



#1

November 2017

Taru Elfvig on residencies | Belgian music and performing arts abroad | Gesprek met Agentschap | Hilde Teuchies on reclaiming the European commons | A conversation with Selma & Sofiane Ouissi | Pieter De Buysser on shifting the paradigm

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Trends, stories & reflections on new ways of working internationally in the arts

/re/framing the international
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Why /re/framing the international?

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 and even intercontinental successes, there is a growing awareness that there are environmental limits. And that, when 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.

The stakes are high. We need to think, we need to develop another story. We have always said that working internationally is important for the arts and we have already mapped out how we do so. But that is no longer enough. More than ever we need to explain why working internationally is important: not only for our stakeholders, but also for ourselves. And then act accordingly.

Ambitions and pebbles

It is for all these reasons that in late 2016 Kunstenpunt – a.k.a. Flanders Arts Institute for international audiences – launched /re/framing the international, an intensive research and development project about new ways of working internationally. We wish to better understand what is happening - both in the arts and in society more broadly - and to get a better view of the responses that practitioners and policymakers are developing today, and not only in Flanders.

Since the launch of /re/framing the international, we have collected and analysed a vast amount of data and facts about the import/export of the arts in/from Flanders. We have organised round-table discussions and meeting days, and commissioned interviews and keynotes to better grasp the changing context and its impact, while also mapping out new ways of working (together). With performers and artists, managers, programmers, curators, policymakers and other professionals, we often talk about their drive and ambition to work internationally, but also about the pebbles in their shoes, about strategies and progressive insights. We have been inspired by the seriousness and the energy observed

during those many conversations. Through our own international activities – such as visitor programmes and work visits – we have learned how people work elsewhere. It often appears that the issues that art professionals from Flanders & Brussels experience are not limited to our national borders.

Working internationally: a different approach, or precisely not

The texts in this first issue of the magazine are diverse. To begin with, there are the facts and figures - the 'trends' - that the above analyses have revealed. We present a study of the internationalisation of the performing arts at the level of presentation and co-production. It is striking that, after years of growth, we suddenly see a shrinkage in international distribution and co-production. Have we reached the end of the growth period? Equally fascinating are the figures that we collected about the internationalisation of live music. On the basis of information collected from various social media, we composed a database that now contains information on more than 150,000 international concerts by Belgian artists. This not only sheds new light on the internationalisation of our music sector, but is also a nice practical example of how we can use big data to support the internationalisation of the music sector; on the basis of the data set we are making a web tool for bands and managers.

Figures and trends only take on meaning when placed beside the insights and ideas of people that are active in the (international) arts. We have gathered these insights and ideas in this magazine under the label 'reflections'. Pieter De Buysser, for instance, raises pertinent questions about the contradictions in the way we work internationally. He advocates an 'emancipated internationalisation'. Taru Elfving looks at artists in residence and sees how they seek, not isolation, but an ecosensitive engagement with the new. Hilde Teuchies outlines the role that art can play in reconquering the European commons.

Besides trends and reflections, this issue also features testimonials or 'stories' of

artists. These may in fact be the most important. Tom Van Imschoot looks with Selma and Soufiane Ouissi, and with Kobe Matthijs, at the stake and ambition of their artistic work. It is only via an apparent detour that they get at the international. But that way they can get to the core of the matter: for artists, the international is not just a theme, but an intrinsic part of a personal artistic commitment.

Paving ways

Perhaps these artists' testimonials contain the solutions to the issues raised by growing economic pressure and by the rapidly changing political context?

We can see that there are different ways of dealing with that growing pressure. A lot of artists and performers take on a pragmatic approach. After all, every day they have to ask themselves how to gain visibility in an internationalising environment. How do you find your way in an art market or music industry that is growing more competitive? Artists, managers and programmers appear enterprising. They pave a way for themselves. Some survive. A homeopathically tiny minority gets rich.

Besides that, artists and arts professionals are developing more fundamental answers to the dissatisfaction with the market such as it works today. Artists increasingly engage in their work with topics like internationalisation, mobility and sustainability. Sometimes they do this on the level of content, thematically. They're also experimenting more and more with alternative ways of working, in line with their artistic project and their frame of values.

If we need to talk about the internationalisation of the arts, then we need to talk about this. These types of reflections, practices and processes often go unnoticed. We need to give them more visibility and to consider their meaning and impact. Perhaps this is where the seeds lie for that new story about the value and meaning of working internationally, and not only in the arts, but also in society.

Joris Janssens,
head of research & development
at Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute

We wish to better understand what is happening — both in the arts and in society more broadly — and to get a better view of the responses that practitioners and policymakers are developing today.

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Trends, stories & reflections on new ways of working internationally in the arts

#1
November 2017

6

trends

Have Love, Will Travel

Quantitative
Analysis of
International
Concerts
by Belgian
Music Bands

Simon Leenknecht

16

reflection

Residencies and future cosmopolitics

Taru Elfving

26

story

Taking Time, Making Place

A Conversation
with Selma and
Sofiane Ouissi

Tom Van Imschoot

42

reflection

Reclaiming the European Commons Part One

Hilde Teuchies

48

story

Een ecologie van kunst- praktijken Gesprek met Agentschap

Tom Van Imschoot

8

reflection

Hello aunt Cécile, hello police officer: welcome and join in

Pieter De Buysser

38

trends

The Only Way is Up?

Quantitative
Analysis of the
Internationalisation
of the Production
and Distribution
of Flemish
Performing Arts

Simon Leenknecht

/re/framing the international #1 is the first issue of a three-part 'pop-up' magazine series in which Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute brings together trends, ideas and stories around new models of working internationally in the arts. Later in 2018 we will publish a summary of the results, giving way to possible new prototypes of working internationally.

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by emailing katrien.kiekens@kunsten.be

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you can read more online at kunsten.be
and on our blog via blog.kunsten.be**

A land of opportunity: announcing your gigs online



Consult Flanders Arts Institute's blog channel on Medium blog.kunsten.be if you want more information on our methodology for gathering online data on Belgian concerts.

Next to streaming services, which redefined the way we consume recorded music, websites such as Bandsintown or Songkick have changed the way people discover live music.

These 'gig-finders' notify millions of users about concerts of their favourite bands.

How can we use the data on these platforms for the benefit of the Flemish and Belgian music sector?

Songkick and Bandsintown offer artists the free opportunity to announce and promote their live concerts or DJ sets online. Users of these platforms can easily track upcoming (nearby) gigs of their favourite artists as they receive notifications through their inboxes or the Songkick and Bandsintown apps on their smartphones. Both gig-finders have struck deals with other online services, so that tour calendars from these platforms also appear when you google a band, follow an artist's Facebook profile or stream music on, for example, Spotify or Bandcamp. So when a band adds tour dates to their profile on Songkick or Bandsintown, they can be immediately communicated through various media. Moreover, ticket vending modules from companies such as Ticketmaster or Eventbrite are integrated into the concert announcements on these gig-finders, shortcutting the process of selling tickets.

Both Songkick and Bandsintown receive concert data from hundred thousands of artists, managers and venues. If dates are lacking, these platforms can pull in additional tour data from the affiliated ticket vendors. All this results in **a huge amount of information on concerts in all parts of the world by artists from all over the world, including Belgium. By collecting these data – within legal bounds – Flanders Arts Institute can gain insights into the international activities of the Belgian music scene as a whole.** Before they are analysed, the rough data are cleaned, disambiguated and supplemented with information from other sources (such as Setlist.fm or the event pages on artists' Facebook profiles).

A first comprehensive analysis of the data on Belgian concerts abroad is presented in this magazine (see *Have Love, Will Travel* in this issue). These new quantitative insights can complement or challenge existing field experience, leading to an enhanced understanding of the Belgian music sector. This elaborated knowledge can then be used for promotional ends with a scope that transcends the perspective of the individual artist. Knowing where Belgian artists play abroad and how frequently they play abroad is an asset for professionals promoting the Flemish or Belgian music scene in other countries.

We identify Belgian artists through Musicbrainz.org, an open database that provides metadata on artists to platforms such as Songkick and Bandsintown. So adding or enriching online data on Belgian artists not only benefits the research done at Flanders Arts Institute but contributes to all information on the Belgian music scene circulating on the Internet.

Flanders Arts Institute is working on a tool to directly share the gathered and processed data on Belgian concerts. This offers additional advantages for individual artists. Through the tool, Belgian artists will be able to see where fellow country(wo)men have played in the past. By learning from their peers, artists have more information at hand to choose where to play next, which might help them in developing an international career. The whole process of collecting and correcting tour data comes full circle if the tool encourages artists to (better) use the online platforms it aggregates data from, stimulating again the promotion of individual artists.

Simon Leenknecht, Tom Ruetten & Quinten Van Wichelen

Simon Leenknecht

Have Love, Will Travel

Quantitative Analysis of International Concerts by Belgian Music Bands 2013–2017

Internationalisation is of crucial importance for the music sector in Flanders and Belgium. Despite this importance, there were significant gaps in the knowledge about working internationally in this sector. In the context of the research project Reframing the International, Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute therefore presents a first comprehensive and detailed study of live concerts and DJ sets by Belgian artists abroad. The focus is on the 2013-2017 period.

By collecting data from various concert websites (Songkick, Bandsintown, Setlist.fm, Facebook Events) and by processing, correcting and completing this information where necessary, we arrived at a data set of 24,100 international live concerts and DJ sets by 1,378 Belgian artists between 2013 and 2017. The data mainly relates to artists from the genres of pop and rock. The concerts took place in 3,706 different cities in 109 different countries outside Belgium. In 46 of these 109 countries, a Belgian concert was organised in each of the five years under consideration.

Europe is the main market for Belgian concerts: 84 per cent of all the examined performances took place here. North and Central America (especially the US and Canada) came in second with a share of 11 per cent. The countries with the most concerts between 2013 and 2017 are respectively the Netherlands (5,147), France (4,851), Germany (3,481), the US (2,177) and the UK (1,933).

These are also the countries where on average most Belgian artists perform per year. The Netherlands offers the most varied sample of Belgian concerts. This is where we find the highest average (336) of artists per year and different genres are also represented. With France (on average 263 artists per year), Germany (194), the UK (128) and the US (90), four of the five biggest music markets in the world are represented. About 50 to 60 per cent of the Belgian artists that performed in these countries did so in only one of the examined years. The percentage of artists that performed in these countries in four or five of the examined years varies from 12 to 14.

Countries of the Schengen Area represent 74 per cent of all Belgian concerts. Belgium's neighbouring countries have a share of 57 per cent. In the BRICS countries, by contrast, only 2 per cent of concerts took place. Asia, South

America, Oceania and Africa have a joint share of about 5 per cent. These continents are home to the countries where no Belgian artist performed in the examined period.

Paris is the city with the highest average of concerts per year (243) and the highest average of Belgian artists per year (143), followed by Amsterdam (an average of 153 concerts per year, an average of 105 artists per year), London (152 and 90), Berlin (123 and 79), Utrecht (61 and 51) and New York (58 and 35). Among the most visited cities, there are mostly Dutch cities (including Breda, Rotterdam and Eindhoven).

Half of the 1,378 Belgian artists under consideration had a maximum of four international concerts between 2013 and 2017. Of the total number of artists, 66 per cent played abroad fewer than ten times during this period, while 24 per cent of Belgian artists are to be found in the category of ten to 49 international concerts and 6 per cent in the category of 50 to 99 international concerts. Three per cent had more than 100 performances outside Belgium. These three per cent are behind more than a third of all the examined concerts between 2013 and 2017. In each category we see a varied palette of Belgian artists from different genres and with different career trajectories.

Among the Belgian artists that performed the most abroad, it is almost exclusively DJs that played more outside Europe than in Europe. Among the artists that performed in the US in (almost) every year under consideration, we also mostly find DJs. The reason probably lies in the logistical advantage of DJs over live bands (there is generally a single DJ or a duo, with equipment that is easier to set up and transport, and the tour is generally less frequently interrupted by the production of new music).

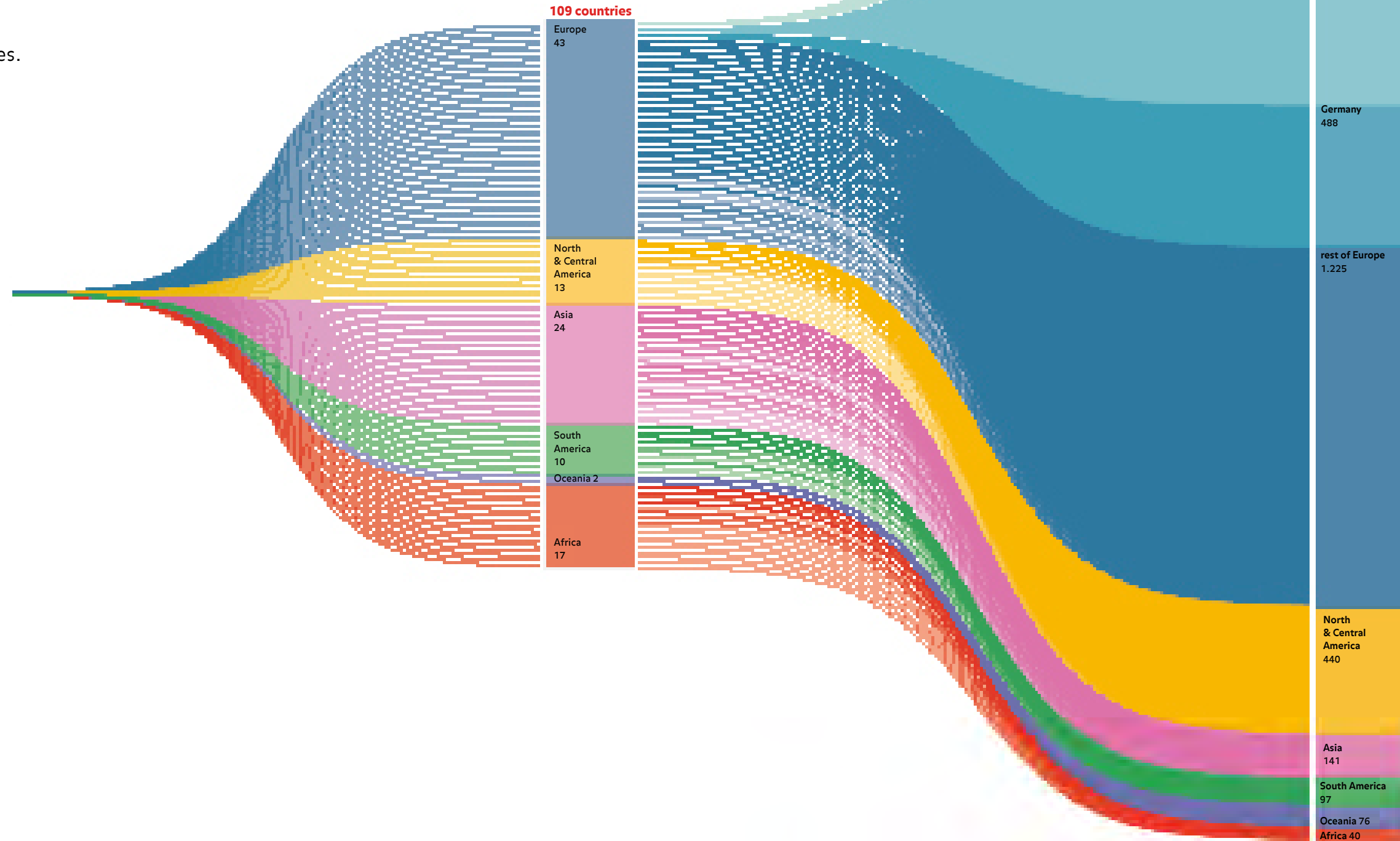
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at kunsten.be

DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING:

Quinten Van Wichelen,
Tom Ruetten, Diane Bal
and Simon Leenknecht

**Belgian music abroad:
where did they play?**

Between 2013 and 2017, 1.378 Belgian artists played in 109 different countries in Europe, North and Central America, Asia, South America, Oceania and Africa. In these 109 countries, the artists played in 3.706 different cities.



The Netherlands: between 2013 and 2017, Belgian artists performed 5.147 concerts in 377 different cities, making it the biggest market for Belgian concerts

France: the second biggest market in number of concerts (4.851), but with 822 different cities visited, it is the country with the largest geographical distribution of Belgian concerts

Germany: the third most visited country (3.481 concerts), with Belgian artists performing in 488 different cities

Belgian artists performed in 1.225 different cities in other European countries. Especially the **UK, Spain, Switzerland and Italy** are important markets. Including our neighbouring countries, there was a Belgian concert in 2.912 cities all over Europe

Oceania: although Belgian artists only performed in Australia and New Zealand, their concerts took place in 76 different cities in these countries.

Africa is represented by 17 countries, but less cities (40) were visited. Africa also has the smallest number of Belgian concerts (0,3% of the total)

Hello aunt Cécile, hello police officer: welcome and join in.

Pieter De Buysser

Good morning.

Border control is a booming business. Nation-states are strengthening; local armies are loading their ammunition.

Good morning.

Imagine that there was one artwork that broke with the idea of the artwork that we've been cherishing ever since Romanticism. Imagine that all artists, arts organisations, and cultural workers together created one artwork. The individuals would not need to agree. They wouldn't need to hold extra staff meetings, wouldn't need to rehearse – they'd just do it. Imagine that the collective artwork they produced broke with some of the classical paradigms we apply to an artwork; namely, that it has to be tangible – regardless of whether it's in a performance, on the screen, in a book, in a museum, in the public or private space... it has to be something.

Well, not anymore.



ABOUT THE KEYNOTE

Pieter De Buysser gave this speech at the /Re/framing the International kick-off meeting in Concertgebouw Brugge in December 2016.

This collective artwork would drop the romantic notion of a singular creator and would leave behind the idea of a product. This time we would not produce anything, we would not feed the juggernaut of art production that repeatedly produces art, producing to produce a product in the hope it will be seen by an audience and critics that thereby make its existence legitimate. The entire group of artists, the audience, and all the cultural workers: just one work. One work that no one can grab hold of. One work that would evolve, that would fly like sand, that would run like a river. One work that could not care less about approval or the judgement of this or that, just one enduring artwork.

And questions of internationalisation – the polarisation of the local and the global – would disappear, in the same way as non-life disappears from the newborn. Imagine if we were to jointly make room for that. That would be the work.

Anti-globalisation is being globalised, and very successfully too. It's conquering the world. The anti-globalisation movement is rapidly building a global empire of anti-globalisation.

We have the good fortune of living in interesting times. And every month, that luck increases. People all over the globe are starting to protest the side effects of globalisation. We are so lucky. For years, the protest against globalisation was a rather exclusive activity conducted by educated leftist students. It was a hard thing to do: you had to carry banners in harsh conditions in cities like Seattle, Genoa... there were violent fights with the police... Nowadays, these rebellious students, these leftist bohemian elitist experts come home and find that their entire family is against globalisation, even grandma. A decade ago, the naughty, critical, leftist youngster upset the boring bourgeois aunt and uncle with his beliefs, and now the boring aunt and uncle are joining in. Even cops and their families are joining in, along with the majority of the middle-class. Anti-globalisation is a massively popular event. What happened to those days? It began in a soggy marsh with electing a spokesman in a lousy t-shirt to rage against the machine, against the elite, against globalisation, and it has ended with electing the current President of the United States of America. Just ten years later. The anti-globalisation movement is truly living the American dream. From zero to hero. Who would have thought it? The millions and millions of voters in the US – and very soon in a country and town near you – are all rallying against globalisation. It looks like we've made it – this is our time. Anti-globalisation is being globalised, and very successfully too. It's conquering the world. The anti-globalisation movement is rapidly building a global empire of anti-globalisation. And it's going all the way: once again borders will be closed, walls will be built; isolation is seen as a politically valuable ideal, a love for country: all of this is on the increase. Nationalism is becoming the highest value and principle.

Things have shifted rapidly. From critical and edgy movements attacking corporate capitalism and neoliberal globalisation, they've turned into unification movements behind the flag of a nation.

What do the Arts have to do with that?

Nothing. Anyone who thinks the Arts can do something efficiently is being as ridiculous as a chicken that flies over the soup in which she will be cooked. But nevertheless, what the Arts can do is to call things by their name. Not the way they are, the way they should be. And by giving them a new name, we are giving them a new world.

Well, when we gather here under the theme of Reframing the International, we should state clearly that nationalism is to politics what incest is to ethics.

Touring internationally is, as it happens, highly problematic simply because of that gap between the worldview that's transmitted by the artwork and real practice

Time to shift the paradigm. But how?

Because the Arts have also been playing the game. Of course. Here we are. Look at us: hundreds of attendants wanting to hear about the internationalisation of the Arts. Maybe you're all hoping to receive some good advice, nice tips on how to better spread your work internationally, more fluently. Sorry for being the party-pooper so early in the morning. But let's face it and let's name it: all over the world people are rallying against globalisation, while in the arts we're gathering in nice buildings to discuss how to further globalise. We are behaving exactly as Marx said of the bourgeoisie: 'The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie all over the globe. Everywhere they must nestle, sell their products and establish new networks.' That's what these international networking events offer; they are meant to enable the arts to move around freely, looking for an expanding market for our products – this is what chases us all over the planet. 'Always hunting for new contacts, new networks, new opportunities.' This, according to Karl Marx, describes the successful life of the bourgeoisie. Well, to be honest, it sounds great to me. Truly pleasurable. It's what I want. I'm not in the business of a bidding war in moral lessons.

We love to sell our work globally. But I have a question regarding the consistency of the discourse, the worldview that is very often communicated in works that travel. There are probably few work environments so sensitive to the meaning of the context in which we operate as those of the Arts. This is a strength. Maybe we should use it to address some painful questions.

Let's have a look at some of the contradictions we live with: major gaps exist between the worldview, the ideals, the discourse expressed through the Arts, and daily practice. Touring internationally is, as it happens, highly problematic simply because of that gap between the worldview that's transmitted by the artwork and real practice.

The Arts have also been playing the game. Of course. Here we are. Look at us: hundreds of attendants wanting to hear about the internationalisation of the Arts.

Let's cite a few examples:

- 1/ Almost nobody in the Arts denies climate change, but the American Presidential Cabinet does, so that joke is covered. A large majority of people in the Arts is aware of the very urgent need to start with other daily practices, but the ecological footprint of an international tour is enormous. We all know that. But we really want to travel. For most of us, touring is very important and comprises much of the joy and passion involved in what we do. But we can certainly commit ourselves to finding more responsible ways of doing it.
- 2/ There is little work which tours internationally that openly defends the speculation on symbolical capital. Yet the speculation on symbolical capital is a key part of the international touring business.
- 3/ There are few works that could defend the superficial passing-through of other cities. Yet that is the standard way of touring.
- 4/ There are few works that would accept being labelled as a representation of the nation-state that funded their production. Yet this is the context in which our work is presented.

There are many other highly contradictory points to discover. With no problem whatsoever, I could make a moralistic statement saying to stop this hypocrisy. Luckily, the Arts has always had a tendency to be contrary. I think it's now or never: let's globalise.

If so many aspects of the international touring context are in contrast with the artists' values, what are we actually after? Is it money, fame, fun? Fair enough. Capitalism is very good at offering these goodies. But capitalism is even better at creating the desire for these goodies.

Money, fame, and fun. Maybe it's just that. I like that.

All three of these things. Let's go with that. It's beautiful. Let's enjoy it. We are exchanging ideas. We are exchanging beauty. And so may it continue. After all, it's the intensity of the exchange that makes people intellectually, morally, and aesthetically rich. Let's become richer and richer. Don't let's allow anti-globalists to destroy this or take it away. Maybe we should recognise this drive – it's the core of the passion and the joy. Let's play, let's play everywhere!

But, yes, there is a 'but'. There is a political price that comes with this and we had better deal with it.

We could choose to grasp this pivotal turning point and to do something.

It's time to come up with new models. While in the performing arts, touring from town to town will probably always exist, there are certainly ways to revise the ecological footprint.

Reframing the international can also mean to work profoundly in a context other than the one in which you're based. To not just drop-off one's product and move on.'

What would these new models look like?

Well there are many and none of them are new; they're just alternatives.

I want to talk about a personal experience. In touring performances to different places in Europe, I noticed that in some venues there is a match with the audience and the artistic staff, and so you return again and again. That's how in 2016 and 2017, I came to be the international artist-in-residence at Archa Theatre in Prague, where both my old and new works were presented many times.

This meant that for a certain period, my work resonated more in the press and in public life in the Czech Republic than in Flanders. This allowed me to address political and aesthetic issues with another bias, because I was a foreigner. Which then led to active and sometimes spicy involvement in the public debate. Reframing the international can also mean to work profoundly in a context other than the one in which you're based. To not just drop-off one's product and move on.

It can give you the opportunity to speak from an outside viewpoint. You're the fool, the stranger. There is a more reciprocal relationship in this kind of profound international work; more than mutual curiosity is at stake: both parties are invited to fundamentally review their respective identities. And this is something crucial that we need to do over and over again in this era where globalisation tests our fixed identity. It's a crucial way to deal with our fixation on identity. Both parties have a say and an impact on this relationship, and that submerges us in a new process of subjectification.

It's what I would call emancipated internationalisation.



Taru Elfving

Residencies & future cosmopolitics

Residencies for artists and curators have gained increasing significance within the ecosystem of contemporary art in the recent years as crucial nodes in international circulation and career development, but also as invaluable infrastructures for critical reflection, cross-cultural collaboration, interdisciplinary knowledge production, and site-specific research. Meanwhile the ongoing processes of wider societal changes – economic and geopolitical pressures as well as the impact of ecological and humanitarian urgencies – are affecting the arts, professional practices and mobility in ways that raise ever more acute questions concerning sustainability and access. The presentation aims at tracing out these complex coordinates of residencies and their potential today:

How can residencies offer safe spaces and escape routes as temporary retreats from political tensions, market forces, or patterns of thought?

How do they foster transformative encounters between practices, people and places across diverse boundaries?

What is the impact and value of travel beyond network opportunities, and how do residencies nurture this amidst all the global acceleration?

Moreover, can residencies work towards new cosmopolitics for tomorrow?

ABOUT THE KEYNOTE

Taru Elfving presented these ideas during the March 2017 Symposium '[Resonating Spaces] The value of residencies and workspaces in Belgium and The Netherlands' in LUCA School of Arts Brussels.

How can residencies offer safe spaces and escape routes as temporary retreats from political tensions, market forces, or patterns of thought?

Residencies as islands

Thinking about artist residencies today, I would like to start from an island. Specifically, I would like to ground my thoughts on residencies as arising largely out of the island of Suomenlinna in Helsinki, Finland, where the residency centre HIAP (Helsinki International Artist Programme) is located. Initially I collaborated with HIAP on a number of independent curatorial projects.^[i] I found that residencies were the most hospitable frameworks for research-based artistic and curatorial initiatives, where the outcomes were not so easily identified as driving the process, while coming together at a specific site was what mattered. I ended up working at HIAP as Programme Director (2012-13) and have continued close collaborations in my current role at Frame Contemporary Art Finland. We host together annual curatorial residencies and, amongst others, co-organised a symposium on residencies in November 2016.^[ii] I am also involved in the EU-funded project *Frontiers in Retreat*, which I initiated while at HIAP.^[iii]

Through many years and diverse projects, this particular island has proven to me to be an extremely resonant site for thinking about and working within the present, towards the future. As a military fortress Suomenlinna carries sediments of Russian and, prior to that, Swedish colonial rule as well as the more invisible traces of the trauma of the civil war at the beginning of Finland's independence 100 years ago, when it served for a moment as a prison camp. The island is listed as a Unesco World Heritage site and flooded with increasing numbers of tourists during the summer months. Meanwhile it is a living part of the city, with approximately 800 permanent inhabitants, 15 minutes ferry ride from the heart of Helsinki.

The ecology of Suomenlinna is also highly particular: It looks out to the open Baltic Sea, often called the most polluted sea in the world. The flora on the island is rather unique in the region thanks to the centuries of cultural migrations as part of the two historical empires. The windswept landscape of the island is thoroughly man-made, perforated by bunkers and lined with grass-covered old walls. Today the island is suffering from erosion, due to the herds of tourists as well as the cruise ships brushing by daily.

This particular island is, therefore, much like so many others and allows insight into both the problematics and potentialities of residencies: Detached yet close to the city it is ideal for retreats, offering focused time and space for critical reflection. It offers also a rich terrain for site-specific investigations, yet demands committed sensitivity to local environment and community. It, moreover, raises acute questions concerning community – nurturing formation of a temporary community

[i] See e.g. Centrifugal network: centri.wordpress.com

[ii] Residencies Reflected symposium: residencysymposium2016.wordpress.com

[iii] *Frontiers in Retreat*: frontiersinretreat.org

Detached yet close to the city it is ideal for retreats, offering focused time and space for critical reflection.

of artists-in-residence, while highlighting the challenges in engaging with the local art scene and its different temporality. As its own island, in multiple senses of the term, it is simultaneously a node of an international artist community, while loosely connected to the local arts. The growing pressures of audience development raise further questions regarding who and how should the work within the residencies made public.

Starting from this island I would like to think about residencies as temporary retreats with all the dilemmas that arise from this. Residencies are removed to an extent from not only the everyday of the artist's practice, community and context, but also their usual art world structures and discourses, hierarchies and histories. They can offer momentary retreats from processes of production – not only within the art market, but also institutions and biennials, private and public commissions, or discursive participation. They can, furthermore, provide platforms for modes of learning and research outside of the academic frameworks.

Meanwhile residencies remain connected through diverse flows: First of all, work for elsewhere, deadlines and new opportunities follow us around the globe. Residencies are also plugged into the intensified international art world circulation today that has led to its discourse and community to be always simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Residency programmes often focus on mediating professional dialogue and public engagement with the local scene and audiences in diverse ways. And last but not least, the ecological impact of travel – locally and on a planetary scale – can no longer be ignored.

There appears to be no escape in this age of omnipotent "action at a distance" – whether understood in terms of online networks or in terms of unequally and unpredictably distributed effects of climate change. Residencies find themselves today, therefore, located at the intersections of the unsettled dichotomies of private and public, home and elsewhere, temporary and permanent.

Role of residencies

The core role of residencies has traditionally been and continues to be to support artistic development. What this means in practice ranges from loosely structured individual residencies (from a few weeks to several months long) to 1-2 year non-academic post-graduate programmes and, for example, short intensive thematic group residencies. These models are interwoven with diverse aims and functions in different contexts. Without more in-depth discussion for now, I briefly touch upon a few examples that I am familiar with through collaborations or recent research:

Many artist residencies are connected to artists' studios and foster the dialogue with local artist community through shared spaces and/or curated programmes. Wysing Arts Centre near Cambridge, UK, is clear in its commitment to transdisciplinary and performative practices that are not so well supported in the largely market-driven art scene in London. They are known for their thematic annual programmes and intensives that bring practices together. Another residency following resonant ethos is Triangle Arts in New York, built on a significant history – initiated by an artist-collective to nurture experimentation and global connections, it grew into a world-wide Triangle network of residencies. SOMA in Mexico City, then again, is an example of an alternative artist-run art school that also incorporates residencies. Ashkal Alwan in Beirut has in similar ways connected residencies into its exhibition, discursive and educational programme that has been integral in the development of the city's now very dynamic international art scene.

Larger institutions also incorporate residencies in their activities: Museums are investing in residencies, for example in connection to longer-term community or research projects. Art & Science residencies are thriving in universities, such as MIT, but also hosted by interdisciplinary research institutes such as the British station in the Antarctica. Privately funded initiatives are also gaining increased presence, such as Fogo Island in a far-flung corner of Canada, which has become highly visible with its combination of artist residencies, architecture, high-end tourism and investment in the local economy. In comparison, there is a growing number of new artist-run, remote residencies committed to eco-critical thought and practices, such as Røst in the Lofoten islands in Norway. While as a response to the ever-more acute humanitarian urgencies and the deepening geopolitical as well as ecological crises, residencies are now also developed with a focus on offering safe havens for artists threatened by political persecution, such as the Artists at Risk network.

While residencies are paying more and more attention to their role within the wider ecosystem of the arts and are responding to the societal changes affecting artists today, they are also entangled in complex ways in the increasing pressures on financially precarious artists and curators.

While residencies are paying more and more attention to their role within the wider ecosystem of the arts and are responding to the societal changes affecting artists today, they are also entangled in complex ways in the increasing pressures on financially precarious artists and curators. Residencies are integral in the international network and career development, which is characterised by the so-called “residency hopping” – a stage in professional development that borders on a nomadic life style and impacts both artistic discourse and practices in numerous ways. Yet, the other side of the coin reveals that residencies are not simply a privilege, and not always a retreat, but also a significant part of contemporary survival strategies in the arts – offering short-term grants, studios and even accommodation. In this accelerated circulation, we may also ask, whether residencies in the end reinforce individualism, thus being in line with much of the art world structures and economy built on individual careers and names. Could they be isolating practitioners while aiming to bring them together? And feeding competition – from one open call to the next – even while encouraging sharing and critical reflection? What does it take to nurture collectivity within the structures that allow and encourage us to be mobile in the present?

Mobility: myths & materialities

As a frightening and fast growing number of people are today in favour of building walls, it is urgent to argue for the importance – or indeed necessity – of mobility. But the surge in populist politics adds to the challenges faced in this task in complex ways. The age of innocence is over concerning international mobility, even for us here in Europe.

The end of the last EU Culture Programme in 2013 signalled the end of an era, where mobility was valued in the name of intercultural and transnational exchange. This era may well have been driven simultaneously by idealistic impulses, diplomatic soft power and the realpolitik of building Fortress Europe, but there are reasons to insist on the need to revisit these ideals today. As the name of the Creative Europe programme that followed spells out, economic impact is what counts now. The tendency to quantify the benefits of mobility in terms of profit and the related pressures to measure impact, productivity, and applicability are extremely problematic in the arts. However, mobility can no longer be embraced uncritically even though we need to make ever-stronger arguments for its necessity.

All modes of cultural exchange and artistic explorations are entangled in the complex mesh of geopolitical and economic power relations. They have always been, yet today it is not just naive but frankly irresponsible to ignore that. What does it mean to be mobile at the time of enforced migrations, reinforced borders, growing xenophobia, escalating climate crisis, and mass extinctions? EU funding is of course only one instrument for supporting international mobility, but it draws into focus the need to reflect more closely on the terms of our travel today: Who has access to global circulation? How and what processes of value production does it take part in? Who and what do travel and, for example, ‘networking’ actually serve? What is the cost of being on the move – ecologically, socially, personally, intellectually? When and how can travel be considered sustainable?

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Three ecologies

Sustainability needs to be addressed today in broader terms than carbon footprint: In order to make sense of the potential and challenges of mobility in the arts today, it is necessary to reflect on how ecological questions are interconnected with economy and geopolitics, as well as cultural and knowledge production. Our work as professionals in the arts is entangled in this web in numerous different ways. As the recent political events have made clear, there are undeniable connections between neoliberal austerity politics, growing inequality and rise of populist nationalism. But this also unveils the legacies of colonialism in global capitalism and the interrelations between racism, sexism, and “extractivism” – the instrumentalised approach to both natural and human resources. How the financialisation of culture and the new forms of precarity entwine with all of this, concern us in the arts deeply.

Who can travel? Who can choose to not travel? For what reasons, by what means, with what cost? This all has to do with access – to movement across geopolitical borders, to material resources as well as knowledge and discourse, to funds and

support structures, to time and space. The increasing inequality of access has become obvious also within Europe, but it is amplified manifold in the global circulation.

The calls for intersectional solidarity between various histories and forms of oppression, and for awareness of their interconnections, are urgent within the arts today (e.g. Demos 2016). Felix Guattari’s call for a transversal understanding of ecology remains highly relevant here too:

“Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think ‘transversally’. Just as the monstrous and mutant algae invade the lagoon of Venice, so our television screens are populated, saturated, by ‘degenerate’ images and statements. In the field of social ecology, men like Donald Trump are permitted to proliferate freely, like another species of algae, taking over entire districts of New York and Atlantic City; he ‘redevelops’ by raising rents, thereby driving out tens of thousands of poor families, most of whom are condemned to homelessness, becoming the equivalent of dead fish of environmental ecology.” (Guattari 2000)

Although this quote may appear somewhat unfair for the algae in the light of recent political events, it remains hauntingly apt. Moreover, it is quite impossible to not see the implication of the arts in these processes mapped out by Guattari originally already in 1989. He defined three entwined ecological registers that all need to be addressed – the environment, the social, and the mental. To address these three ecological registers demands that we consider the complex interrelated processes and impacts of our work within the arts: How the knowledge and value produced in and through our work reinforce or challenge the unsustainable structures that permeate the society today? What processes do our practices participate in or contribute to – in terms of their environmental impacts, but also power relations in our communities and modes of communication, and in terms of their subjective affects?

To critically consider all of this is no mean feat to accomplish, especially when stuck in the midst of accelerated production driven today by what has been called survivalism. This is where my enthusiasm for slowing down comes in.

Here it is worth stressing the significant difference between the circulation of people in residencies and the circulation of art works in the institutions, biennales, and art fairs, where the works often get uprooted: at best they allow for awareness of historical, present or emergent connections across the globe.

But at worst they lose their capacity to communicate the subtle yet significant differences and feed into the dangerously simplified, monolithic visions of the world framed by the global market.

Situated retreats

How are residencies implicated in all of this? May residencies in their role as retreats hold particular potential in the formation of cosmopolitics for the future in the field of contemporary art.

Retreat is defined as – an act of withdrawing from what is difficult, dangerous or disagreeable; a process of receding from a position or state attained; a place of privacy or safety; and a period of group withdrawal for prayer, meditation or study. Retreat refers thus to a place and a time but also to an act. It may be considered as a state of being, a movement, or a particular moment inhabited. In similar terms residencies can be understood to be often intense experiences of isolation and self-reflection, yet all kinds of critical encounters also take place in residencies as retreats.

Residencies can be seen as active sites of transition and artists in residence as mediators, who move between and connect places and people, cultural contexts, site-specific and disciplinary knowledges, subjective and shared experiences. They gather and disseminate ideas and methods. They are challenged and influenced, while they also challenge and influence others, both in the everyday and professional interactions. They weave connections between the local and the planetary, both in their work and in their interrelations.

While residencies appear as nodes on a map of transnational circulation, they are always also located in specific contexts. They are sites, where local and global are intensely woven together and where so-called site-specificity has to be critically re-considered. In the era of advanced globalisation and climate change, each and every site is already deeply embedded in global processes. Their specificities only come into focus in and through relations to elsewhere. Moreover, site can be understood today as a situation, an event. It is not a backdrop, an object of study, or an environment to inhabit – rather, it is in ceaseless formation that we are all part of.

This calls for a shift in the understanding of site-specificity. Sensitivity to local particularities requires today critical positioning of the artist, curator or researcher engaging with it in the midst of the ongoing movement between places. We need to ask: What do these engagements do and leave behind? Who and what do they serve? Can they have any local impact or global effects beyond the value production in the sphere of the international art world?

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circulation of art works in the institutions, biennales, and art fairs, where the works often get uprooted: at best they allow for awareness of historical, present or emergent connections across the globe. But at worst they lose their capacity to communicate the subtle yet significant differences and feed into the dangerously simplified, monolithic visions of the world framed by the global market. When people move and meet all kinds of transformative encounters are indeed possible, but not guaranteed.

How and when do residencies truly allow for the commitment to critical reflection and openness for unexpected entanglements, for research and experimentation without predefined ends? What does it take to live up to the promise of residencies as retreats – from the pressures of production and even of political persecution; for artistic development rather than mere networking and cv-building; for cross-cultural dialogue and collaborations rather than “site-specific lite” productions for global circulation that exhaust local communities as resources?

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Cosmopolitics

This has led me to reconsider what cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics may mean today. Nikos Papastergiadis has written recently on what he calls “aesthetic cosmopolitanism”, focusing on the significance of globally oriented contemporary art practices and their relationship to transnational social movements. He argues that a diverse range of locally rooted artistic practices today demonstrate a shared consciousness towards global issues. Yet they cannot be grouped together based on formal resemblances or on common cultural traditions. These practices, he claims, provide new grounding for the debates on the politics of globalization, the ethics of hospitality, and the culture of cosmopolitanism, as they create alternative models for cross-cultural dialogue.

Cosmopolitanism needs to be, furthermore, rethought as integrally connected with the complex and grounded realities of multiculturalism. They are “co-constitutive”, Papastergiadis argues. *“Art has a role in both forging a specific knowledge of the world and initiating new modes of being in the world”*, Papastergiadis writes (2012), and continues that art has a capacity to “not only capture a cosmopolitan vision of the world but also to initiate situations in which the artists and public participants are engaged in the mediation of new forms of cosmopolitan agency”. Knowledge, visions, modes of being and forms of agency – these do not come easy. Rather, the challenge of cosmopolitanism is that it “requires a greater commitment towards openness” and, simultaneously, “an appreciation that differences really matter”. (Papastergiadis 2012)

This connects, in my mind, to the thinking of Isabelle Stengers on cosmopolitics. The combined challenge of radical openness and irreducible differences resonates with the call by Stengers to be attentive to all those who have a stake and will be affected by political decisions: “Cosmopolitics means that politics should proceed in the presence of those who will bear the consequences, not only of “humans” who will be the victims of political decisions, but of the multiple divergent worlds they belong to.” (2016) This concerns the ecological urgency to expand the notion of community and the ethics of co-dependence beyond the human. There are no quick fixes here, no universal solutions, transcendent common interests, or mutual understandings. This means facing and addressing “wild divergence” that cannot be tamed by “reducing it to problems of communication”. (Stengers 2016)

Cosmopolitics, in these terms, requires slowing down, Stengers argues. Yet the call for slowness is radical in today’s project and attention economy. It may also appear deeply problematic in the face of the urgencies and multiple crises unfolding

in front of our eyes at a terrifying pace. But if it is considered in terms of what Donna Haraway has recently called “staying with the trouble” (2016) it seems to me undeniably necessary, especially in the field of the arts and critical thought, to situate oneself: To reflect on and to articulate what means and aims, affiliations and affinities guide one’s practice and how?

Transformative encounters require critically situated practices – and not just of the artists but also of curators and others working in and shaping the institutions of art. This implies being accountable and attentive for where one stands: the complex interdependencies with their entangled histories and futures that form the ground under one’s feet and thought. This deep implication of our practices within the wider processes of transformation is not a cause for paralysis, but rather a source of agency. We can affect change.

Response-abilities

Critically situated practices demand the nurture of response-ability, as Haraway argues: “*To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet.*” (Haraway 2008)

Yet, why should this involve any further travel? After all, globalisation has opened up networks that allow for new modes of exchange, global resistance and movement building to take place. Is travel still significant, and if so, why? Can it work against the formation of detached bubbles and populist polarisations that the very same online media and platforms have nurtured?

For example, Brexit in the UK taught us that the strongest opposition to immigration was often in the areas with least immigrants. Meanwhile, ecological awareness at the time of climate change requires that planetary perspectives are also grounded and responsive to irreducible specificities of local ecosystems. Here further knowledge and access to information is not enough, as many frustrated climate scientists are saying today. We do need more multidisciplinary information and better tools for negotiation, yet we also need tools for transition. We seem to be running out of time, and of ideas. Art has a significant role to play here, I believe.

As Timothy Morton writes: “*Art is thought from the future. Thought we cannot explicitly think at present. Thought we may not think or speak at all. If we want thought different from the present, then thought must veer towards art.*” (Morton 2016)

As retreats residencies may act as laboratories for situating and re-grounding ourselves in this turmoil – with a focus not only on what but also on how we practice – as artists, curators, institutions. International artist residencies can offer safe spaces for hospitality, generosity and sharing rather than ever-increasing competition for survival. They also make us question, what it means to be offered temporary residence today? This comes with promises, possibilities and responsibilities. After all, many do not have the privilege to be hosted and given residence while also being able to return back home when the time is up. To be a resident calls for us to think of how to be other than a tourist consuming novel experiences and environments, or an explorer in search of new resources to extract, or an introvert hermit momentarily retreating to wherever elsewhere?

Travel may not always mean long geographical distances – such as in the case of residencies that today work as local support structures for precarious artists, for example in London, or residencies outside of art institutions, hosted by universities, community initiatives, even corporations. Retreat may then be a withdrawal from some kind of action and interaction, but simultaneously a dynamic activation of other modes of experience and experimentation: not necessarily literally retreating from the centre – from cities or structures of the art world – but radically challenging the very notion of the centre – through retreat from traditions of thought or habitual patterns of practice.

Slowing down may then actually be an acceleration or intensification of our critical and creative capacities of response – of “response-ability”. It calls for experiments with forms and formulations of community, collectivity, and co-existence that work to break with institutional hierarchies as well as all gendered, racialised, and naturalised power dynamics. To support this, institutions have to become accountable for their blind spots and exclusions. They need to commit to the development of more inclusive practices across those borders that are being reinforced around and between us right now – between cultures and peoples, between disciplines and modes of knowledge, and between individual practices and collective processes.

Meanwhile the sense of emergency should not lead to a fear or dismissal of complexity and opacity. Rather, with an acute attention on the always partial positions and perspectives, the insistence on the diversity of discourses and the embrace of epistemological multiplicity does not have to add up to post-factual relativism. Quite the contrary, to take time to do the necessary hard work of situating our practices in the face of the multiple intertwined urgencies today can allow us to challenge the bubbles of alternative facts.

Or, in the words of Toni Morrison (2016):

“This is precisely the time when artists go to work.”

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Tom Van Imschoot

A Conversation
with **Selma** and
Sofiane Ouissi
after Ten Years of
Dream City

Taking Time; Making Space.

As a brother and sister team, Tunisian choreographers and dancers Selma and Sofiane Ouissi (b. Tunis, 1975 and 1972, resp.) form a unique artist duo, integrally binding artistic and social engagement in every project. Their art investigates the conditions of living together. They want to 'dream' different communities, employing the wealth of the human body in order to see what powers are alive in our social relationships to create another sense of community. Ten years after they breathed a public life into their dream in the Medina in Tunis, in the form of Dream City, now a multidisciplinary, biennial festival for contemporary art, I spoke with them while passing by in Ghent, on a warm, late summer evening. They were openhearted, without reservations. Their voices melded together, assessing, testing, within the context of a shared vision, looking back and looking forward. 'The question is: do you want to do something for the world you live in or not?'

ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

Commissioned by Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute, Tom Van Imschoot talks to artists who developed a new take on working internationally through their artistic practices.

Working visit to Dream City 2017
organized by Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute
© Lissa Kinnaer



Selma and Sofiane grew up in Tunis and trained as dancers there. Since they began creating works that were internationally widely performed, such as *STOP...BOOM* (2004) and *Waql* (2007), they have been viewed from far and wide as figureheads of the contemporary Arabic dance scene. A choreography such as *Here(s)* (2011), which they created in real time via Skype, together with media artist Yacine Sebti, is no exception to that status. Nor is the success that they have enjoyed following a commission from the Tate Modern to create a work for a worldwide Internet audience, entitled *Les Yeux d'Argos* (2014). The traditional image of Arabic art, inevitably and endlessly reproduced for tourism, as a craft or inherited tradition, here makes way for a contemporary practice, one that seeks loopholes in everyday social environments in order to create previously unseen public connections. With Selma in Paris and Sofiane (back) in Tunis, that may as well be simple necessity. Although with them, the friction between creating art and living together stems from an integral artistic démarche.

In the intense collaboration that defined them from the start, they no longer approached 'dance' as an objective in its own right, in the classical sense, but as a method for engaging in dialogue with a context, and in this way to make public that which is invisible, inaudible or marginalized to that particular context. Taking the time, making a place for the other, making direct contact, and focussing attention on the human body are, for them, not just idle words, but real gestures in a post-disciplinary practice that always and everywhere relies on local encounters. It can therefore

Hela Ammar, Dream City 2017
© Pol Guillard



ATDK, Dream City 2017
© Pol Guillard

be perceived as both poetic and political. *Laaroussa* (2013) is characteristic in this connection. It is a choreographic performance based on age-old, ritual gestures of women potters in the Tunisian village of Sejnane, as well as the result of a group process that lasted several years, in which dance served to give back a worthy self-image to these women, as well as setting up the beginnings of self-organization for their community.

Their recent *Le moindre geste* (2017) is comparable, because of the importance of that group process. It evolved from a European collaboration between the Museum of Fine Arts (MSK) in Ghent, Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona and the FRAC Lorraine in Metz, with performances at Festival Passages in Metz and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, which has been following Selma and Sofiane for some time now. For this project, they engaged with very diverse local communities in Metz, Brussels and Ghent, in search of the revolutionary power of the small gesture to transcend social and linguistic barriers. Based on this, they created an installation with performance, illustration and video, which allowed a broad public to come eye-to-eye with the life stories of fellow citizens living in the margins. The content of each performance is different, because the deciding factor is always the specific local context. Selma and Sofiane moreover seek out precisely that feeling of empathy with what does not fit into the official narrative.

Concrete proximity is crucial here, with the body as a membrane between private and public. When I spoke with the Ouissis, they had just returned from an intense visit to the prison at Oudenaarde. By way of coaching from the Museum of Fine Arts, prisoners had worked with the protocol that they had made for *Le moindre geste*. But they also felt they needed to meet the Ouissis in person, to know just who they were. It was a highly emotional moment. *'We do not work with a protocol like that in order to conceal ourselves as artists, but to become unseen, invisible,'* they explain. *'It is a way of giving the space to the others, so they take it into their own hands. This way, we avoid any artistic discourse imposing itself on what is taking place. We can't stand that. As artists, we impose no gestures that put us in the middle of the creation. In this case, those who were involved really wanted to speak to us in person, so that made the meeting very delicate.'*

Their presence speaks volumes about their engagement – humanist, going into the breach for their contemporaries. For Selma and Sofiane Ouissi, however, all this is utterly self-evident. *'All of our projects take their meaning, their sense, even their direction from an immediate relationship with the local social context.'* Nonetheless, the time that they take, or make, is remarkable, especially since at the very time of our meeting the next edition of Dream City in early October 2017 is in full and intense preparation. Dream City is an initiative of L'Art Rue, a collective that the Ouissis established in 2007 for the production and dissemination of contemporary arts in Tunisian public space. As a biennial festival it has been ensuring and honing interaction between the arts, the public and the city of Tunis since then. In a time of dictatorship (three years before the Arab Spring in 2010), the first edition gave expression to a desire to reinvent art on the spot, to ask 'what people were looking at and

who was allowed to look', what freedom was permissible and what role the artist had regarding it. Ten years later, that desire still burns. Have the artistic questions of the Ouissis changed in the meantime?

Selma and Sofiane Ouissi:

Do artists and the arts they practice truly make up part of a societal project? This is the larger question that concerns us. We find it our duty to keep asking it, because we think that art should effectively serve as a part of the construction of a society, as a dreamed, or dreamed-of construct. What do you do for the place where you are? L'Art Rue collective is our answer to that question, not only in the form of Dream City, but also in its attention to art education, support for contemporary Tunisian creation, a magazine, the Laaroussa art factory in the Tunisian countryside, and so on. We clearly devote a lot of time to it, but it is our way of helping to build the structure of our country, as a dreamed society. We are not just doing it for ourselves. We also try to find working methods to support other artists in finding local anchorage for their projects, so that our work, as it were, is constantly doubled, and unfolds in a democratic space that is open to everyone. In that way we want to create dreamed-of spaces. And in doing so, the support and the assistance we give to others, the giving itself is essential.

What do you exactly mean with the recurring theme of a 'dreamed', or 'dreamed-of' space or society (*espace rêvé; société rêvée*)?

We are talking about 'dreamed' in a utopian sense, but in a very concrete way. Take the prison that we have just come from. That is a dreamed society, because we meet people there whom you normally may not and cannot meet, people whom other people are constantly judging and with whom you spend no time, because the regular society has decided the way it has. Our work establishes a protocol, a framework, a project, a concept that can be shared by people who would otherwise not meet one another. As a result, the rules of the society are shifted a bit, and something becomes possible that would otherwise be unthinkable. That also explains our need to be physically present somewhere, and to work completely from an actual physical proximity.

Does the need for physical embedding in concrete situations explain why you are almost completely absent in the virtual sense? There is a real dearth of information about your work on the Internet.

It is true that promotional dissemination of our work does not concern us. We do not have a website of our own. That has nothing to do with any rejection of modern communications media. On the contrary, Skype is one of our artistic tools. But we prefer to remain in the margins, and to work from immediate physical contact. We have no interest in the economic system of an art market that revolves around marketing and consumerism. We first have to get to know people and the art centres they work in, in order to see whether we can really work with them. The distribution of our work is through stories told mouth-to-mouth, and even then it can happen that a theatre or a person who invites us does not

appeal to us, for example, because they deal with time differently. We are not a product. We seek a dialogue that can carry on through time. That continuity is something we need. And that never happens straightaway. It is not easy to just instantly expose or reveal our practice on demand.

So time is the very matter that your work and your working method primarily require?

Absolutely. Moreover, as an artist, you have to be able to give yourself time as well. But that is not obvious in the contemporary art world. The institutions play a major role in this. They kill off the way of experiencing time that we stand for. Most museums are factories. They place orders and constantly want something new, something that has not yet been presented. But this creates a bulimia in the circuits of programmers and curators. Curators who invite you to take your time are rare. They want efficiency, because, of course, they have to account for themselves in the context of the numbers of tickets sold. The result is chronic, permanent stress. But is that really the way art is created? Is the size of an audience an indication of the quality of a project or process? We absolutely do not want to be efficient. The focus on results merely ensures that curators or artists no longer ask themselves why they are doing something or how they achieve something, when in fact, that is the only thing that matters if you want to appeal to an audience.

How do you mean?

What matters is not the result, but how you get there, the urgency with which you proceed. Showing that how and why offers people the space to become poetically and politically engaged. The question is therefore how you can create a process in which the generosity is already built in. For it is precisely in connection with this generosity that we find ourselves in crisis today.

Is your way of dealing with time an answer to that very crisis?

Yes. For Dream City, for example, we are inviting European artists to spend time immersing themselves in the city before they begin. All we are asking is that they take the time. It often confuses them, but in a good way. Jozef Wouters, for example, who is taking part in the 2017 edition, has completely changed his approach as a result. So taking the time is simply essential. You cannot expect an artist to just constantly produce all the time. It is unhealthy and even a violation. It means you create vicious circles. Sometimes a project takes several years. That is not something crazy – it is just normal.

Ten years have passed since the first edition of Dream City in 2007. Has the time that has passed since then also had its effect?

Yes, a lot has changed since then and now, but not in terms of our method. From the very beginning, we felt an urgency to involve unconventional, public places in Tunis and to work there in a collective way with other Tunisian artists. But it was certainly never our idea to begin a biennial project. It was originally about a one-time creation, a project in consultation with Frie Leysen of the Kunstenfestivalde-sarts. It was at the request of the public that the initial artistic project grew into a biennial event.

An instance of being in the right place at the right time, shortly before the Arab Spring?

It was a real turning point, for the audiences as well as for us and other artists. It was an artistic *coup d'état*. It all began live, on radio, when we made a call for a peaceful march by all artists and art students, because we wanted to show the government how many of us there were, without anyone having a decent artistic statute. Yet, that

was actually a bit naïve of us. In a dictatorship, you are not allowed to speak out certain things, actually say such things as ‘President of the Republic’, ‘government’, ‘march’, or ‘occupying public space’ out loud, and we had in fact spoken them all of them out loud. The result was that the broadcast was immediately intercepted, and the journalist who had invited us was removed for a long time. Everybody around us was really terrified, but we did not ourselves live in Tunis at that time, and that saved us.

But the story did not end there...

No, it didn't. Direct confrontation with censorship made it just physically tangible how public space in fact did not belong to us. It was at best an instrument for the propaganda of the head of state and his government. You were also not allowed to come together in public space with more than three people at a time. In our creative work, however, we already had the habit of installing a laboratory for reflection, in which we could open up our artistic methods and materials to students who could make use of them for their own creations. So when we tried to think up a concept whereby people could peacefully and innocently walk through the city for art, we continued along that path. We began to carry on discussions in order to assess who was interested, and based on that, we wrote down the whole methodology and the concept.

What are they?

Methodologically speaking, we had the idea of surrounding ourselves with artists, philosophers, sociologists, art critics and journalists, and to support them in realizing their creations in situ, in unconventional and public places. We asked them to show how they dreamed of their city, in their own (artistic) medium. The title Dream City originally came from that theme. Moreover, as an extension of that dream, we decided to completely

ignore all financial concerns. Every time we returned to Tunisia, our experience was that artists indeed had no place and no resources, but because of that, they were constantly complaining about everything. We wanted to turn that negative energy around, so we asked ourselves what we could think of together: how can we, together and without financial means, try to conceive of a work that establishes and maintains contacts with others? How can we forge a collective energy that is stronger than what you can do on your own, that makes things possible that you could not achieve on your own?

So the idea of a work of your own changed into a decision to work with and for others?

It seemed senseless to us to try to set up a work alone. That would never have had the same impact. We could not march for our own art ourselves, of course, the public had to do that. Moreover, that choice was also an answer to another crisis that we were experiencing.

What crisis was that?

At the time, we had already been working internationally for a while, but after our performances, we had come to notice that we were generally always performing for the same kind of audiences. We could easily grow old bowing to the same applause, we thought, as if we were performers for a royal court. But that is not art. That was simply not what we wanted! For us, that too seemed like a form of dictatorship. You are mostly busy protecting the amount of money you're collecting. And sooner or later, you become politically recycled. We asked ourselves: is that what our work is for? Is that what we want to do every evening of our lives? Dancing for the bourgeoisie of Tunis? Doing that, we would never really succeed in creating freedom. We kept asking ourselves where the young people were, or the people who were not being admitted.

And that led to the idea of moving into the city and coming together at changing places?

Exactly. Although we also needed a tactical plan in order to do that. During the dictatorship, we did not have the right to do what we wanted. We had to move underground. We regularly met with about 20 artists in Sofiane's small living room to discuss who wanted to realize what and where. We also needed to select an appropriate date, which eventually was the anniversary of the Ben Ali coup d'état in 1987, on 6 and 7 November.

Why was that an appropriate time?

Because all government agents would be at the presidential palace for the national festivities! Nobody knew anything about it. We were only able to give substance to our plan the day before, because we were not permitted to communicate. On the morning of the opening, Sofiane was even taken to a police station with 50 agents, whose boss was constantly yelling, *‘What do you mean, all those artists in public space?! Just where do you think you are going to go?’* That was heavy. But suddenly it turned out that there were masses of young people all out in public spaces, in the thousands. And 7,000 to 10,000 people in the streets – that even intimidated the police! Nobody had expected that, not even us. That is what is so incredible. You think, and you work, but you actually don't know that there are so many people interested in this aesthetic, artistic project. But they are. Those huge numbers of people were our salvation. The lesson was that the people were already there.

And they asked you to come back?

Yes. It was on public demand that Dream City went from being a one-shot thing to a biennial. There were also many artists who were pushing to continue. We took them out of their theatres and galleries

to place them eyeball to eyeball with the community. And that in turn opened them up as well. That caused their practices to shift in ways that they also found very interesting. But the mass interest also had a downside. During the second edition, which was again open to local artists, it seemed as if we were having to carry the entire artistic community. That was too heavy a burden; it became a ghetto. So we were thinking that we couldn't do it anymore. This was not our mission. From that point forward, we invited Jan Goossens to come help us out.

What did his arrival bring with it?

In the first place, Jan saw to it that there was a buffer between us and the other Tunisian artists. It was too big a burden for us to have to choose between artists to whom we were so close! And at the same time, you have to be able to objectively say that somebody must be left out. Jan also insured the necessary opening to the international circuit. That is one of the most important differences from the first editions, and it still keeps on stimulating us today.

In what sense did that international dimension alter the process?

Someone from the outside who looks in at your society causes you to take ten steps forward, compared to someone who is completely in the middle of it and has no overview of the whole. The confrontation between those two perspectives is interesting. You learn a lot about people and about the world. If you remain together as members of the same culture, you cannot keep learning. At the same time, that opening up to the international art world has also helped us realize that we needed to anchor our work much more solidly. And that we had to incorporate more time. That can take place through working with other groups of people or it can entail exploring and trying to

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Nidhal Chamekh, Dream City 2017
© Pol Guillard



Jozef Wouters, Dream City 2017
© Pol Guillard



understand the places where those people live more closely.

Is your project with the women of Sejnane for Laaroussa an example of that?

Yes, in a certain sense it is, but Laaroussa came about entirely separately from Dream City. In October of 2010, just before the revolution, we were in a beautiful country region. We were extremely interested in the way the women behaved and the ancestral, gestural character of their gorgeous pottery culture. They lived isolated from each other in unsightly hamlets, not in a community, so we decided to go from door to door in order to tell them that we would like to do a project, as well as assess what the women themselves would like. We had nothing more to offer than our art, so what was it that they themselves needed in order to get started? What they answered every time was ‘time’ itself. Those women needed time for their work, because it was not acknowledged or recognized anywhere, by anyone, as anything even vaguely artistic, and they moreover combined it with caring for their children and maintaining their households in poverty-ridden conditions.

So next to their craft, they all actually shared a basic need for time?

Exactly. So with that in mind, we returned to Tunis to write out a project that would ultimately last for three years. In the first year, we invited lots of diverse artists who could, together with those 60 women and their children, create a kind of dream horizontal society. Each of us chose a role that he or she wanted to do every day for that community. We based it on the local reality. The children had to be cared for, so there were artists who decided to open up a kindergarten and work there. The region has very little water, and people always had to fetch it from far away, so some did that, while others cooked. The landscape is vast, and the mobility of the women is limited, so we also organized minibuses to pick them up every morning and take them to a place where they could get to know each other and learn to work together. That had never happened before. The horizontal structure helped clarify what could be achieved with the division of labour and by working together.

Was that the ultimate goal of the whole organization that you set up?

Our first idea was that ultimately, at the end of the first year, everyone would offer something to that community. We chose to make a choreographed video of their gestures and to archive it all in that way: not by interpreting those gestures, but by reflecting them, and giving them back to them. The gestures that you make every day are gestures that you no longer see, but if someone sublimates them and mirrors them back to you, you notice them again, and they can suddenly have a great affect on you. The women wept when they saw the video. It was also a gift especially for them – not something to be distributed elsewhere. The fact of giving itself was central to the project. The factory that we established as a result lived on for three years. After the project had finished, UNESCO recognized their expertise as immaterial patrimony, which was huge news for everyone. The only thing that we think is a shame is that we were unable to continue on with the factory. We searched, we tried. The structure was there, but we could not find the right people or means. But in the meantime, the

women themselves had learned to work together, and they are still doing that. That remains.

In artistic circles, did people think it odd that the makers of an urban contemporary art festival would work so intensely with a rural craft culture?

No. Right after the revolution, there were dozens of artists interested in regions like that. Moreover, Dream City generated other projects in those rural regions. For example, we had an edition that took place at the same time in both Tunis and Sfax. But that was too complicated. We wouldn’t do that again. You cannot go out in search of being anchored locally at the same time in both Tunis and somewhere else. But that is also not necessary. For the 2017 edition, we have invited artists from different regions to get to know our construct and our method, and then they can do whatever they want to do with it. We cannot do everything ourselves.

Did the question of ‘how to share an artistic practice’ that arises in Le moindre geste evolve from that? With the idea of a shareable, freely applicable protocol as an answer?

Partly. FRAC Lorraine had asked us to redo Laaroussa in Metz, but that seemed impossible to us because of the local anchoring, so we developed Le moindre geste instead. ‘What is the connection to the city in this particular case? What is the need that Metz itself has?’, we asked. In Laaroussa, it was clear that the women involved all shared an expertise, but what is shared in Europe? That was already rather more complicated.

How did you go about then?

We never work from a pre-conceived idea. The idea always evolves from a meeting with others and through the friction that we seek with the area in which we work, so we began to speak with local organizations and associations in order to gain some fuel. On the one hand, they pointed out people in the city who were marginalized, all those people nobody hears. On the other hand, they spoke about the presence of foreigners, people who are categorized according to

stereotypical questionnaires into bureaucratic indexes, and idiotically enough, about whom the most important thing seems to be that they learn to speak the language, become integrated and culturally recognizable.

So what idea did you develop out of these local conversations?

Our idea was in any case not to get in between the many population groups that we met and point fingers or stigmatize them. We wanted to create an open space. We asked ourselves how we could help repair the conversation between people and groups. How can we create a space in order to speak? How do you take the time to really look at and listen to one another? What can bring together and re-establish bonds amongst people who have nothing to do with each other, in a way that means that they are all engaged with the project? We felt that we had to start out from something that all people share in common. So we came to a protocol of five interview questions around the life stories of the participants. Who is the other? What do I share with him or her? Well, the answer is precisely that individual life story.

Our protocol functioned as a kind of musical score for sharing widely diverse life stories. And consequently, the participants themselves were able to determine the directions that they took.

Do these performances still bear your signature?

We don’t want any signature! We always start out from the unknown, without an idea, in search of a concrete necessity, the need that we feel in a concrete place. It is because of the degree to which we dig deeper in a place that the idea slowly presents itself. What interests us is that investigation, always putting ourselves at risk, again and again. We throw ourselves into the middle of a situation that we are not familiar with and know absolutely nothing about.

Are there any fixed anchor points, or recurring references, that inspire you in doing so?

No, we don’t have references either. We are not ‘inspired’, so to speak. Or to put it differently, our inspiration comes from where we go. It is visceral. Our work starts out from the encounters, and within them, we experiment and fabricate, but we have no words to place above

them. In the meantime, we know how it works for us, but there have also been other times. We have often been confronted with programmers, primarily French, who constantly wanted to put us in a specific framework. They felt that as artists, you had to have references. But it bothered us to have to pretend that we knew something, that we had already found our way, as it were. For we may be standing here today, but tomorrow we are somewhere else. Perhaps that works because there are two of us. That is a strength. In that sense, our own life trajectories are our only reference.

I see, but doesn’t every life have particular influences?

Certainly. Perhaps our family is one of those influences – a family of opponents. Among our grandparents’ family, where we spent a lot of time, there was an aunt who was an artist, and was involved in Sufism. She was always bringing in other people. She opened the door to everyone: all the artists in the neighbourhood regularly came together, and even the gentleman who held open the door to the building was welcome. Those moments of exchange, that intellectual breeding place, with all those people who went to theatres



Johan Lorbeer,
Tarzan/Standing Leg,
Dream City 2010

and to concerts, to the cinema – all that certainly influenced us. It is ultimately perhaps even true that it is this atmosphere that we are always trying to rediscover. But in the world of dance, for example, in which we were trained, if you speak about influences, then what they are talking about are influences from a specifically aesthetic handwriting. And we have always rejected that idea of an aesthetic signature.

Why?

Again, that has to do with the anchoring. We feel the need to ensure that every gesture is grounded: that it is justified, or justifiable, and useful to society. We need to have a relationship with real life. In that sense, we have an aversion to all aesthetic discourse. There are artists who can do that, but for us, wanting to be at the centre of one's own discourse feels like a hindrance. We do not believe that you can impose a discourse like that on the world, unless it is grounded in a deeply lived experience of things. It is because things touch you or move you that you feel the need to find words for them, not the other way around. In dance, it works the same way. With every creation, we always start out from the body, seeking to find the necessary attitude towards the issues that the body confronts. Going into the studio consequently means asking ourselves on which body and with which approach we are going to work. It is precisely this that requires so much time for thought. Because, if you do not record or fix the handwriting, you do not know whether what you're doing is right. You work and you think more by feeling, by testing it out. Little by little, however, we actually stopped dancing altogether.

Because that was never the objective in itself, having no focus on an aesthetic signature?

Indeed. Moreover, we also wanted to make a radical break with tradition. People need traditions because they are frames of references for how to do things. But what if that means that all you're doing is repeating the same references? At one point, we said to each other that we were going to stop going to the studio and maintaining our bodies the way we had always learned to do. We wanted to be able to get closer to the everyday, ordinary body, instead of striving for sublime perfection. That was a very clear break, a break with a certain idealism.

Did you really finish with 'the dance'? Or did you begin approaching dance differently?

Well of course, we certainly have a great deal to thank dance for. It awakens a mystical, spiritual dimension in you, while at the same time allowing you to feel and touch one's body from very close by. It brings you in contact with the respiration of life itself. But dancing is more than a technique. For us, what dancing is about now is a total charging of energy that displaces itself within a certain experience of time, in relation to the other, with a sensibility of the senses for looking, touching... As soon as we saw that, life itself suddenly became a dance. The most unguarded gesture of life is for us a true gesture, with a real time and a real musical handwriting to it. Reading a body is therefore also such a passionate thing – it tells much more than what words can say. It is the aesthetics of dance that we are pushing as far away as possible, to the point where a transformation takes place, a radical physical and visual experience of transcendence, silent and intense. From there, we then ask ourselves what that means for the posture of someone who receives that experience, who gets insight into the process that has taken place.

What do you eventually consider to be the source of the desire for human encounters that so animates your work?

That's hard to say. There is a very instinctive, animal side to physically feeling the other. To immerse yourself into another, to be in someone else, engenders a transformation of yourself. So we are very seduced by the other. And this also has something to do with love, a deep faith in people and in mankind. Time and time again, we want to discover a new way of existing for and with others, others who are different. Precisely because of that difference, these others touch us, confuse us, make us breakable. You realize yourself through the other. So it is that concrete look of the other that we are searching for, not the look of the audience in a darkened hall. In order to feel that we are alive, we really need that singular, individual look. It can sometimes be utterly invasive and intense, but it makes us question ourselves.

Are you two also that singular look for each other?

We have been very close to each other since we were children, more than with other family members. Perhaps that explains why we are always looking for an encounter with that look. We constructed ourselves that way. So yes, it is not without significance. We have made and shaped ourselves by way of the look from the one to the other.

We don't have references. We are not 'inspired', so to speak. Or to put it differently, our inspiration comes from where we go. It is visceral. Our work starts out from the encounters, and within them, we experiment and fabricate, but we have no words to place above them.



Simon Leenknecht

The Only Way is Up?

Quantitative analysis of the internationalisation of the production and distribution of Flemish performing arts

2000-2016

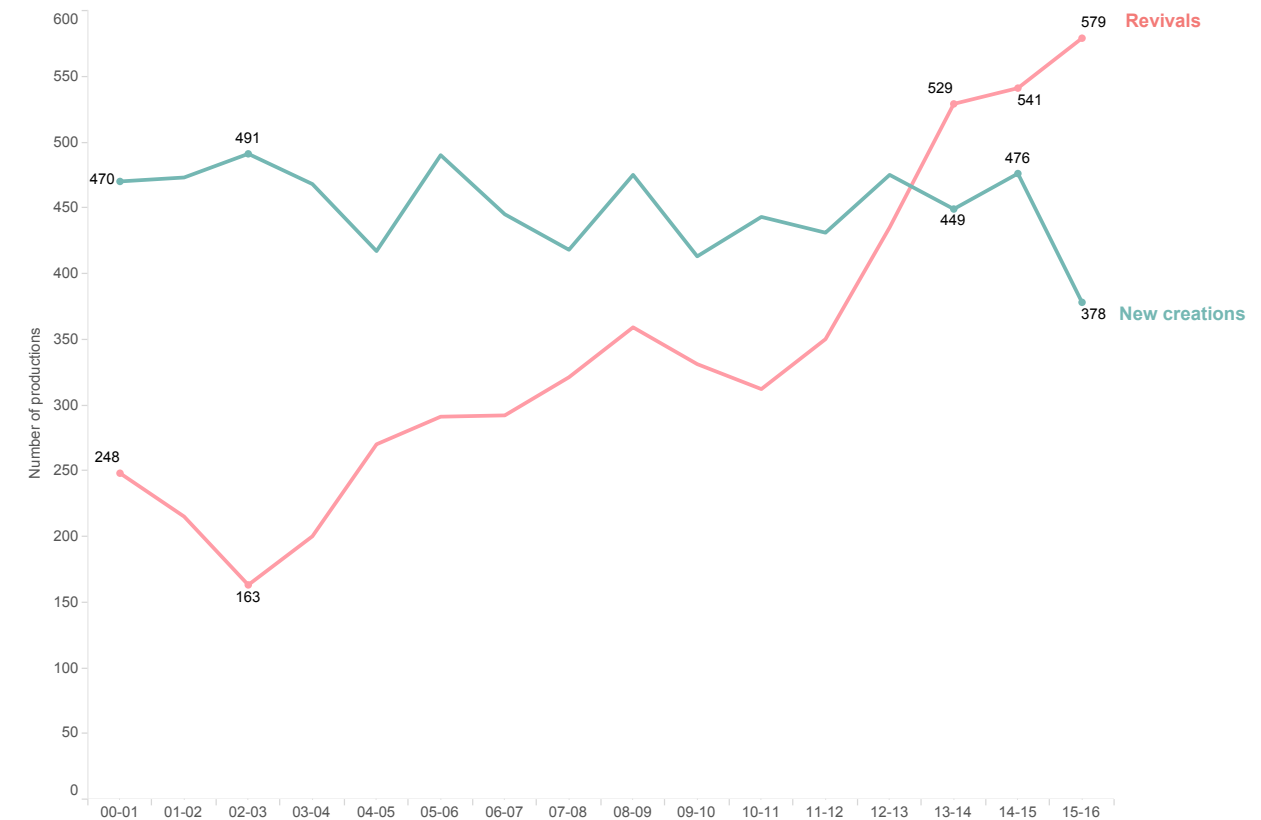
This study takes a look at the international aspects of the production and distribution of Flemish performing arts between the seasons 2001-2002 and 2015-2016. The report is based on data from Kunstenpunt's extensive database.

Compared to the beginning of the period under consideration, more shows were staged in recent seasons in which Flemish ensembles and production companies were involved. This is a result of an increase in the number of revivals of older productions. The number of new productions remained relatively stable throughout the period under study, until the last season. While during the first seasons new work was staged more often than old work, in the last three seasons it has been the reverse.

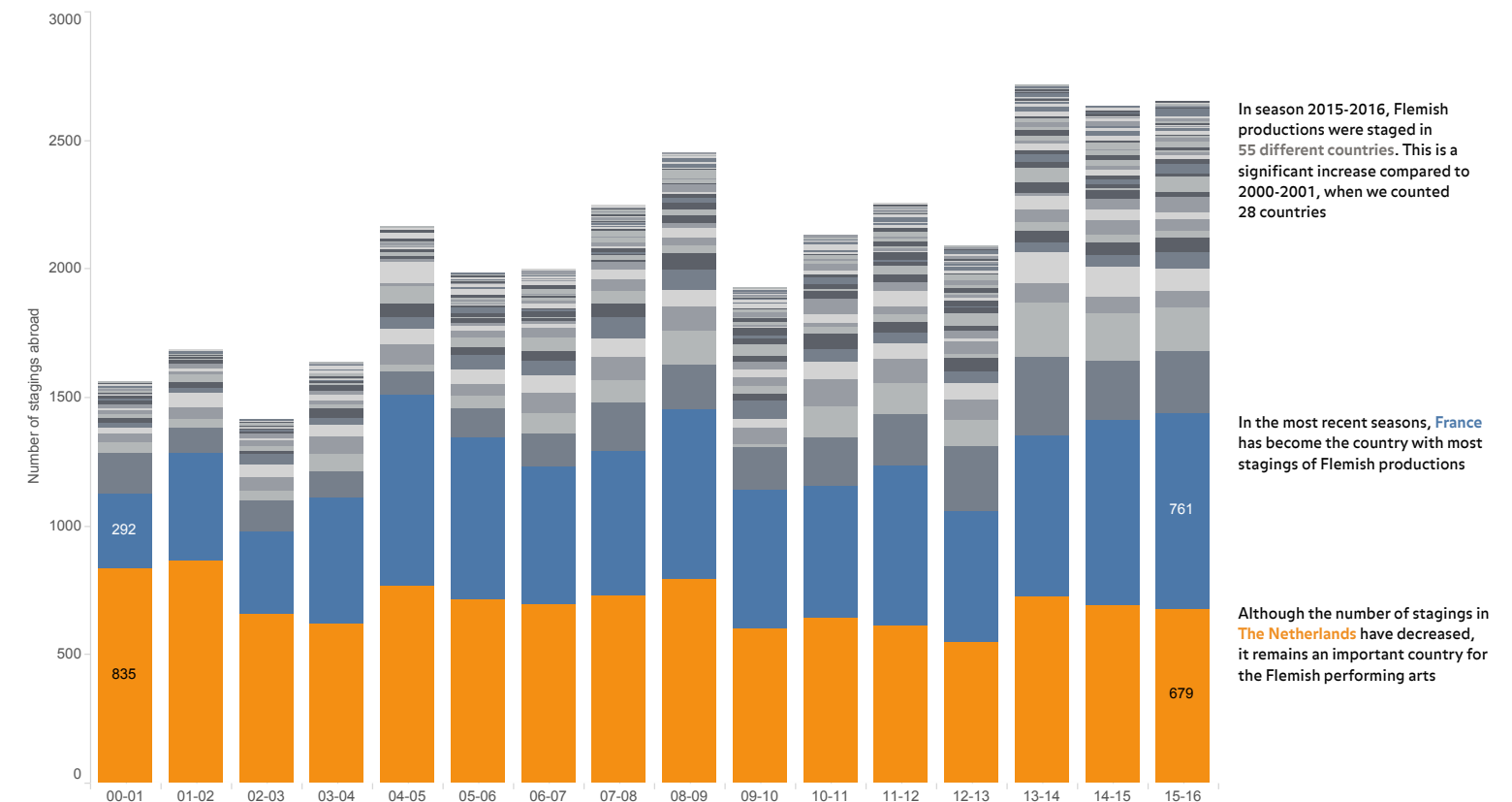
The number of stagings of Flemish productions outside Belgium grew between 2000 and 2016, as did the number of different countries in which these stagings took place. At the start of the millennium, half of all foreign stagings took place in the Netherlands. Sixteen seasons later, this number had been halved. France has overtaken the Netherlands as the main foreign market, and the number of stagings in other European countries and countries outside Europe has also grown significantly. Among the increased number of foreign stagings, there are especially more stagings of revivals.

Flemish ensembles and production companies increasingly seem to be abandoning the traditional, season-bound model, according to which a new production is created each season with which to tour Flanders. The tour possibly goes to the Netherlands and in later seasons the show is revived if it has proven to be successful. The figures show that another practice has become more common: productions are kept on the repertoire for longer (therefore there are more revivals) to serve a broader market than Belgium and the Netherlands (noticeable due to the increase in the number of stagings, especially of revivals, in France, the rest of Europe and the rest of the world).

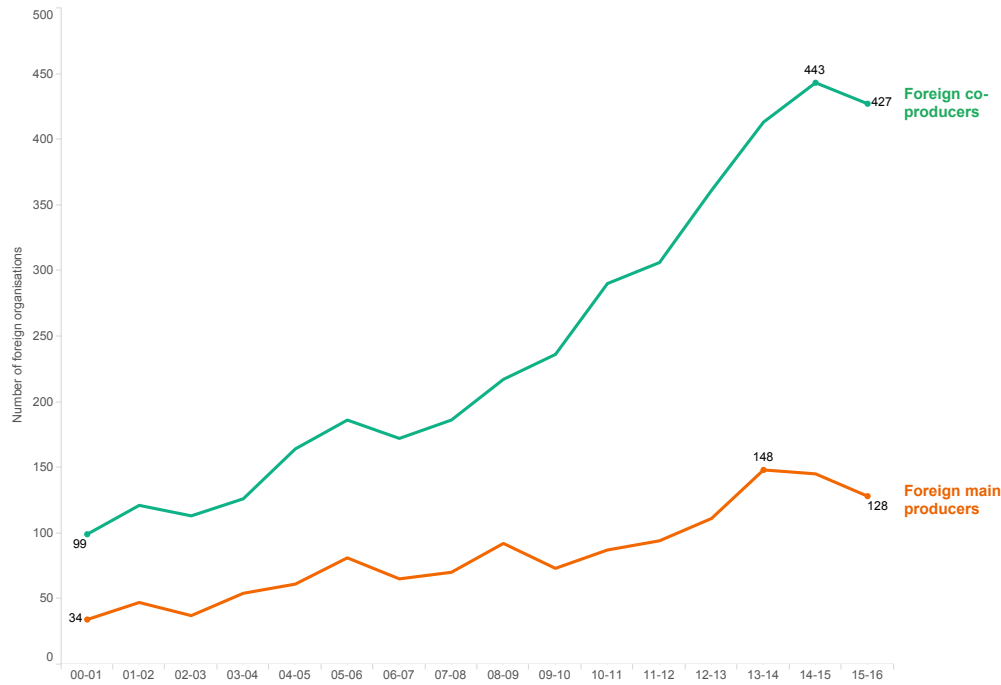
New productions and revivals of older productions



Stagings of Flemish productions outside of Belgium



Foreign main and co-producers

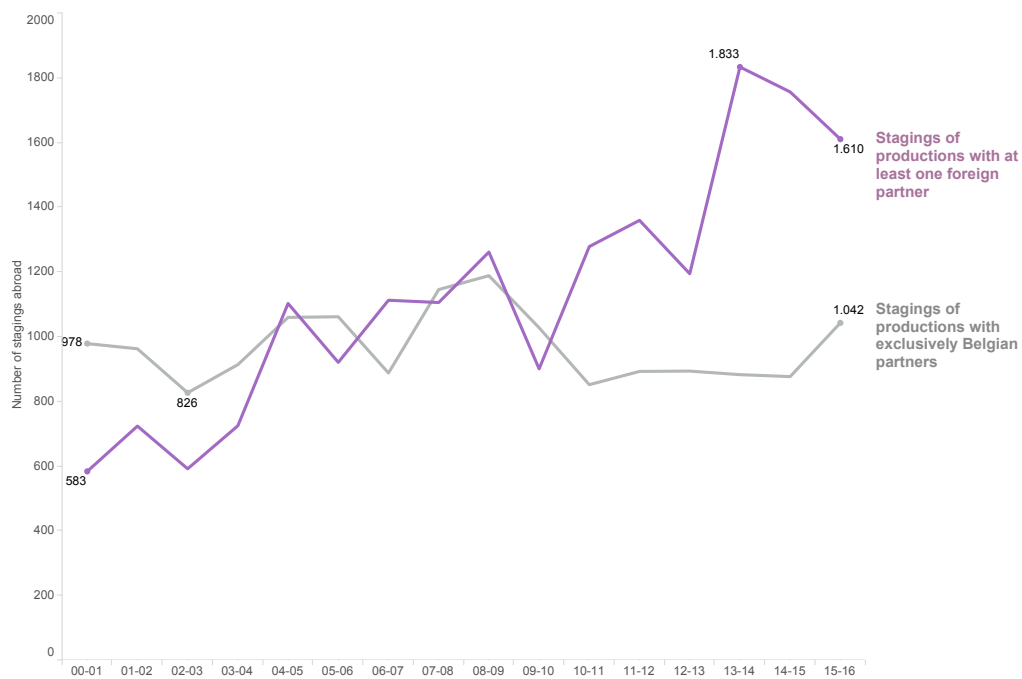


In terms of production too there have been some fundamental changes between 2000 and 2016. There are more productions involving several main and/or co-producers. At the start of the period under study, there was only one ensemble or production company involved in more than half of the productions in the Flanders Arts Institute database. At the end of this period, about half of the productions involved the collaboration of three or more organisations.

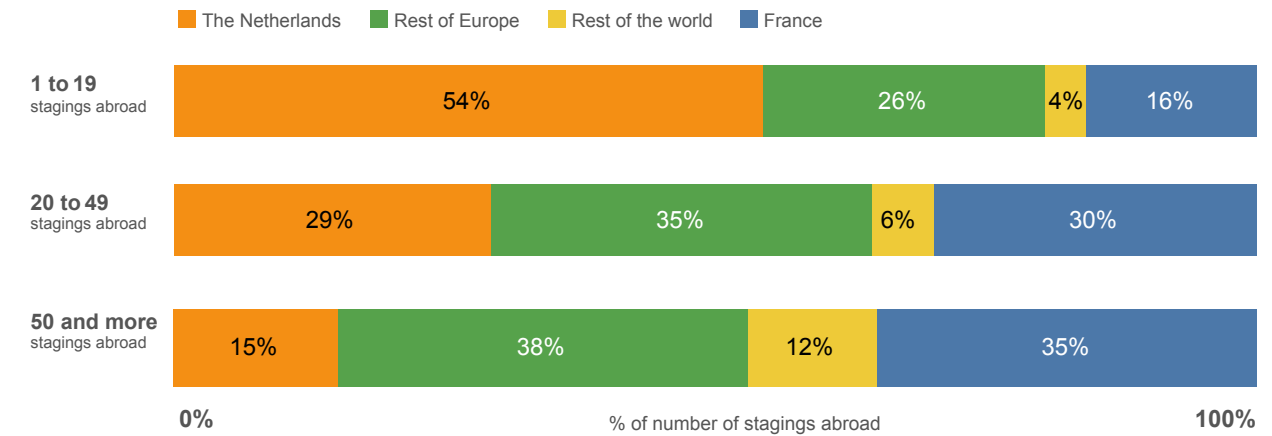
The growth in collaborations is at the same time a growth in international collaborations: between 2000 and 2016 we see a four-fold increase of both the number of productions with at least one foreign partner and the number of foreign organisations with which collaborations are ongoing. Also, these foreign partners come from a greater range of countries than before, although most come from France, the Netherlands and Germany. Among the foreign organisations there are especially more co-producers, which indicates that main producers from Flanders seek investments from abroad more often (it is not possible to comment on the precise nature of the investments on the basis of the data available). The reverse also seems to happen, because the number of main producers from abroad that collaborate with one or several Flemish co-producers is also increasing.

The increased number of productions with at least one foreign partner is driving the growth in the number of foreign stagings and the greater diversity of countries in which this spread is occurring. So a connection emerges between the internationalisation in terms of this spread and that in terms of production. However, this does not mean that the situation for productions with exclusively Belgian partners has remained unchanged. Although the number of exclusively Belgian productions and the number of foreign stagings that they carry out have remained relatively stable throughout the seasons under study, this type of production is also being staged in a greater range of countries than before.

Stagings outside Belgium of productions with and without foreign partners



The share of The Netherlands, France, the rest of Europe and the rest of the world in the international distribution of productions with few and many stagings abroad



All stagings outside Belgium between 2000 and 2016 were split into three equal parts. The three bars resp. represent the stagings of productions that were performed less than 20 times, between 20 and 49 times and more than 50 times abroad. The regions where these stagings took place are marked with different colours. The Netherlands occupy more than half of the first bar, while France is more important for productions that extensively tour abroad.

In the whole narrative about the internationalisation of the Flemish performing arts, leading roles have been reserved for the Netherlands and France. The Netherlands used to be the main foreign country and was in a sense a prolongation of the Flemish circuit. Several diagrams demonstrate that exceptional role. Across the 16 seasons, the top ten of the most important venues for Flemish work abroad is mostly filled by theatres in the Netherlands. For productions that focus less on the foreign market, the Netherlands was the most important market throughout the period under study.

In recent seasons, however, the Netherlands has acted more like 'another foreign country'. The number of stagings by exclusively Belgian productions fell sharply between 2000 and 2016. At the same time, there are more Dutch partners in the production network of the Flemish performing arts. More than before, collaboration with a Dutch main or co-producer appears to be a factor in getting access to this Dutch market. Although the number of stagings of new creations in the Netherlands has fallen, it remains the most important foreign market for new productions. In addition,

Dutch venues pop up among the main foreign stages, both for productions with many, and for productions with few, foreign stagings. France has overtaken the Netherlands as the main foreign country, at least if we look at the number of stagings that take place there and the number of partners that come from this country. This might be a reaction to the fall in performance opportunities in the Netherlands. But contrary to that country, it is mainly productions which are geared towards the international market (which have often been on the company's repertoire for a long time) that find a large market in France. The top ten of the venues that most often programmed Flemish productions also includes French theatres. However, the main venues in France act differently from those in the Netherlands. The most important Dutch venues programme short runs of many different Flemish productions. The principal French venues seem to choose for a limited number of Flemish productions, to which they then give many staging opportunities. In general, the Netherlands therefore offers a more diverse sample of Flemish performing arts than France.

The data in this study demonstrates the international success of the Flemish performing arts: productions from here appear more often on foreign stages, and the network of main and co-producers behind these shows has become a lot broader and has ramified over different countries. But this picture of growth comes with some considerations. The growth between 2000 and 2016 has mainly taken place in Europe: the number of stagings outside Europe and the number of non-European partners have both increased, but still form a minority. In addition, not every Flemish ensemble or production company has an extensive international activity. The number of productions with less than 20 foreign stagings is almost four times higher than the number of productions with 20 or more foreign stagings. And despite the strong growth in the number of productions with at least one foreign partner, exclusively Belgian organisations are involved in the majority of productions in each season.

From conversations with professionals from the Flemish performing arts – published in a separate report (Dutch) – we know that working internationally requires the necessary investments. Besides artistic and policy considerations, the financial aspect certainly plays a role in the choice not to work with foreign partners or not to play outside Belgium or only a little.

These conversations also offer other insight that we can relate to the data. For example, the professionals indicate that the contributions of co-producers have fallen in recent years compared to before, as a result of which they are forced to look for additional budgets. This explains the strong growth in the number of foreign co-producers. But there are signs that working internationally has recently reached its limits and is even under pressure. According to the professionals, in recent seasons the (co-production) budgets have reached a low point and co-producers are putting forward a greater number and a broader range of demands. Foreign theatres and festivals are allegedly taking a harder stance in financial negotiations or have started to focus more on the local performing arts. It also appears that foreign (and domestic) programmers are less willing to show new or recent work. These phenomena are possibly connected to the data from the most recent seasons and that announces an end to the growth. The number of foreign stagings and the number of different countries in which they have taken place stagnated between 2013 and 2016. The number of productions with at least one foreign partner dropped in the 2015-2016 season. The number of foreign stagings of these productions began to fall in the previous season already. Around the same period we see slight drops in the numbers of main and co-producers from abroad. The number of new productions has also experienced a dip in the latest season.

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Hilde Teuchies

Reclaiming the European Commons

Part one:
On the place of culture
in the European project
of the future

ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

This is the first part of an article on the (new) place of culture in the European project. You'll read the next parts in the following two issues of this magazine. Insights shared in this article were presented by the author at the November 2017 IETM-meeting in Brussels.



Europe. As artists or cultural players, do we still need to talk about it today? We are familiar with the inertia of the European institutions. We know the channels that might bring in extra European subsidies for our cross-border projects. Why then should we still put any energy into the Augean stable that Europe sometimes seems to be?

Approximately 35 years in the performing arts have led me to all corners of the continent. From the mid 1980s and in the years of growing internationalisation that followed, I was able to help steer European exchanges, gatherings and collaborations. I had the occasion to accompany artists as they conquered European audiences. And I had the chance to raise a voice with colleagues to draw Europe's attention to all that blossoming cross-border creativity. I have had my share of optimism and frustration. Tired of an all too lax decision process, I regularly turned my back on Europe in order to focus once more on the essential (the artist). But again and again I came up against Europe. After all, in the arts field there is no getting around the broader picture. So yes, Europe. Now that I myself am taking a step back, I would like to zoom out briefly on that broader picture. What do art and culture mean for Europe today and what could they mean in the future? I allow myself to ignore short-term feasibility and political pragmatism for a moment, and try to look further, deeper into the future.

daily work environment is so permeated by neo-liberal thinking that we hardly even realise it anymore. It is visible in our managerial jargon, in a product-oriented practice and in the undermining, market-driven chain of production, presentation and distribution.

Let's start out from the situation here and now. Malaises that have been growing for years are now crystal clear. Natural disasters rub our noses in environmental challenges. While the welfare state is being dismantled, income inequality is growing. A surge in populism points to a fundamental breach of trust with politics. In short, years of intensive neo-liberalism and blind faith in the market have led to acute problems that can no longer be ignored. For a long time, this generated an undercurrent of unease, but today it is coming back to hit us smack in the face. Every day we see the consequences of global migration waves, of the undoing of social and democratic rights, of irreversible climate change, of growing individualisation and globalisation. No wonder that citizens feel increasingly helpless. It is difficult to find one's bearings in an environment where trusted social and cultural boundaries and perspectives are collapsing.

The arts are not located outside these turbulent economic, political, social and environmental waters. The ecosystem of the arts is embedded in an increasingly complex machinery of national and transnational institutions and policies, in urban fabrics, in the confusion of social media, the swamp of warped social relations, the coercive strait-jacket of the market with its focus on output, profit, efficiency and growth... That does not leave the art world undisturbed. It determines our way of thinking and being. Also in Flanders, the arts sector is wrestling with social difficulties such as a precarious (artist) status, gender inequality, a lack of cultural diversity, and a work environment that has been corrupted by the pursuit of profit. Our

The malaise in the arts sector in Flanders, made worse by the pressure on the public subsidies of the past decade, is tangible. Everywhere questions are being raised about the way in which institutions and organisations, companies and artists function and interact. At the same time, in debates, in-depth articles and research projects, cries for a fundamental revolution are being heard increasingly frequently. More and more artists and organisations are setting up experiments in order to approach things differently, to reinforce the position of artists and to seek new relations with a variety of audiences.

The realisation is growing that a different approach is necessary. That we have to oppose the sneaking scantiness and superficiality. This is something we have to achieve by introducing slowness, by seeking to go deeper and especially by establishing connections. In other words, it is time for another narrative, a strong narrative. In the words of cultural philosopher Thijs Lijster, that is 'a narrative that is capable of setting a movement in motion – in the first place, a movement of the mind, but if it is a good one, also a social movement'.

Perhaps we can turn Europe into such a strong narrative? Perhaps we can actively influence our European habitat, appropriate it more and make it more liveable? The arts play a crucial role in the telling of 'strong' narratives. That is precisely where the imagination resides that is necessary to be able to imagine our world differently. What revolutionary strategies can we develop within the arts? Where are people already working on alternative narratives? And how can this lead us to another, better Europe?

The ecosystem of the arts is embedded in an increasingly complex machinery of national and transnational institutions and policies, in urban fabrics, in the confusion of social media, the swamp of warped social relations, the coercive straitjacket of the market with its focus on output, profit, efficiency and growth.

Towards a European commons

We all know that nowadays Europe finds itself in deep water. In recent years, it has been inundated by waves that have brought one crisis after another: the financial crisis, the debt crisis, the refugee crisis, the terrorism crisis and, as an increasingly powerful undercurrent, rising economic inequality and a growing democratic deficit. In the meantime, citizens are feeling left out. They see the institutions that prop up the European project as a cold, unapproachable machinery that cannot be influenced. *'The European project', says Prof. Hendrik Vos, 'is tough and sticky, and survives less elegantly, with small steps, tottering from one partial solution to another'*. The timorousness of the member states is well known. All too often they hit the brakes when it comes to carrying out a daring common policy (for instance, in the field of energy, climate change, fair trade, mobility, etc.). That prevents so many opportunities for a more visionary and voluntaristic Europe.

The looming fiasco of the European project has everything to do with the failure to appreciate the autonomous dynamic of culture. So says Pascal Gielen in *No Culture, No Europe*. Together with his co-authors, an interdisciplinary group of scientists, artists and theorists, Gielen points to Europe's lack of attention for culture as the most important cause of its political and economic failure.

Gielen reminds us of the essential role of culture (in the broad, anthropological sense) as the cornerstone of society. Culture, he posits, has a socialising, qualifying and subjectivising effect. It ensures a shared frame of reference. It gives meaning to the lives of people. In other words, it forms, not the superstructure, but the substructure or actual foundation of every society. If we define politics broadly as 'the configuration of actions that give shape to a society', then these actions cannot exist without interpreting – and giving meaning to – the social reality. And it is precisely our culture that functions as a maker and carrier of meaning. 'So, politics must build on culture, if it is to be politics at all.'

In short, without culture there is no community. For the European project, this lack of 'belonging' has disastrous consequences. We do not perceive the European community as 'something that is ours'. Neither do we feel responsible for it. Pascal Gielen: *'It should come as no surprise then that neoliberal policies, which are aimed at efficiency, standardization and measurability, are a threat to various forms of community. The logic of the market, which is imposed upon the whole of society, leads to hyper-individualization, undermining of solidarity (by dismantling the welfare state), weakening of citizenship and, rather obviously, of*

Within the broad activities of the cultural area, the arts occupy the smallest place. But at the same time, artistic practice can be the epicentre from which social innovation is set in motion.

community spirit. When citizens are increasingly approached as consumers – and therefore start to regard themselves as such – or are encouraged to see their fellow citizens as competitors, it is no wonder that they no longer feel responsible for the community.'

Why should we still attach any importance at all to something like our European biotope? Why should we still mobilize ourselves for a failing European project? What if the ministers we chose keep repeating that 'there is no alternative' to the neoliberal path that Europe is now engaged on, while daily we are confronted with the pernicious effects of that path? Why should we not abandon the sinking ship called the European Union?

From this perspective one could certainly have sympathy for the diagnosis of a growing number of Eurosceptics. It is true that scepticism never offers a fully fledged alternative. The truth is that our lives are more than ever indissolubly connected with those of the 500 million other European citizens. Retreating to the nation-state is a misleading non-solution. For the most part, the organisation of society, including the region we live in, is determined by our European embedding, legislation and economic policy. Because of the increasingly porous country borders and the intense mobility of people, goods, ideas and everyday cultural practices, we have moreover a lot more in common than we would at first imagine. The truth is also that a large number of social problems can no longer be tackled at the regional or national level (think of climate change, mobility issues, fair trade, the refugee crisis, etc.). In addition, our global connectivity is also increasing, stimulated by galloping globalisation. This all requires a transnational approach. Let's not forget also that the European project, even

though from the start it has chosen economic unification as its instrument, was in the first instance a peace project. It could become so a lot more.

In early 2017, Europe celebrated the sixtieth birthday of the Treaty of Rome, which holds the foundations of the EU. On this occasion, the media once more detailed all difficulties and future scenarios of the European project. The same doom scenarios were dished up along with worn-out neoliberal recipes. But other voices could also be heard. A growing number of people believe that we do not have to slavishly follow the warped European project. They are convinced that Tina can take her leave and that we can tackle the European machinery from within. We are not powerless, claims VUB economist Jonathan Holslag. Five hundred million European citizens and six million Flemings can indeed weigh on policy. And that is also happening more and more. There are a growing number of bottom-up and civil society initiatives, that are working on new connections in society, that are experimenting with new ways of undertaking and living together sustainably...

This is how the young Croatian philosopher Srećko Horvat, who gave a talk in the Kaaaitheater earlier this year, sees it: *'I know that many left-wing people want to leave the EU, but progressives have no other choice than to reform the system from within. There are two reasons for that. First: leaving the EU or the Eurozone does not mean leaving global capitalism. It is not possible to return to full national sovereignty. Politicians who promise an independent utopia are selling their citizens dangerous illusions and lies. (...) Second: progressives will always lose if they step out of an integrated market. (...) We have to penetrate the system and that is the only way we can change it.'*

In the arts sector too people are thinking hard about other ways of living together, within a shared European space. People are actively looking for policy frameworks that place new and sustainable accents. If we want to bend Europe to our will, then art can play an essential role in this. After all, Pascal Gielen continues his line of thought, it is within the field of the arts that a certain 'dismeasure' can thrive. Art is one of the few places in modern society where pretty much every 'measure' (whether culture, economic, political or ethical) can be challenged. So culture is not only the engine that creates meaning and gives people a place in the social order. Stimulated by the arts, culture is a pre-eminently dynamic given. The arts create a space in which to question dominant meanings or existing social relations. Within the broad activities of the cultural area, the arts occupy the smallest place. But at the same time, artistic practice can be the epicentre from which social innovation is set in motion.

When working on another kind of social environment, what is most needed is interaction between different trends, social ideas and models – formulated by a broad and diversified group of cultural players. Together they do not so much generate a harmonious whole with clearly delineated proposals, but rather a kind of commons: a communal space, supported by different groups and lifestyles. It is such a communal place, such a commons, that we must create once more in Europe. It could become a biotope in which a different sort of European communality takes shape, in which other values dominate besides market obsession, competition and unlimited growth.

In recent years we have come across the concept of commons more and more often and in many areas. But what does

it mean concretely? The first philosophers to use the term in a contemporary context were the American-Italian philosopher duo Hardt and Negri (in 'Commonwealth', 2009) and the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis (in 'De utopie van de vrije markt', 2010). Hardt and Negri describe the commons as a category that transcends the traditional opposition between public property (often safeguarded by the state) and private property. Achterhuis refers to the historical practice of a common pasture which could be used freely by all the members of a village community. In economic terms, the commons is the vast no man's land between market and state, a domain accessible to all. An area, so argue a growing number of proponents, that we must continue to defend and protect from privatisation and overregulation. And more so still: it is an area that must consciously be reconquered.

Today we could describe the practice of the commons as a (not necessarily physical) place in which citizens think jointly about collective means and how to use them or to make them available. That can involve air, light, space, but also creativity, knowledge, technology, etc. The notion of the commons offers a framework in which to reflect on social challenges and to try out new ideas and solutions. The practice of commoning involves the creation of alternative, liveable conventions and decision-making methods, and is tried out in social, political, educational and cultural areas. There are countless commoning tools, where culture and technology play a primary role. What interests us here is how the arts sector can contribute to a European and local commons. We can interpret this as a communal space where we can create a frame of values based on mutuality and cooperation, and where we can search for better economic models and solutions to ultimately change the course of the sluggish European ship.

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Tom Van Imschoot

Een Gesprek met **Agentschap** ecologie van kunst- prak- tijkken.

Is er één principe dat kunstenaars over alle grenzen van taal, cultuur en land heen meer verbindt dan hun recht op intellectuele eigendom? Het is de gedeelde basis voor hun verschil in identiteit. De materiële uitkomst van artistiek werk – van welke aard ook – kan eindeloos van eigenaar veranderen, maar moreel onvervreemdbaar is het auteurschap dat de intellectuele eigendom bepaalt. Alleen is de vraag dan wel hoe je 'auteur' en 'werk' begrijpt. Is een auteur een individu of kan het ook een groep zijn? Moet het een mens zijn of komen ook dingen in aanmerking? Is vrije wil cruciaal of hoeft dat niet? Kan naast de schilder en zijn doek met andere woorden ook een boom auteurschap claimen over zijn silhouet? En wat met routines (pakweg goocheltrucs) die van generatie op generatie worden overgeleverd binnen een begrensde groep?



Agentschap, Assemblée (Générique et spécifique), Le Grand Café Centre d'art contemporain, Saint-Nazaire, 2015

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ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

In opdracht van Kunstenpunt/Flanders Arts Institute praat Tom Van Imschoot met kunstenaars die via hun werk een nieuw licht werpen op de internationale dimensie van hun artistieke praktijk.

Elke praktijk is enkelvoudig en is enkel mogelijk dankzij een 'omgeving' of een manier van bestaan. Vergelijk het met het bestaan van andere wezens. Een wolf bijvoorbeeld is afhankelijk van zijn habitat om te overleven. Je kan wezens onmogelijk loskoppelen van hun ecosysteem. Welnu, met praktijken is dat gelijkaardig. Ook kunstpraktijken hebben een 'milieu'.

Door de standaardisatie van intellectuele eigendom ontwikkelt het globale kapitalisme echter de ambitie om alle mogelijke praktijken in één omgeving onder te brengen.

In 1992 richtte Kobe Matthys in Brussel het intrinsiek meertalige collectief Agentschap/Agence/Agencia/Agency/Agentur op om juist die kwesties te onderzoeken. Het werk van Agentschap bestaat deels in het samenstellen van een archief van dingen (of 'quasi-dingen'), meestal afgeleid van juridische processen en legale controverses over copyright, patenten, merknamen... Die 'cases' stellen – in de geest van Bruno Latour – het dualistische onderscheid tussen natuur en cultuur in vraag waarop het klassieke idee van intellectuele eigendom berust. Tegelijk maakt Agentschap op basis van dat archief ook een combinatie van tentoonstellingen en performances, de zogenaamde 'assemblées', waarin twijfelgevallen rond auteurschap en intellectueel eigendom opnieuw opgeroepen worden. Binaire afgeleiden van de natuur/cultuur-tegenstelling, zoals idee/expressie, feit/creatie of mens/onmens, worden zo het voorwerp van discussie.

Kunst, antropologie en jurisdictie zijn in Agentschap zodanig verstrengeld dat de hybride praktijk van het collectief al even lastig te classificeren is als de lijst van dingen (intussen zijn het er 2267) die het al meer dan vijfentwintig jaar

samenstelt. Voor oprichter Matthys is de niet-classificeerbare aard van Agentschap echter niet verwonderlijk. Zijn insteek is immers juist dat een kunstpraktijk verandert wanneer kunstenaars een beroep doen op het auteursrecht. Er is altijd sprake van een wisselwerking tussen praktijk en omgeving. Of beter: er bestaat een ecologie van iedere praktijk waarin beide elkaar wederzijds bepalen. Wederkerigheid, ook tussen kunsten en hun omgeving, is dan ook wezenlijk vanuit ecologisch perspectief. In die zin is het geen toeval dat Matthys, naast zijn internationaal circulerende werk in Agentschap, ook lokaal in Brussel actief is in de strijd voor het opnemen van kunstenaars in de algemene werknemersregeling van de sociale zekerheid, via het collectief State of the Arts. Hoe anders dat engagement ook is dan wat hij bij Agentschap doet, je kan niet bezig zijn met de diversiteit van kunstpraktijken zonder je in te zetten voor haar overlevingskansen in je eigen omgeving.

Maar hoe houdt de artistieke praktijk van Agentschap in feite zelf stand in een internationale kunstwereld die wel steunt op ogenschijnlijk universele hoekstenen als auteur-

schap en intellectuele eigendom, maar die tegelijk niet graag aan die principes laat raken? Hoe vindt die uiterst ecologisch-gevoelige praktijk plaats? De beste manier om dat na te gaan is te kijken naar hoe de praktijk van Agentschap zich heeft ontwikkeld, in gesprek met Kobe Matthys zelf: wat waren de eerste stappen, waar komen de eerste ideeën vandaan en hoe hebben die zich verknoopt naarmate het artistieke werk vorm kreeg? Ik spreek hem in café La Phare, langs het kanaal in Molenbeek, in het artistiek sterk geïnternationaliseerde hart van Brussel waar hij woont en werkt. 'Het is belangrijk om de ecologieën van kunstpraktijken te koesteren, waar men zich ook bevindt.'

In welke omgeving is jouw kunstenaarschap ontstaan?

Kobe Matthys: In 1987 ben ik naar de Vrije Universiteit Brussel getrokken om culturele studies te studeren, en meer specifiek visuele antropologie. Aan de V.U.B. bestond toen een leerstoel van Henri Storck. Wij bestudeerden er het filmwerk van onder anderen Robert Flaherty, Jean Rouch, Frederick Wiseman,... Wat me echter vooral interesseerde, was: wat gebeurt er als wij een

De 'ex-nihilo'-doctrine, die aan de basis ligt van het auteursrecht, gaat ervan uit dat een idee uit het niets ontstaat en dan in een expressie wordt omgezet door een auteur. Een dergelijke doctrine is echter een te reducerende manier om de grote verscheidenheid aan kunstpraktijken te benaderen.

De standaardisatie van het auteursrecht is een direct gevolg van de globalisering van het kapitalisme. Sinds 1995, met de oprichting van de Wereldhandelsorganisatie (WHO), werd TRIPS internationaal toegepast. Alle lidstaten gingen toen akkoord om intellectuele eigendomsrechten in hun nationale wetgeving over te nemen. Dat had verregaande gevolgen voor veel praktijken, inclusief de kunsten. In al die lidstaten vielen kunstpraktijken vanaf dan standaard onder de internationale auteurswetgeving, of kunstenaars dat nu wensten of niet.

etnografische blik op onze eigen moderne ‘westerse’ maatschappij zelf richten? Van Bruno Latour, die met publicaties als *Wij zijn nooit modern geweest* (1991) juist een etnografische blik op de westerse maatschappij ontwikkelde, had ik op dat moment nog helemaal niet gehoord. Ik maakte een aantal video’s in het kader van mijn studies, maar die vond men op de universiteit te experimenteel. Na mijn master ben ik in 1992 vervolgens voor vier jaar naar een kunstschool getrokken. Dat was de Staedelschule, in Frankfurt am Main.

Waarom die school, meteen in het buitenland?

Vanwege mijn interesse voor de kunstenaar Dan Graham, die er een aantal jaren gastdocent was. Hij benaderde het dagelijkse leven als kunstenaar op een bijna etnografische manier. Maar hij bracht mij ook in contact met conceptuele kunstpraktijken, institutionele kritiek, participatieve performances, enzovoort.

En dat raakte een snaar?

Vele ‘conceptuele’ kunstpraktijken vertrekken vanuit een reeks instructies. Die vormen een partituur of een dispositief om mee te experimenteren. In een experiment is de uitkomst daarom minder belangrijk. Conceptuele praktijken hebben in die zin veel geërfd van de Fluxus-beweging, waar men al eigenzinnige partituren schreef voor muziek, dans, poëzie,... Dat boeide me. Het creatieproces zelf stond hier centraal. Of dat was althans het uitgangspunt.

Maar dat was niet uitkomst?

Neem de instructieschilderijen van Yoko Ono. Aan de ene kant was de bedoeling van de ‘instructie’ dat iedereen het zelf kan uitproberen. Aan de andere kant ervaart men nu nog nauwelijks het experiment, als men de documenten van deze instructies in het MOMA ziet hangen, naast alle andere kunstwerken. Ondanks het experimenteel karakter van Ono’s praktijk, verandert het

document dus nauwelijks iets aan het idee van auteurschap. Ook in de conceptuele kunst bleef het auteurschap dus aanwezig, als een spook.

En zo begon het auteurschap je zelf te bespoken?

Ik begon in te zien dat auteurswetgeving van buitenaf wordt bepaald, niet van binnenin een praktijk. Dat impliciete karakter is zeer typisch voor wetgevingen. Ook in een kunstschool wordt ‘auteursrecht’ als een administratief vak gegeven, alsof het geen verdere impact zou hebben op de kunstenaarspraktijk. Maar wat is de impact van de standaardisatie via de auteurswetgeving op de hele diversiteit aan kunstpraktijken?

Is dat de vraag waaruit Agentschap ontstond?

Zodra ik had gemerkt dat het idee van auteurschap zelfs in het conceptuele experiment onzichtbaar bleef doorwerken, begon ik me af te vragen wat er zou gebeuren als men niet zozeer over een auteur of over auteursrecht zou spreken, maar over de kracht van praktijken – over het mutuele, de wederkerigheid tussen praktijk en omgeving in de warboel van het dagelijkse leven. Wat gebeurt er als de ecologie van praktijken deel gaat uitmaken van het experiment?

Wat dreef je om net die kwestie uit te diepen?

Elke praktijk is enkelvoudig en is enkel mogelijk dankzij een ‘omgeving’ of een manier van bestaan. Vergelijk het met het bestaan van andere wezens. Een wolf bijvoorbeeld is afhankelijk van zijn habitat om te overleven. Je kan wezens onmogelijk loskoppelen van hun ecosysteem. Welnu, met praktijken is dat gelijkaardig. Ook kunstpraktijken hebben een ‘milieu’. Door de standaardisatie van intellectuele eigendom ontwikkelt het globale kapitalisme echter de ambitie om alle mogelijke praktijken in één omgeving onder te brengen. Door het verdwijnen van de verscheidenheid

aan omgevingen van praktijken verdwijnt ook de verscheidenheid aan praktijken zelf. Standaardisatie betekent het verlies van de diversiteit van praktijken.

Vandaar dat jij een ecologie van praktijken benadrukt?

Het concept van een ‘ecologie van praktijken’ is afkomstig uit het boek *Les Trois Écologies* (1989) van Félix Guattari. Voor hem gaat ecologie niet alleen over omgeving, maar ook over sociale en familiale relaties en mentale gezondheid. Het concept werd later ook door Isabelle Stengers ingezet als vorm van diplomatie in de oorlog tussen de wetenschappen. Het belang van het concept bestaat er volgens Stengers in om praktijken en hun diverse manieren van bestaan niet zoals om het even welke andere te definiëren.

Hoe vertaal je dat naar de kunsten?

De ‘ex-nihilo’-doctrine, die aan de basis ligt van het auteursrecht, gaat ervan uit dat een idee uit het niets ontstaat en dan in een expressie wordt omgezet door een auteur. Een dergelijke doctrine is echter een te reducerende manier om de grote verscheidenheid aan kunstpraktijken te benaderen. Agentschap trachtte daarom van meet af aan vormen van verzet tegen de standaardisatie van auteursrecht in kaart te brengen, niet vanuit historisch perspectief maar vanuit het standpunt van de kunsten. Want ook aanhangers van de copyleft-beweging, bijvoorbeeld, proberen één oplossing aan te bieden die geldig zou moeten zijn voor alle mogelijke praktijken. Terwijl elke kunstpraktijk andere vereisten heeft, inherent aan die praktijk. Uitgaan van de diversiteit en ecologie van praktijken is dus cruciaal voor het verzet tegen standaardisatie.

Agentschap

Met een naam als Agentschap gaf je het onderzoek naar verzetsvormen meteen institutionele allure.

Agentschap klinkt inderdaad als de naam van een organisatie of een instituut. De naam is afgeleid van ‘agencement’, een concept dat Deleuze en Guattari gebruikten om de ‘assemblages’ van Kafka te beschrijven. Het personage ‘K.’ is zowel iets collectiefs als iets machinaals en staat voor de combinatie van een technische en juridische bureaucratie.

Resoneerde in de oprichting van een dergelijk ‘Agentschap’ de institutionele kritiek van Graham?

Sinds Graham verschoof de institutionele kritiek van het museum, zoals bij Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren of Hans Haacke, naar de media. In *Homes for America* bijvoorbeeld schreef Graham een soort fictief kunstartikel, waarin hij over alledaagse architectuur van New Jersey rapporteert als minimale beeldhouwkunst. De bijgevoegde foto’s van het artikel tonen de herhaling van de huizen als de reproductie van een sculptuur van Donald Judd. Volgens Graham is het niet alleen het museum maar ook de rapportering in de media die mede bepaalt of iets al dan niet als kunst kan worden beschouwd. In het verlengde daarvan verruimden de zogenaamde ‘context-kunsten’, met kunstenaars als Fareed Armaly, Andreas Fraser, Rene Green en Christian Philipp Müller, de institutionele kritiek van het museum naar de mediëring van het kunstwerk. De mediëring van het kunstwerk, bijvoorbeeld het gidsen of het discursieve programma, is voor deze kunstenaars een plek voor interventie. Maar het concept van een context is nog steeds gegeven. Het lijkt alsof die kunstenaars zelf buiten de context staan en er geen deel van uitmaken.

Agentschap wil geen alarm slaan voor het uitsterven van de verscheidenheid aan praktijken in algemene zin, maar voorkomen dat er nog verder kunstpraktijken verdwijnen.

En dat standpunt volgde Agentschap niet, begrijp ik?

Neen, inderdaad. De moderne benadering van kunst gaat ervan uit dat ze autonoom is. Maar kunst is niet autonoom in zichzelf. Autonomie wordt geschonken. Ze is gebaseerd op overlegde of onuitgesproken akkoorden tussen kunstenaars en hun omgeving. Het standpunt van een ecologie van kunstpraktijken gaat ervan uit dat de constructie van akkoorden deel uit maakt van praktijken. Dankzij hun akkoorden kunnen kunstpraktijken een habitat ontwikkelen en beperkingen ook uitzetten als een kracht. Tegelijk brengen ze onverwachte gevolgen, neveneffecten, onzekerheden met zich mee. Die maken deel uit van de praktijken. Het probleem ligt evenwel niet aan de akkoorden op zich, maar eerder bij akkoorden die van buitenaf aan een praktijk worden opgelegd en niet kunnen gestuurd worden binnen de praktijk. Intellectuele eigendom wordt van buitenaf opgelegd.

Maar intellectueel eigendom is toch een soort bescherming? Hoe verandert dat een kunstpraktijk?

De wet bepaalt mee de omgeving waarin praktijken kunnen overleven. In de wetgeving rond intellectuele eigendom volstaat de eenvoudige act van creatie om de bescherming van het auteurschap

over een ‘werk’ als standaard te laten gelden. Men hoeft niets meer te registreren om auteursrechten te laten gelden. Vroeger lieten kunstenaars een kopie van hun werk registreren in een bureau voor intellectuele eigendom. Maar sinds het internationale TRIPS-akkoord uit 1994, waarbij Trips staat voor Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, is registratie niet meer noodzakelijk. Auteursrecht geldt vandaag standaard.

En dat is geen goede zaak?

De standaardisatie van het auteursrecht is een direct gevolg van de globalisering van het kapitalisme. Sinds 1995, met de oprichting van de Wereldhandelsorganisatie (WHO), werd TRIPS internationaal toegepast. Alle lidstaten – op dit moment 164 – gingen toen akkoord om intellectuele eigendomsrechten in hun nationale wetgeving over te nemen. Dat had verregaande gevolgen voor veel praktijken, inclusief de kunsten. In al die lidstaten vielen kunstpraktijken vanaf dan standaard onder de internationale auteurswetgeving, of kunstenaars dat nu wensten of niet.

Agentschap heeft verschillende

rechtszaken rond jazz op de lijst.

Ter bescherming van muziek kent

de auteurswet slechts één parameter:

de melodie. Maar jazz is gebaseerd op

de variatie van een melodie.

Als men met jazzmuzikanten spreekt,

hebben zij het daarom

over ritme, harmonie of andere

muzikale termen. Maar daar is

geen spoor van terug te vinden

in de auteurswetgeving.

Kan je een concreet voorbeeld geven van de onwenselijkheid daarvan?

In de jaren tachtig bestond in de Verenigde Staten veel discussie over de bescherming van software via auteursrecht. Uiteindelijk werden softwareprogramma's met auteursrecht beschermd. Dat had echter een grote impact op de praktijk van het programmeren. Gebruikers moesten in de logica stappen van een beschermde software, ontwikkeld door één ingenieur. In reactie daarop ontwikkelde Richard Stallman in 1989 de eerste GPL-licentie (General Public License). Dat is een licentie waarvoor het auteursrecht wordt aangewend om de software vrij te delen zodat andere informatici op dezelfde code kunnen verder werken. De basisveronderstelling is dat men door meer samen te werken een software kan bekomen die beter aangepast is aan de gebruikers ervan. De actieve omvorming van het auteursrecht door de vrije software-beweging om tot andere software te komen is dus een kunstzinnige keuze, een ervaring om uit te leren. Maar dat was niet de enige soort van controverses die Agentschap aan de lijst toevoegde. We vonden ook controverses rond fanclubs interessant.

Fanclubs?

Volgens het auteursrecht mogen consumenten creaties van de culturele industrie, zoals Harry Potter, niet zomaar gebruiken. Met uitzondering van ‘fair use’, bijvoorbeeld in een parodie, worden consumenten die als fan gebruik maken van bestaand materiaal bestraft. De weerstand bij fans bestaat er nu echter in om de notie van ‘fair use’ zo ver mogelijk op te rekken. Ze proberen loopholes uit om niet gecriminaliseerd te worden. Het interessante daaraan is dat het de scheiding tussen 'producent' en 'consument' in vraag stelt. Bezien vanuit een ecologie van praktijken maken fanactiviteiten de collectiviteit van een creatie manifest.

Controverses

Waarom richt Agentschap zich vooral op wettelijke controverses en rechtszaken?

Tijdens een controverse komt juist de manier van bestaan en de ecologie van een praktijk ter sprake. Vergelijk het hiermee: als men de trein neemt, ziet men de ecologie van die trein niet onmiddellijk. Maar zodra er controverse ontstaat, bijvoorbeeld omdat de signaalmensten staken, beseft men ineens dat de trein deel uitmaakt van een complex geheel en afhankelijk is van een omgeving. Tijdens een controverse wordt in die zin de mesopolitiek, of wat inherent is aan een praktijk, onder de loep genomen. Bij gerechtelijke controverses wordt bijkomend naar de macropolitieke wetgeving verwezen, en ook naar de micropolitiek van het evenement dat de jurisprudentie veroorzaakte. Bovendien vermelden advocaten en rechters tijdens rechtszaken vaak een opeenvolging van precedenten, de geschiedenis van een bepaalde discussie op basis van voorgaande jurisprudentie.

En omgekeerd zijn in precedenten dan de kantelpunten in de discussies van het verleden te vinden?

Tijdens een jurisprudentie is het de rol van de rechter om beslissingen te nemen. Hierdoor worden legale ‘deuren’ geopend of dicht gedaan. Neem sampling, een collage-techniek binnen de muziek. ‘Fair use’ is afhankelijk van de hoeveelheid en de wezenlijke aard van het gekopieerde deel. Een rechter heeft in een zaak ooit geoordeeld dat een kort stukje muziek gekopieerd kon worden. Een deur werd geopend. Vele kunstenaars hebben zich op die uitspraak gebaseerd en gebruikten korte stukjes muziek in loops om nieuwe muziek te maken. Een latere gerechtelijke uitspraak bepaalde echter dat alle sampling enkel nog mogelijk was mits er voor licenties wordt betaald. Zo werd opnieuw een deur dicht gedaan. Na een tijdje

hadden we in Agentschap honderden kwesties samengesteld in een lijst met nummers en sleutelwoorden.

Werkte je daarvoor met andere kunstenaars samen? Je spreekt consequent van ‘wij’.

Agentschap is een collectief avontuur, maar minder in de zin van een kunstenaarsgroep en meer in die zin dat ieder ‘agencement’ collectief is. De bedoeling is dat de controverses op de voorgrond staan. De lijst van controverses of ‘dingen’, zoals wij ze ook noemen, maakt speculatie mogelijk. Voor een tentoonstelling speelt Agentschap in op een speculatieve vraag. Die vraag bepaalt de keuze voor een reeks precednten. En die precednten maken het mogelijk maken om andere ecologieën te verbeelden.

Anders in welke zin?

Neem bijvoorbeeld de tegenstelling tussen idee en expressie. Een idee 'valt' volgens de ex-nihilo-doctrine vanuit het niets in het hoofd van de kunstenaar en wordt vervolgens toegeschreven aan de natuur. De omzetting van dat idee in een expressie wordt in de doctrine echter begrepen als ‘werk’ en wordt dus toegeschreven aan de cultuur. Enkel een expressie geniet bescherming van het auteursrecht, niet het zogenaamde ‘idee’. Enerzijds wist de doctrine dus bepaalde krachten uit als passief – het idee valt je te binnen – anderzijds verheerlijkt het de kracht van het werken als actief. De wederkerigheid die bestaat tussen idee en expressie wordt binnen het auteursrecht niet in acht genomen. Een mogelijke speculatieve vraag is dan: ‘Wat gebeurt er als wij ideeën wel actief opnemen in kunstpraktijken?’ Een ander voorbeeld is de tegenstelling tussen niet-mensen en mensen. Creaties van niet-mensen worden beschouwd als ‘natuur’. En creaties van mensen worden gezien als cultuur. Een mogelijke andere vraag is dus: ‘wat gebeurt er als wij creaties van niet-mensen mee opnemen in kunstpraktijken?’

Is het mogelijk om niets of niemand uit te sluiten? Hoe valt zoiets in te beelden? Die kwestie is voor Agentschap essentieel. Onze lijst bevat dan ook tal van controverses omtrent minoriteitspraktijken.

Wat zijn minoriteitspraktijken?

Praktijken die niet compatibel zijn met de doctrine van het auteursrecht, die dus niet in acht worden genomen door de wetgeving. Neem goochelaars. Goochelaars beschermen hun praktijk door middel van geheimhouding. Maar intellectuele eigendom heeft geen apparaat dat geheimen beschermt. De goochelaar Horace Goldin, die vorige eeuw bekend werd door zijn truc waarbij iemand in tweeën wordt gezaagd en nadien opnieuw aan elkaar wordt gezet, was ervan overtuigd dat hij zijn goochelkunsten het beste kon beschermen via intellectuele eigendom. Hij liet zijn truc daarom filmen en registreerde dat als een theatervoorstelling ter bescherming van de auteursrechten. Tegelijk deponeerde hij een patent op de technische kanten van de uitvinding. Door de deponering van het patent werd echter het geheim van die truc achterhaald. Op basis daarvan maakten Weiss Brothers een film waarin de geheimen van de truc uit de doeken werden gedaan. Het gevolg was dat niemand nog interesse had om de goochelkunst van Goldin te vertonen. Jarenlang heeft hij geprobeerd om de film juridisch te verbieden op basis van intellectuele eigendomsrecht. Maar dat heeft niet gewerkt. De film toonde hoe de truc in elkaar stak en dat werd niet beschouwd als een kopie van de voorstelling. Men kan zich echter afvragen hoe het mogelijk is dat een goochelaar vergeet dat geheimen inherent is aan zijn praktijk door de belofte van bescherming via intellectuele eigendom.

Je bedoelt dat intellectuele eigendom het verdere bestaan van de praktijk zelf in gevaar brengt?

Juist. Elke praktijk heeft beperkingen die bepalend zijn voor het verdere bestaan ervan. Goochelaars delen binnen een gilde bijvoorbeeld wel degelijk kennis onder elkaar, ze doen dat alleen niet met wie zelf geen goochelaar is. Dat maakt deel uit van hoe zij hun praktijk organiseren. Dat vergeten is vreemd, want mensen die deel uitmaken van een praktijk kennen normaal gezien ook de gevoeligheden ervan. Anderen kunnen die gevoeligheden moeilijk kennen. Wetgevers trachten bijvoorbeeld bij uitstek te denken vanuit algemeen geldende regels, maar ze kunnen nooit de diverse gevoeligheden van alle kunstpraktijken kennen.

Bestaat de praktijk van Agentschap erin om die diversiteit aan praktijken aan het licht te brengen?

Agentschap wil geen alarm slaan voor het uitsterven van de verscheidenheid aan praktijken in algemene zin, maar voorkomen dat er nog verder kunstpraktijken verdwijnen. Agentschap lijst de controverses rond bestaande kunstpraktijken op zodat de verschillende ecologieën waarvan ze deel uitmaken gekoesterd kunnen worden. Aanvankelijk toonden we de controverses vooral aan de hand van tentoonstellingen, maar na verloop van tijd hebben we daaraan ook performances gekoppeld. Zo zijn de zogenaamde ‘assemblées’ ontstaan.

Een combinatie van tentoonstelling en performance?

Een assemblée is zowel een samenstelling van kwesties als een samenkomst van betrokken mensen. Een kwestie wordt opnieuw geactiveerd door mensen die erbij betrokken zijn vanuit hun eigen praktijken met een controverse te confronteren. De uitspraken van rechtszaken zijn voor hun praktijken immers niet zonder gevolgen. We nodigen specifiek betrokkenen uit die als een ‘interlocuter’ voor de dingen fungeren. Tijdens de assemblée lezen wij met die groep

fragmenten van de discussie tijdens een rechtszaak. Daaruit ontstaan dan speculaties over andere mogelijke uitkomsten dan die van de beslissing van de rechtspraak.

Wat is het oogmerk van dat gezamenlijke speculeren?

Het gaat om het inbeelden van andere werelden. Neem nu dat ook niet-mensen worden opgenomen binnen kunstpraktijken en daarvoor dus ook erkenning krijgen, dan leven we meteen in een andere wereld. Als morgen de zang van een vogel als muziek erkend wordt, of de beweging van een boom als een choreografie, wat zijn dan de gevolgen voor de wereld waarin wij leven? Men zou het kunnen benaderen als een vorm van humoristische sciencefiction. Tegelijk genereert het misschien een zekere bescheidenheid over het menselijke vermogen, een relativering ook van de wereldwijde standaardisering.

Zijn er door het geglobaliseerde kapitalisme intussen controverses van over de hele wereld?

De controverses komen uit diverse landen. Zelfs Cuba en China hebben de wereldhandelsakkoorden en alles wat daarin verband houdt met intellectuele eigendom onderschreven. De oudste rechtszaak op de lijst van Agentschap dateert zelfs al van 1600 en betreft een Engelse kwestie over patenten op speelkaarten.

De historische basis voor de internationale auteurswet is dus Europees, leid ik dat daar goed uit af?

De copyright komt inderdaad initieel uit Engeland, met de ‘Statute of Anne’ uit 1709 in antwoord op het ontstaan van de drukpers. Vervolgens werd ook in Frankrijk en Duitsland een auteursrecht ontwikkeld. In de negentiende eeuw vond een eerste harmonisering van de verschillende auteurswetten in Europa plaats. Sinds de akkoorden van Bern in 1886 wordt dezelfde auteurswet-

geving in verschillende Europese landen toegepast. Die Bern-akkoorden zijn daarna steeds uitgebreid en werden uiteindelijk ook opgenomen in het TRIPS-akkoord dat, zoals al vermeld, onderdeel werd van de wereldhandelsakkoorden.

Internationale wet, lokale resonantie

Door de aard der dingen is het onderzoek van Agentschap dus per definitie internationaal? Of niet? De auteurswet is internationaal, maar de kwesties op de lijst van Agentschap komen uit verschillende territoria, van België tot Australië. Agentschap krijgt ook vragen voor tentoonstellingen uit diverse landen. De invoering van de auteurswet onder impuls van het geglobaliseerde kapitalisme houdt immers niet in dat er geen verschillen meer zouden bestaan. Agentschap speelt net in op hoe gesitueerde praktijken met de standaard wetgeving omgaan. Je kan het ook vergelijken met andere complexe ecologische problemen, zoals de klimaatverandering en de verdwijning van biodiversiteit. Die spelen zich af op planetaire schaal, maar zijn voelbaar op verschillende manieren, afhankelijk van de kleine omgeving waarin een wezen zich bevindt. Ook de verdwijning van ecologieën van praktijken speelt niet enkel op lokaal of nationaal niveau. Het gebeurt integendeel op grote schaal, maar het wordt wel anders ondergaan in verschillende praktijken.

De auteurswet is dus internationaal, maar de zaken die Agentschap daaromtrent onderzoekt lokaal? De problematiek van de ecologie van een praktijk is niet noodzakelijk aan een geografisch territorium gebonden, vooral bij kunsten niet. De jazzmuziek is een goed voorbeeld. Agentschap heeft verschillende rechtszaken rond jazz op de lijst. Ter bescherming van

muziek kent de auteurswet slechts één parameter: de melodie. Maar jazz is gebaseerd op de variatie van een melodie. Als men met jazzmuzikanten spreekt, hebben zij het daarom over ritme, harmonie of andere muzikale termen. Maar daar is geen spoor van terug te vinden in de auteurswetgeving. Jazz is dus moeilijk verenigbaar met de auteurswetgeving. Hoewel jazz historisch uit de Verenigde Staten komt, wordt die muziek echter in allerlei delen van de wereld gespeeld. De rechtszaken rond jazz komen dus mogelijk eveneens uit verschillende landen. De problematiek is echter eigen aan de praktijk van de jazz en is niet noodzakelijk louter aan één geografisch territorium gebonden.

Welke werkwijze heeft Agentschap om met de spanning tussen lokaal en internationaal om te gaan? Kan Agentschap een rechtszaak die in de Verenigde Staten plaatsvond ook elders lokaal activeren? Zeker. Een interessant precedent overstijgt juist het anekdotische, in die zin is het ook elders lokaal inzetbaar. Wanneer we een zaak ergens in een 'assemblée' activeren, zoeken we daarom altijd naar lokale ‘betrokkenen’ om erop te reageren. Afhankelijk van de plek worden de controverses dus anders ingevuld.

Kan je daar een voorbeeld van geven? Agentschap heeft een serie van controverses die speculeren rond de rol van doden in creaties. Eén van de bestudeerde controverses draait rond de tekening van een helderziende kunstenaar uit Engeland, Frank Leah, tijdens de jaren vijftig. Men kon hem uitnodigen om vanuit zijn helderziendheid een portret te maken, niet van een persoon maar van de geesten van doden die de opdrachtgever omringen. In Engeland wordt de bestelling van een portret volgens het auteursrecht echter beschouwd als ‘works for hire’, met als gevolg dat de rechten

op het portret niet aan de kunstenaar maar aan de opdrachtgever worden toegekend. Nu had een man aan Leah gevraagd om een portret te maken van de geest van zijn zoon, die gestorven was tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog. Omdat die ervaring voor deze man belangrijk was in zijn rouwproces schreef hij er een artikel over in de krant. Daarbij publiceerde hij ook een reproductie van het portret door Frank Leah. De krantenuitgever ging ervan uit dat de opdrachtgever de reproductierechten over het portret bezat. Maar toen manifesteerde Leah zich. Hij claimde dat hij over de rechten van de tekening beschikte, omdat het geen portret ‘after nature’ was. De rechter moest daarop beslissen of de kunstenaar een portret ‘after nature’ maakte of uit zijn verbeelding tekende. Dat maakte immers het verschil qua auteursrechten. Is er wel sprake van verbeelding als Leah beweert dat hij begeleid wordt door de geest van de overledene? Is de overledene mee verantwoordelijk voor het portret? Op welke wijze droeg hij dan bij aan de tekening?

En het is dan het specifiek Engelse antwoord op die kwestie dat Agentschap elders gaat reactiveren? Inderdaad, precies om speculatie te ontwikkelen over de vraag wat er gebeurt als anders-dan-mensen, doden bijvoorbeeld, op wederkerige wijze deel zouden uitmaken van kunstpraktijk. Binnen de auteurswet komen doden immers spijtig genoeg niet in aanmerking voor bescherming. Maar wat bleek? De assemblée rond de genoemde rechtszaak verliep helemaal anders in Parijs dan in Cuenca. De betrokken genodigden reageerden helemaal anders op hetzelfde geval. In Frankrijk stonden enkele aanwezigen in de 'assemblée' ronduit sceptisch tegenover de praktijk van een helderziende kunstenaar. In Ecuador werd de manifestatie van doden minder in vraag gesteld.

Wat leid je daar dan uit af? Dat de resonantie op de verhalen van de rechtszaken afhankelijk is van de plek waar ze ter discussie worden gesteld en de betrokkenen die aanwezig zijn. De auteurswet is internationaal, maar de resonanties zijn lokaal. Dat is niet onbelangrijk. Precies daarom nemen we onze assemblées ook nooit op met video. We organiseren “assemblées” steeds opnieuw, met elke keer andere resonanties, afhankelijk van de plaats en het moment van de invocatie. Mensen die hebben deelgenomen vertellen de verhalen zelf weer verder.

Praktijk en ecologie

Wat houdt de organisatie van assemblées praktisch in? Meestal vindt een reeks van samenkomsten tijdens één tentoonstelling plaats, afhankelijk van de aard van de tentoonstelling en de middelen waarover we beschikken. Voor elke ‘assemblée’ nodigen we ter plekke betrokken mensen uit, omdat zij bepaalde praktijken beoefenen, met behulp van de contacten van de organisaties. Vervolgens zoeken we die mensen op en starten we een dialoog. Uiteindelijk worden deze mensen gevraagd om tegen vergoeding deel te nemen aan de 'assemblée', die ook open staat voor anderen.

De organisatie vergt dus veel meer dan ‘bestaand werk’ naar de andere kant van de wereld sturen? Inderdaad, de organisatie van assemblées is arbeidsintensief. Wij zijn dus ook afhankelijk van lonen. Mensen die bij Agentschap te werk gesteld zijn, zijn ingeschreven volgens het statuut van werknemer in België. De lonen zijn hierdoor gekoppeld aan Belgische arbeidsovereenkomsten, ook als Agentschap in andere landen actief is.

En als er geen middelen zijn? In de beeldende kunsten zijn vaak louter transportkosten voorzien. Het probleem in de beeldende kunsten, zowel in België als in andere landen, is dat men er dikwijls van uitgaat dat kunstenaars hun loon halen uit de verkoop nadien. Voor een tentoonstelling worden dus nauwelijks middelen voorzien voor de ontwikkeling van nieuw onderzoek. Organisaties vinden het altijd fantastisch dat er ter plekke onderzoek gebeurt, maar tegelijk worden er zelden middelen voor lonen voor vrijgemaakt. Als er onvoldoende budget is voor lonen, moeten organisaties echter extra middelen zoeken. In het geval van de Biennale in Cuenca in Ecuador was er bijvoorbeeld ook een extra

ondersteuning van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap. Dat hielp ons dan het transport te bekostigen, zodat een deel van het bestaande budget vrij kwam voor lonen. Alle beetjes helpen.

Wat wordt er dan juist getransporteerd in het geval van Agentschap? De ‘dingen’ die deel uitmaken van de rechtszaken en in de tentoonstelling zijn opgenomen, worden verzonden. Soms transporteren wij ook de architectuur. Dat hangt af van de afstanden. Als die te groot is, maken wij de architectuur van de tentoonstelling en performance opnieuw ter plaatse. Het heeft geen zin om tafels, banken en rekken de wereld rond te sturen.

Hier spelen ecologische overwegingen, veronderstel ik? Het is ecologischer, maar meestal ook goedkoper. We recyclen onze architectuur en slaan die op in Europa, maar ook in andere continenten. De afgelopen jaren heeft Agentschap bijvoorbeeld diverse keren in Amerika tentoongesteld en is de architectuur daar opgeslagen en op verschillende plaatsen hergebruikt.

Haal je zelf ook nog bijkomende middelen uit verkoop? De dingen waarrond controverses plaatsvonden – dat kan gaan van een boot, een fietsrek over tegels, olifantenperformances tot en met een basketbalmatch,... – maken deel uit van de lijst van Agentschap en zijn noodzakelijk voor de assemblées. Ze kunnen dan ook niet worden verkocht. Wij stellen daarom aan verzamelingen die geïnteresseerd voor om één of meerdere controverses te activeren. Er vindt evenwel nooit een ‘overdracht’ of transfer van een werk plaats. Dat vormt soms een probleem voor verzamelingen die de aankoop van een blijvend werk wensen.

Het gaat om het inbeelden van andere werelden. Als morgen de zang van een vogel als muziek erkend wordt, of de beweging van een boom als een choreografie, wat zijn dan de gevolgen voor de wereld waarin wij leven? Men zou het kunnen benaderen als een vorm van humoristische sciencefiction. Tegelijk genereert het misschien een zekere bescheidenheid over het menselijke vermogen, een relativering ook van de wereldwijde standaardisering.



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Zijn er andere grenzen waarop je terugkerend botst bij de presentatie en verspreiding van het werk in de wijde wereld?

De grenzen van het vertellen. Teksten van uitspraken in rechtszaken vertellen is niet bijster makkelijk. Bovendien komen de controverses uit uiteenlopende landen en zijn er bijkomend vertalingen nodig naar de taal van de landen waar de assemblées plaatsvinden. De onkosten van vertalingen wegen dus soms zwaar door op het budget, maar dat is eigen aan de praktijk van Agentschap.

Pleit je voor een kunstwereld die ook de verschillen tussen kunstpraktijken meer in rekening brengt, waar nodig met specifiek aan te vragen steun?

Ja, er zijn immers grote verschillen in praktijken en hun manieren van bestaan. Niet alle kunstenaars overleven uitsluitend via de verkoop nadien. Toch wordt daar meestal van uitgegaan. En dat

is dan vooral te betreuren bij organisaties die werken met overheidssteun. Die zouden verplicht moeten worden om voor het werk van kunstenaars lonen te voorzien. Anders blijft er te weinig ruimte voor experiment. Gelukkig bestaan er een reeks organisaties die meer vertrekken vanuit creaties en hiervoor ook middelen voorzien. Wanneer die uitzonderlijke initiatieven ook internationaal samenwerken, maakt dat al een verschil.

Moet het lokale stadsniveau daarin het voortouw nemen? Kan het sterk internationale Brussel dat?

Brussel is in de afgelopen veertig jaren sterk veranderd door de federalisering van België. Enerzijds werden de bestaande federale instellingen afgebouwd, en dat proces gaat ook nog altijd verder. Daardoor ontstond er een relatieve ‘leegte’ in vergelijking met andere hoofdsteden. Anderzijds ontstond in Brussel ook een communautair opbod van de verschillende overheden – de stad, het gewest, de gemeenschap-

pen. Daardoor krijgen veel kleine kunstinitiatieven ook overheidssteun, een fenomeen dat soms onterecht als een ‘versnippering van het veld’ wordt omschreven. Daarnaast is Brussel, mede door de extreme armoede en de stadsvlucht, één van de goedkopere Europese steden om in te leven. Dat verklaart waarom Brussel zoveel avontuurlijke nieuwkomers aantrekt, waaronder kunstenaars. Veel kunstenaars uit andere landen hebben zich hier gevestigd omdat de huur hier lager ligt dan in andere steden. Na enkele jaren verblijf in Brussel komen ze bovendien voor overheidssteuning in aanmerking. De erkenning van kunstenaars binnen het statuut van werknemer biedt dan weer mogelijkheid tot bescherming van de sociale zekerheid. Voeg daar nog een ‘traditie’ van artistieke zelforganisatie bij die in Brussel bestaat, en dat maakt waarom Brussel in vergelijking met andere steden nog een relatief grote verscheidenheid aan kunstpraktijken kent.

Hoe schat je de toekomst op dat vlak in? Is het een kwestie van tijd voor die diversiteit verdwijnt?

Kunstpraktijken staan ook in de beeldende kunsten onder steeds grotere druk van privatiseringen. En door de besparingen van de afgelopen jaren lijkt het kunstbeleid in dezelfde richting te gaan. Kunstenaars vinden dus allicht meer mogelijkheden om buiten de lijnen te blijven experimenteren in kleine openingen, niches die beantwoorden aan de enkelvoudigheid van hun praktijken. Zolang die niches er zijn, blijven er ook andere kunstpraktijken mogelijk in de toekomst.

About the contributors

Pieter De Buysser is writer and theatermaker. Today he's preparing the play *The Decoy*, a fable on the refined, globalised elite. The play he wrote and directed in Archa in Prague, *The Afterparty*, will be presented in Kaaitheter on February 7.
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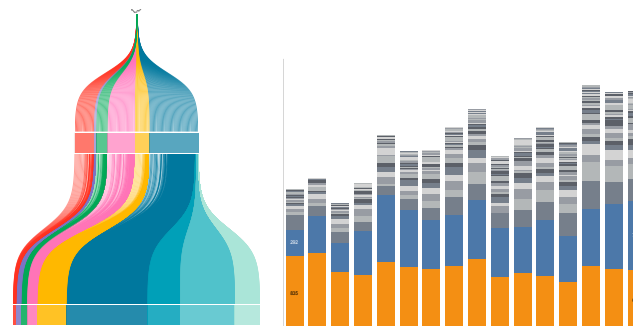
Hello aunt Cécile, hello police officer: welcome and join in

Taru Elfving is a curator and writer based in Helsinki, working as Head of Programme at Frame Contemporary Art Finland. Her practice focuses on nurturing transdisciplinary encounters and site-sensitive artistic investigations with a long-term commitment to the critical discourses on ecology and feminism. She holds a PhD from Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths University of London, and has been teaching theory in practice at Goldsmiths and many Nordic art academies.



Residencies and future cosmopolitics

Simon Leenknecht is researcher at Flanders Arts Institute. He has an all-round research interest, working on analyses of the fields of visual arts, performing arts and music in Flanders and Brussels.



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As first co-ordinator of IETM, co-founder of the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (now CAE), cultural actor involved in the European Cities of Culture and many years as manager for several artists and arts organisations, **Hilde Teuchies** has a long-standing experience in European cultural co-operation, cultural policy and networking.

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