobe or interior. Fast consumption and the continuous need for newer / better / cheaper things, might be seen as compensation for everything else that is missing. One could argue that behavioural pattern of easily buying-and-replacing was a sort of reaction to previous living conditions, where it was a must to spare and repair.

Simultaneously there is great disrespect towards inexpensive, short-lasting goods, which coexists with a gratefulness for and reliance on the availability and affordability of the Chinese shops. Ranging from products to beautify the home – plastic covers for washing machines with flower-motives, towel hangers in funny shapes, various decorative figurines, wallpapers and stickers, through to practical items – plastic bowls, whisks, bottle openers, candles, and again an astonishing amount of other kitchen and bathroom items, to hobby equipment, arts and crafts, clothes, sex-shop products, whole gardens of plastic flowers, and supposedly funny small props. Chinese shops are having thousands of items on display, changing with seasons and every new shipment. Objects that were worn – damaged or changed through use – would easily be replaced with new ones, also of poor quality and no durability. It is interesting to know where all these used things end and after how long!? The imitation of luxury and posh style as seen on TV programs has been compensated with domestic design and fashion on steroids.

Cheap prices cause cheap look, pumped with decorative details – pearls, shimmer, letters, colors, materials. A different understanding of beauty has arrived like a screen over the familiar and old. Familiar and distinctive cultural sets have been slowly but steadily influenced by the appearance of cheap goods made in China. It changes the domestic and business landscape and experience, introducing new lifestyle through new materials, decorations and details. Through kitchenware and other house items, clothes and toys, new aesthetics have developed and conquered.

Prior to this was a long period of scarcity, embargo, war, displacement, impoverishment and isolation. Things were already old, used, repaired many times, adjusted, worn out, and they were mirroring living conditions, like silent reminders of everyday struggles. People were hungry for novelties, financial stability and relaxed attitudes, good times, even if it is only the illusion of a better life and of well-being. Thus, it was only natural that this opportunity was welcomed with open arms, cherished and developed to epidemic proportions. At a certain point, only Chinese goods were bought as gifts, shops were like a twisted paradise and the possibilities almost miraculous. Since the first shops were established and the scene was set, within Novi Sad existed over twenty big (several thousand square metres) and a great number of small (starting from three square metres) Chinese stores, changing and developing in accordance with the market.

They adjust and change, steadily being part of everyday life in Novi Sad and Serbia. Interestingly, no groceries or food are being sold, continually missing opportunity to present the Chinese culture beyond the framed view of the shop window. (There is now one big, old and dilapidated shopping mall from the early 1990s in Belgrade which has been turned into a Chinese distribution centre, where food for private and commercial use is being sold, and where anybody can shop as well).

Another wave hit with the boom in “Nylon” – a longstanding, spacious and buzzing flea market in Novi Sad. It pulsates in the city's rhythm, adjusting and changing with trends. With a new – hipster – class of shoppers emerging, a shift in products on offer occurred, following demand for interesting retro goods, again spanning from clothes and house items, to more artistic and specialized objects. During the previous ten years, a group of affluent young people established, spending their earnings on this cabinet of curiosities that “Nylon” offered. Better social standards created conditions for purchasing just for pleasure, out of curiosity or as part of socialising.

Previously-common flea markets with curious parts of second hand cars and other machines, old furniture on display where people expect to bargain, bloomed with Western European second-hand clothes, and with a plentitude of rejected and unneeded objects: mostly ceramics and glass, but also dolls and fragments of personal histories: photo albums, postcards, souvenirs, books, New Year, Christmas and Easter decoration, and anything else imaginable. (Even though I tend to look for items for sets and as props, I also couldn't help but wonder what are the stories behind these discarded lives and pasts. Perhaps children / inheritors of deceased refurbishing and throwing away all traces of parents' lives?)

During a long period before the mentioned shift occurred, unskilled sellers traded goods sourced from all kinds of sources. It meant there is always the possibility of luck, surprising and rare findings, and regularly good bargains. The change in the buyers structure and culture transformed the dominant market. There exist areas of selection and prices adjusted to new customers – coming from IT, graphic and other design – who were interested in unusual, cheap items, trash clothes, particularly fashion pieces with 1980s flair, which were sought and bought for parties or just to have fun with ugly and retro prints. Before the adoption and celebration of trash aesthetics among the “hipster” population, plenty of people dig into piles of clothes, sourcing cheap purchases for their husbands and children, in that way overcoming small house budgets. Bargaining is still present, but sellers are more skilled and specialized, so miraculous moments happen rarely. Before this, items on offer were displayed randomly, simply unloaded from cars and trucks, for example – today items are designed and presented carefully.

The social performativity of visiting “Nylon” and buying there changed accordingly. Until a few seasons ago, it was a layered place, ranging from broken pieces being sold directly on the ground, up to antiques and art, with a continually changing and unpredictable offer of items, with some street food vendors

around and scattered dodgy cafes for rest. The whole market with all of its parts followed new interest and customers, changing ways of selling and shopping, influencing when particular things are purchasable and raising prices. The difference between the various customers became more distinct, and clothes took up most of the space. Other products are being sold very early in the morning – before sunrise or only on Sundays. Fridays and Saturdays are reserved for fashion. It is fairly common that buyers come from a night out – to crown the night with a special experience of eating the unhealthy and greasy sold at the flea market. The “party” overflowing the market transformed social norms, familiar codes, previous aesthetics of the market, established new social performances of shopping, goods, prices and, consequently, everything. Buyers who have been visiting this flea market for a long time are unhappy with these changes, they complain and grumble. Sellers are highly adjustable and welcoming to any shift that brings more money.

This initiative in “Nylon” significantly changed attitudes towards buying in second hand stores, and is currently an important source of available goods. Similarly, second-hand culture and aesthetics thrived on the weak financial situation through its approach and impression and by the excitement created of purchasing something for a small amount of money. Cluttered and crowded, these shops vary from being spacious to very small, all with a distinctive smell and bad lighting design and fixtures. The spatial arrangement and overall impression of second hand shops is reveals much about its’ function, as being a kind of store somewhere between a flea market and a cheap shop selling Chinese-made goods, both also over-filled, but with new goods, which only last for half a season. Next on the scale are boutiques with cheap and low quality things, which are designed with an aesthetic of seduction, but with some intentional investment to the interior, to communicate style. These are popular with teenagers and young people, these being mainly women. Next on the scale are regular shops with unknown trademarks and chains of well known everyday brands.

The trend set by hipsters to buy old ceramics, glasses such as those sold at wine-festivals monastery breweries and other events, and many other imaginable household items, soon took hold of other people too. Old, handmade, imperfect, painted by hand and thus unique things gained popularity and brought change and joy to many homes. Bearing the stamp of solidity and the aura of a good life, these items, many bought from the Federal Republic of Germany or the former German Democratic Republic, appear familiar and, thus, also safe and beloved. These objects from the past certainly have an air of nostalgia, which is itself strange since almost none of these buyers lived through the period the objects were made in. These young buyers have been seemingly educated to revere such past artefacts and memories which are not their own, having heard romantic tales and legends of these bygone times from their parents or grandparents. This instilled love and, thus, popularity for objects, old designs, shapes and materials has further triggered an increase in the market for such goods and a change in prices. New, affordable objects subtly inhabit our daily lives, nudging aesthetic norms into a new direction based on past aesthetics, thereby establishing a different social interaction based on “Nylon” rituals.

This new wave in purchasing special houseware caused again a not-so-organic mixture of aesthetics when brought back home and put to use. Human tend to clutter and compensate for years of not having wanted, for not being able to acquire desired. Another important question here is what the emotional worth of these goods, both clothes and household products, is, in comparison to their financial worth, especially if they were received as gifts or to present the illusion of financial power. Usually, bought items end up tucked away somewhere out of sight, to be replaced by new, more exciting and important objects. After enough time has passed for the dust to collect on these once prized shop-finds, people often sort out the abundance of unwanted, cheap items to make space for new acquisitions. And so the cycle continues.

Both the rise in popularity of the “Nylon” flea market and the trend of buying from second-hand stores has hugely impacted the market and behaviour, as there is now a more positive attitude towards recycling and the creative re-using of clothes. On the other hand, it has also led to the careless replacing of the old with the new. I argue that this mixture of cheap yet unique pieces of clothing and household items has the potential to change established habits of consumerism in fashion and design, and to inspire people to combine aesthetics, even if for competitive reasons. This in turn leads to an aestheticised relationship towards one’s appearance, personal spaces and the wider urban environment, which to some extent overcomes the ever-present uniformity, anaesthesia and blasé attitude that we have come to associate with urban life. The imperative trend now, as we are instructed by fashion brands, is to become, so to speak, samely different. The new tendencies are still somehow in line with this but also opposing these trends. They also have the potential to promote recycling as well as encourage a more responsible attitude towards old and repurposed objects, which at the same time saves money.

## “Stable” and “mobile” elements of structure in the *Apartment* project in Saint-Petersburg, Russia

### Abstract

*Apartment* is the first independent “horizontal” project in Russia that combines classical theater, social projects and a space that generates an environment, where people with autism and Down Syndrome, theater professionals and people from outside the art community have a chance to meet. Currently in the *Apartment* there are two performances: *Conversation* involving the participation of professional artists and students with Down’s syndrome or autism from the habilitation centre “Anton is here”. And *Childless talks* – a performance for children with and without disabilities and for adults. The director of both projects is Boris Pavlovich.

Through the example of *Apartment*, we would like to try to analyse the potential of stability and mobility in artistic work within a social theatre project.

Elements of stability are a vital necessity for participants with autism (stable space – the building of the former communal apartment, the invariable basic interiors of which were stylized by the artists, the constant composition of the team; the production process – the schedule and process of rehearsal meetings, rituals, etc.). On the other hand, there are stable elements of work in the *Apartment*, such as the basic components of the theatrical language (space, concept, roles, sound and light scores, text).

The basic element of “mobility” is an interdisciplinary approach in communication (there are no strictly-verified procedures – everything is constantly being rethought). The desire for an open or “horizontal” system of relations within the project also implies a fluidity among the participants and the instability of the roles within the team.

Some of the issues that we would like to touch on – the mobility of experience; transportation in the *Apartment*; statistics and movement as dimensions of the artistic space of the performance; rhythm as the semantic element of the performance; absence of statistics in *Mise en Scène*; the fluidity of performances; the mobility of roles (actors transfer functions to one another) and the absolute freedom in the movement of the spectators.

### Part I Organisation and movement

The space itself is very stable. It is an apartment in the very center of St. Petersburg, carefully renovated, but still looking quite old and authentic like most of local communal apartments with shared facilities. However, at the same time, it is very much mobile. Unlike most St. Petersburg communal flats that usually have a long corridor

with doors leading to separate rooms, this apartment has a circular layout of rooms, which allows the spectators to have a panoramic view and observe the performance in motion from different angles and viewpoints.

The furniture and some of the décor elements, too, change all the time – depending on the season, the current mood of the creative team and the performance itself. It is crucial for the whole concept that things could also be moved around by guests during the performances so they are not settled in fixed places. There may be quite a lot of “mobility” among the neighbors as well because different people rent apartments in the building and keep on moving in and out all the time.

The team of the project is rather stable. It includes theatre director Boris Pavlovitch, producer and off-program curator Nika Parkomovskaya, playwright Elina Petrova, choirmaster Anna Vishnyakova, light designer Stas Svistunovitch and many others. The major part of the regular team consists of twenty three actors – both professional (fourteen) and non-professional (nine), all of the latter with autism or Down syndrome. At the same time there is a constant turnover of set-designers: while Katerina Andreeva, the main set-designer of the project, remains the same, various artists come and go, helping with different performances and interior renovations.

Not only do set-designers change from one show to another, but actors vary as well, taking part in different performances depending on their wish and on the schedule. Performances, therefore, are both quite stable in a sense of structure, composition, script, timeline, etc. and very mobile from the viewpoint of acting. Moreover, we should admit that while any performance very much depends on the public, our show is highly influenced by the particular spectators who come to each show and by how they react and interact with it.

When talking about “stability” and “mobility”, we also have to refer to the schedule and rehearsal process. Trainings for mentally disabled actors take place twice a week except during summer, when we have vacations. However, even during the summer break we all go to a countryside residence to prepare the next season show and have a good time together. Although rehearsals are regular with quite a tight timetable (always on Tuesdays and Saturdays, which is very important especially for people with autism due to their need to plan everything in advance), we try to include an element of improvisation into our artistic life. Therefore, performances as well as special events like meetings with actors and so on can take place on any day. We are working on improving professional actors’ planning skills and, at the same time, on increasing mentally disabled actors’ ability to adapt, to be socially involved and to be spontaneous. It allows participants, all being very different and having various behavioural patterns, to inspire each other.

Speaking in general, the most “stable elements” are the frame (which should not be perceived as a limitation) of the performance and the space itself. The most



“mobile” elements are creativity and improvisation. The goal of the *Apartment* is to give a direction, a route, or a clue in a wide sense of this word. It can be compared to Pina Bausch’s way of thinking: in her late years she and her company travelled all over the world, creating performances dedicated to local features while still remaining the Wuppertal Tanztheater. This approach allowed her to be rooted to the ground and “in the air” at the same time, discovering different territories, learning new languages, interacting with previously unknown cultures. The *Apartment* is doing the same for both intellectually disabled and people without disabilities, bringing them together, letting them communicate in a pure, honest way.

Nika Parkhomovskaya

## Part II

### “Stable” and “mobile” elements of structure in *The conversations* performance within the *Apartment* project

The initial momentum (welcoming guests at the Apartment) and the final salvo (two songs sung together) create a tight framework that leaves a spectator quite free within a limited space so that they can build their own route through the performance. That means that between the beginning and the finale the spectator (or guest) is quite free. Here and there some kinds of games pop up. Yet they are quite unobtrusive and spontaneous. When speaking of the games I mean the creation of a certain situation in which participants and spectators are involved: interaction with some objects (a book in the library or buckwheat in the kitchen) or even a short scene (for example, spectators can ask one of the performers to solve their problem and she telephones somewhere and improvises an answer that is usually paradoxical). Quite a lot of such games appeared in the *Apartment*, and they are periodically rated and changed. Thus the structure within the general framework is rather mobile. That is, there is a lot of time when nothing seems to happen while in fact, the most important thing, the interaction, is taking place.

My colleague Marina Israilova formulates the concept of the *Apartment* this way: “Here social and theatrical performances are not divided, they are fused in the same time and space. The social tissue itself, i.e. the principles of our mutual interaction, becomes subject matter of the performance”.<sup>1</sup> Marina introduces the term “idiorhythmic” from Barthes’ work *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism)*<sup>2</sup> to characterize the process that is going on in the *Apartment*. This term describes the situation when all the participants exist (live, operate) in their own rhythm. Initially, this term relates to one of the ways of monastic life in early Christianity but Barthes expands it to cover any form of community where participants can exist in their own rhythm. This is opposed to cenoby, the historically prevalent

<sup>1</sup> Israilova, Marina: Что мы видим, когда смотрим спектакль? [What do we see when we watch a performance]; <https://syg.ma/@marina-israilova/chto-my-vidim-my-smotrim-spiektakl>, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, Roland: *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces (European Perspectives: A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism)*, Columbia University press, 2012.

model of monastic rule, when all participants follow the same rhythm.

In my opinion, the difference of rhythms is conditioned by the very existence of special people. They just cannot act in the same rhythm. Thus, what is happening in each of the rooms adjusts itself to particular participants. The most comfortable and expressive situations and games for them had been found in the process of rehearsals that later were included into the performance.

The professional actors exist within the unstable scenario. Their task is to be always ready to join in the play and support it. Besides, they can offer a game but it is usually discussed in a circle before the show. This system of spontaneous ideas and changes of microplots works as a way of maintaining a good creativity level during the performance. The main condition is that these new circumstances should not hurt the disabled participants. So these microchanges consolidated by the main framework loosen the plot making the participants brace themselves every time. For disabled people it is an interaction training.

Unlike an immersive show, the roles of performers are orchestrated to the minimum and are very flexible. They do not build circles of circumstances as the method requires (the first, the second). Their “magic if” is the very fact of their existence in the *Apartment*. They are proficient at acting /being in this space, finding their way about the apartment, living at the apartment. And they deeply understand each other. Metaphorically speaking, we can say that over the year of meetings and laboratory work they have grown into the space and closer to each other. Therefore, it is not so painful for a guest to fall into this new, uncomfortable space and get involved into such complicated intense communication.

In this situation a spectator becomes more like an actor, he has to act, to search for identity. The spectator’s strategies may range. The simplest way is to focus on the task that they receive on a sheet of paper when entering the *Apartment*. However, they may either remain an observer or offer their own game. They can tap into the atmosphere and “float with the stream” or try to alter the situation and break the rules proposed by other participants. I should say that it is not so simple to “float with a stream” because it requires them to be sincerely interested in other people’s personalities. The participants also have the right to break the structure, even the main frame structure. This possibility is usually used by disabled participants – for example, after the final song they can offer one more game, and yet another one until the frame structure of the show collapses.

The performance aspires to build Rancière’s “community of narrators and translators”, an “emancipated community” where everyone is both a performer who demonstrates his skills and a participant who explores what these skills could yield in new circumstances, among other spectators.

Alexandra Dunaeva

# Participants

## Alexandra Dunaeva

Theatre critic, researcher and teacher.

Graduated from the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts (RGISI), the Faculty of Theater Studies (2009), attended postgraduate studies at the Russian Institute of Art Studies (2013). Conducts the author's course "Contemporary Theater" in the RGISI. Authoress of more than ten scientific and about hundred critical articles about theater and cinema in the leading editions of the country (*Theater, PTSZh, Seance, Colta.ru*, etc.)

## Michael Freundt

studied theatre science, philosophy and dance science. Worked as a freelance journalist and critic, among others for *Theater der Zeit* and *Berliner Zeitung*. He belonged to the directors' team of numerous independent theatre projects and worked for *euro-scene* Leipzig from 1997 till 2002. In 2003 Michael Freundt became deputy managing director of *Internationales Theater Institut Deutschland* (ITI) after his collaboration on productions in the genres of theatre, dance and ancient music. Since 2004, Michael Freundt has been involved in the meetings of *Ständige Konferenz Tanz*, he coordinated its development into a registered association, and in March 2006 was named managing director of *SK Tanz*, now called *Dachverband Tanz Deutschland*.

## Anna Galas-Kosil

Curator and cultural manager; from the beginning of 2018 curator of an international program at *Scena Prezentacje* Theatre operating under the *Biennale Warszawa* brand. She was a head of the international project department at the *Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute* until 2017. Graduated of the Faculty of Theatre Science, she was a project manager and curator of many international projects, among others, *R@port Festival*, Gdynia in 2010, *Shared Space: Music Weather Politics* 2013-2016, *Performing Arts from Central Europe* (Bydgoszcz, Poland, 2015), *Days of Polish Theatre* in Tehran in 2015, *Reclaimed Avant-garde* 2017. She was an executive producer of the Polish Presentation for *Prague Quadrennial*. From 2011 she has been a board member of *On-The-Move* international network, from 2015 she has been the President of this board.

## Prof. Dr. Günther Heeg

Professor of Theatre Studies and Director of the *Centre of Competence for Theatre* at the *University of Leipzig*. His current research focuses on the theory and practice of transcultural theatre. Concepts of repetition and appropriation of history are also on the horizon of transcultural mediation work. Günther Heeg is head of the research projects "The Theatre of Repetition" and "Strangers playing. Amateur theatre as a medium of transcultural education". He is vice president of the *International Brecht Society* (IBS) and co-director of the Japanese-German research project "Tradition and Transculturality in Japanese and German Contemporary Theatre". New Publications: "Das transkulturelle Theater" (2017), "Willkommen anderswo. Theaterarbeit mit Einheimischen und Geflüchteten" (2017), "Recycling Brecht. Materialwert, Nachleben, Überleben" (2018).

**Dr. Joris Janssens**

research & development coordinator at *Flanders Arts Institute*, the supporting organisation for the arts in Flanders. Since 2001, he worked at and directed the *Vlaams Theater Instituut* (Flemish Theater Institute). VTi merged with the comparable institutes for visual art and music to become *Flanders Arts Institute*. He holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the *KU Leuven*. In 1997-2001, he worked at the *KU Leuven* (Department of Netherlandic Studies). In 2001, he worked at the *University of Vienna* in the Department of Niederlandistik. He has published and edited several books and articles on performing arts practice and policies, literary history and pop culture.

**Marta Keil**

is a performing arts curator, dramaturg and researcher based in Warsaw. Initiated and curates the *East European Performing Arts Platform* (EEPAP). Together with Grzegorz Reske, she curated the performing arts festival *Theatre Confrontations* in Lublin, Poland (2013-2017). Worked as the program curator for the *Teatr Polski* in Bydgoszcz (2014-2015) and as performing arts curator in the *Adam Mickiewicz Institute* (2008-2012). Editor of the book "Reclaiming the Obvious. On the Institution of the Festival" (2017) and "Dance, Process, Artistic Research" (2015).

**Dr. Krystel Khoury**

Born in Beirut Krystel Khoury trained first as a dancer, before completing her Masters in Performing Arts theories and getting a Ph.D. degree in Anthropology of Intercultural Dynamics from *Auvergne University* in 2014. Since 2006, Krystel has been developing cultural initiatives and exchange programs between Arab and European artists, and has been involved in transnational, creative dance and theatre projects. She has worked as an expert and programme manager for several cultural organisations in the Middle East and Europe while pursuing her research in the field of intercultural artistic practices and discourses. In 2017, the *Münchner Kammerspiele* invited her to be the artistic director of the *Open Border Ensemble*; a project part of a broader structural frame focusing on diversity, mobility and migration aiming at encouraging transnational theatre experiences.

**Nika Parkhomovskaya**

Theatre critic, researcher, producer.

Being a member of the *Theatre Critics Association*, Nika is a contributor, editor and theatre critic at various online and offline magazines as *Theatre*, *Takie dela*, *Vedomosti*, *Petersburg Theatre Magazine*, etc. She is a lecturer on dance and theatre in Moscow, Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, etc. Nika produced various performances, organized festivals as the *New European Theatre Festival* and coordinated creative labs. Nowadays Nika conducts social choreography seminars for professionals/non-professionals, people with intellectual and physical disabilities, teenagers and their parents.

**Anastasia Patlay**

Playwright, actress and theatre director focusing mainly on documentary theatre. Director in *Teatr.doc* since 2011. Curator of the theatre programme "Archeology of Memory" in the *Sakharov Center* and the festival of documentary projects *Hunting for Reality*. Conducts dramaturgical workshops "Memory of the Great Terror" and "Jews in USSR. Family in the history". Participant of the National Theatre Award and the festival *The Golden Mask*. Anastasia's performances are performed at Russian and European venues.

**Iulia Popovici**

is a performing arts critic and curator based in Bucharest. She is also an expert for Romanian and EU cultural programmes. She has published extensively about the alternative performing arts scene, collectives and artists in Romania and Eastern Europe, the social challenges of contemporary arts and the shift in working practices. In 2011-2018, she was co-curator of the *Independent Performing Arts Platform* (*Temps d'Images Festival*, Cluj). She has curated a number of independent performing arts showcases and programmes in Romania and abroad. The most recent publication: "Metaphor. Concept. Protest. Performance Art in Romania and Moldova" (with Raluca Voinea; Idea Design & Print/tranzit.ro, 2017).

**Dr. Tom Ruette**

is data & information coordinator at *Flanders Arts Institute*, the supporting organisation for the arts in Flanders. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the *KU Leuven*, where he worked from 2008 until 2012. During this period, he was a visiting scholar at the Colloquium "Frequency Effects" of the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Freiburg. From 2012 onward, he taught at the Humboldt University of Berlin in the departments for corpus and historical linguistics. After his academic career, he worked as a data scientist at Sirris, an industrial research support center in Belgium.

**Olga Sorotokina (Sara Tokina)**

is a producer and director based in Moscow, Russia. Amongst others, she is the producer of the *New Space of the Theatre of Nations*. The *New Space* is an interdisciplinary project run by the *Theatre of Nations*, which is aimed at uniting contemporary artists of all fields to create a new cultural environment by means of exploring all of the diverse forms of contemporary art and theatre. Sorotokina also works with various international art and theatre festivals and independent cultural projects such as the *New European Theatre Festival* and the *Tolstoy Weekend Theatre Festival*.

**Dr. Attila Szabó**

Theatre researcher, museum specialist, deputy Director of the *Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute*, Budapest. Graduated from the Pannonian University in Theatreology and English language and literature. In 2018 he defended his Ph.D. at the Doctoral School of Literary Sciences of the University of Pécs. Between 2013-2014 he was a Fulbright researcher at the *Martin E. Segal Theatre Center*, New York. He has worked at the *Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute* since 2009. He was the Hungarian project coordinator of several international research projects on theatre architecture (TACE), the *European Collected Library of Artistic Performance* (ECLAP) and *Performing Arts Central Europe* (PACE.V4). In 2018 he received the *Károly Pulszky Award* for the achievements of promising young museologists.

**Jonas Vanderschueren**

Born 1993, Vanderschueren is currently a scientific assistant at the Eastern European section of the Department for Languages and Cultures at Ghent University. Previously he worked for *Troubleyn/Jan Fabre* and performed an internship at *Nowy Teatr*. He is active as a writer, dramaturg and journalist, writing about ideology and the emancipatory potential of theatre. He is also editor-in-chief of the *Flemish Literary Fund*-supported literary magazine *Kluger Hans*.

**Miljena Vučković**

Miljena Vučković creates Space. She explores its scenic potentials, perception and presentation, limits and changeability, from theoretical studies, light and spatial installations, to scenographies and spatial design for commercial events. She gained significant professional experience in stage and production design. She is vice-president of *Scenatoria*, an organisation that “stages” performing arts in neglected heritage buildings. She writes and holds lectures about the above mentioned topics.

**Nina Vurdelja**

Nina Vurdelja is a performance researcher and cultural worker. Belgium-based, she is working internationally in the field of contemporary theatre and intermedia performance. She is interested in exploring the performative potential of cultural spaces and the multimedia text emerging in them. Nina is pursuing a Ph.D. studies in Theatre and Drama at the University of Tampere, Finland.

**Wojtek Ziemilski**

Theater director and visual artist. Born 1977 in Stanford, California. Studied philosophy and linguistics in Warsaw, Toulouse, Grenoble and directing in Portugal. His first show, the multimedia performance “Hamlet Light” (2007), received the national JAJ award. In 2009, he moved back to Warsaw, Poland. His Polish debut “Small Narration” has been shown in over 20 countries. In his interdisciplinary projects, Ziemilski also regularly works with non-professional actors, e.g. in his performance “Jeden gest” for which he won the main award at the *Zürcher Theater Spektakel* and the FAST FORWARD award of Staatsschauspiel Dresden. Ziemilski teaches at the Theatre Academy and the University in Warsaw.

Imprint

## Thank you

The organisers of the conference would like to thank the speakers and presenters of the conference as well as the hosts of the panels and the sessions:

Alexandra Dunaeva  
Michael Freundt  
Anna Galas-Kosil  
Prof. Dr. Günther Heeg  
Dr. Joris Janssens  
Marta Keil  
Dr. Krystel Khoury  
Nika Parkhomovskaya  
Anastasia Patlay  
Iulia Popovici  
Dr. Tom Ruetten  
Olga Sorotokina (Sara Tokina)  
Dr. Attila Szabó  
Jonas Vanderschueren  
Miljena Vučković  
Nina Vurdelja  
Wojtek Ziemilski

### Special thanks go to

Dorota Buchwald, director of the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, who enabled the organisation of the conference and who hosted the whole ENICPA meeting and conference for the second day.

Hanna Wróblewska, director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, for inviting the conference participants to use the spaces and facilities of Zachęta.

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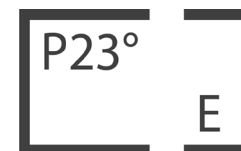
Cover print: Wikimedia.org, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0  
Pictures pp. 52/53: Miljena Vučković (private archive)

### Proofreading

Leonie Baker

## Organisation

This conference has been organized by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute Poland (ZRTI) and the International Theatre Institute Germany as part of the project PASSAGE 23°E (ITI), with support from the European networks ENICPA and On-The-Move as well as the Zachęta National Gallery of Art.



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International networking processes are important anchors of the contemporary performing arts.

They find particular expression in the seemingly increasing mobility of artists, the transfer of their productions and various formats of cooperative collaboration across regional and international borders. The various realisation forms, processes and ideas of mobility urge us to question the current and historical contexts of the relationship between theatre and society.

The Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute and the International Theatre Institute Germany organised in cooperation with ENICPA, On-the-move and the Zachęta National Gallery of Art the conference "Mobility of Aesthetics" on 12 and 13 October 2018 in Warsaw - to examine these processes of moving and being moved, focussing on the changes of and challenges for an aesthetic and artistic expression within the mobility of the arts.

The international conference took place as part of the annual meetings of the international performing arts network, ENICPA, European Network of the Information Centres for the Performing Arts.

Speakers and participants joined the conference, coming from all over Europe and representing various, diverse approaches and points of view on the subject of mobility in today's times.