

Statements and questions from three round table talks
„Next Steps: Learning from Exchanges“ at the IETM plenary meeting
at Nov. 2nd 2018 at Gasteig, Munich

About 50 participants took part in the working sessions (two times 40 minutes) and closing round (the individual rounds and closing round took place from 10am to 12:30)

The ITI had invited two to three artists to participate in each of the rounds, who initially gave an introduction of their experiences in transcultural work. These introductions were followed by open discussions moderated by a professional also working in the field.

round 1: Who(m) do you speak for/to?

Questions on representation and audience

invited artists: Boris Ceko (God's Entertainment, Vienna) and Urška Brodar, dramaturg at Mladinsko Theatre in Ljubljana, moderated by Bettina Sluzalek (ITI-vice-president)

introduction:

- Boris Ceko refers to the theoretical background of his work influenced by the Indian scientist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who questions how the ‚subalterns‘ can and should be represented and how artistic work should focus on ‚the marginalised‘ (example: in his work ‚Human Zoo‘ people from the so-called margins of the society are being exposed in cages and invite the audience to a dialogue)
- Urska Brodar describes structures in a repertory theatre which leave less room for manoeuvre as opposed to the independent scene; at Mladinsko Theatre they initiated therefore a special space in which they can swiftly react to political developments and programme workshops, discussions, film series and performances on political issues

discussion:

- is it possible to let the ‚subalterns‘ speak for you or don't you just repeat a colonial discourse by doing so?
- several participants name examples from their own work and mention problems they encountered; a recurrent question is how to treat everyone the same, how to pay everyone fairly

conclusions:

- Ceko concludes, that he does not have a solution to avoid repeating colonial structures, but that he will certainly continue working with those people who otherwise are not visible and will always ask the audience to (actively) position themselves
- Urska Brodar concludes (and gets unanimous support from the rest of the group) that one needs a great deal of patience and energy, but that it is worth opening up new spaces for new formats for an audience

→ art always refers to the social context *and* to its recipients

closing appeal: the round closes with a debate about hierarchical structures in institutionalised theatre and an appeal for gender justice and diversity

(though the discussion started on transcultural work it then mainly focused on the relation to the audience and the introduction of new aesthetics to an audience; the (post-)colonial discourse is always entangled in this and should stay the focus → round 3)

round 2: Working transculturally/ creating new resonating spaces

invited artists: Majd Feddah (Open Border Ensemble, Münchner Kammerspiele) and Helge Letonja and Augusto Jaramillo Pineda (Ensemble New Bremen), moderated by Krystal Houry, artistic director of the Open Border Ensemble

- the artists exchange experiences of artistic processes where language barriers were successfully overcome

- to work transculturally means to ‚unlearn‘ your own cultural context, to then define a common goal and try and create a new joint (body-)language

→ collaborations are important as a process not as a result („aim to collaborate to create new ground in the process“)

- personal statements on how displacement strengthens the ego (empowerment through crisis)

- advantages of an ensemble structure as safety net as opposed to being truly free-lance

questions:

- is transcultural just a European concept? How can we widen our focus?

- how can we cooperate when not all artists are mobile?

- should we all found collectives?

- how do funders determine our work? Do they have an agenda which artists navigate through?

- political art vs. autonomy (“culture is always individual to start with, not just political“)

- controversy: ‘hypermobility of artists / dependency on European festivals and production means (those who have the money direct the programme)

- how to work in true solidarity? Same pay for all? Who defines what is fair? Is the ensemble structure the fair basis for all?

conclusion:

How can we jointly create new resonating spaces?

- to listen & hear and be open minded

- give space for workshops to explore (no deadlines for results)

- develop creative methodologies and work strategies from within the group

cultural policies:

- resolving visa issues for more mobility
- more access & invitation to other spaces
- mobilising funds, smoothing the administrative conditions

round 3: Reflecting colonisation and decolonisation in transnational projects

invited artists: Fabian Lettow and Mirjam Schmuck (kainkollektiv) and Veselin Dimov (ACT Festival Sofia), moderated by Azadeh Sharifi

context:

colonialism and postcolonial reality is present in transnational work

statements:

1. some do not want to face the questions of colonialism as the power relations to not allow this, the others, who possess all privileges, only partly dare the confrontation
2. we are not in a phase of post-colonialism but (still & again) colonialism

questions:

- how to support a process of decolonization? How to prevent new tendencies of colonization? How much are we prepared to sacrifice?
- who are 'we'? How can we overcome the cultural frame, 'the other'? (all artistic work has a ,cultural context')
- to be examined: don't we just do as if we were cooperating in order to find a joint aesthetic?
- kainkollektiv: ,The better you know each other, the more difficult it gets to cooperate.'
- European cooperation only follows the European markets
- how do funding structures determine the artistic outcome? Are the arts just reactions to the funding structures? Should it not be the nature of collaborations to develop new funding structures?
- how can cooperations work over a longer period of time?

Discussion on cultural diplomacy with representatives of Goethe Institut and El Mawred:
what is the role of cultural institutions? Can a state fund the arts in an independent way? Or is it always ,at arm's length'?

perspectives:

- we should better share resources and strengthen solidarity!
- define together which responsibility artists have when their work is being colonized or censured → international cooperations can be means of resistance and resilience
- „not thinking of ,the other' but the living together! Transformation is the transformation of the mind. Imagining a sociality starts by being creative in our thinking!"

→ we can do something!* to be aware of colonial minefields is the starting point; we should then create more spaces to jointly develop visions on collaborations

* institutionalised theatres (such as the city and state theatres in Germany) are particularly suited to act, the initiative DIE VIELEN is an example

Remarks/ ITI

- all three themes should be followed up; there was not enough time for discussion; the rounds would not dissolve easily even after approx. 1,5 hrs; generally the format worked well
- language problems should be considered more carefully in advance; it showed again that for many participants it was not easy to talk in English – a phenomenon also encountered in other IETM talks