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## **THE INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS: A CHALLENGE TO NATIONAL FESTIVALS**

At the time of globalization and integration processes, national festivals are also subject to internationalization pressure. What is the role of national festivals in relation to international ones? In what way are we to understand the internationalization process and how should we integrate it into the national festival model - while successfully avoiding the trap of promoting standardized cultural production as well as the risk of fuelling national stereotypes? This is the central question I wish to deal with in this paper. My purpose, however, is not to present a sample matrix for the national festival, but primarily to address national festivals and contextualize them in relation to the phenomena of internationalization and interculturalization. How are we to reflect on the process of internationalization in today's globalized world (actually the global village), where the borders of the national communities are transcended and which is international already in its predominant ideological orientation and infrastructural organization? How to consider the phenomenon of interculturalism in so-called cross-cultural world, where the differentiating qualities of cultural spheres are subject to disappearance, or melting? How to define the role of national festivals at the present moment of translational cultural pluralism?

### **The International and the Intercultural**

It is sensible to think about the internationalization process in the light of interculturalization – in terms of generating theatre at the crossroads of cultures, as Patrice Pavis would put it. In the sphere of theatre and performing arts, interculturalization is realized in three prevailing ways: through international touring of productions by individual groups; through internationalization at the level of the production itself, featuring artists from different nations; through international festivals, which try to attract productions from various nations and cultures. As Marvin Carlson finds in the article “Govorice modernega mednarodnega odra” (The Languages of Contemporary International Stage, 9), there is a number of blurs between these three ways of internationalization and interculturalization of theatre. As a first-rate example of their intertwinement, Carlson states the theatre of Peter Brook. It was founded by a group of artists from various theatre cultures; the group

regularly goes on international tours, attends international festivals and attracts international audiences to their home theatre, the Bouffes Du Nord in Paris. In this case, the internationalization process springs from the tendency to search for a common foundation of different cultures, with the aim of transcending particular cultures on behalf of a universality of human condition. This quest is marked by the tendency to search for universal theatre language and transcend the dominant, language-based theatre model.

The internationalism of Brook's theatre springs from a far-reaching and long-term project; it derives from the research of basic ontological questions and roots of theatre. In today's globalized world, which establishes itself as a culture of links, however, internationalism has become a necessity of any (not just international) activity. Under the pressures of economic globalization, working internationally no longer means just activity within prestige connections, investments into development and planning, but is inevitably connected with existence. The relations between the international and the intercultural seem to be especially based on the formal(ist) infrastructural connections; some deep, fundamental correlation between the two notion seems to be lost. Actually, the problem lies in the fact that the principle of connection has become a demand, even a norm of contemporary society and started dominating over the principle of (cultural) difference.

The new approaches in cultural production and networking have also resulted in a special production type, so-called 'festival production', by several co-producers in order to ensure its festival participation in advance. These connections are based on trust in the quality of work by (established) artists (e.g. Jan Fabre, Wim Vandekeybus, Romeo Castellucci). Investing into 'brands' is supposed to at give festival audiences insight into their current work and offer good performances as well. International co-productions bring eminence and combine funding flows, which is important at the time when repertory (municipal, regional or national) theatres increasingly face financial problems in a market-driven economy. Let us consider the pros and cons of such networking on two examples from Slovenia. In 2004, the Slovenian National Theatre Nova Gorica staged the play *Meanwhile* (written by Srečko Fišer, based on the novel *The Ceasefire – La Tregua* by the Italian writer Primo Levi) within the scope of the "The Theatre of Europe: The Mirror of Displaced Peoples" project by the European Theatre Convention. The shattering experience of holocaust, intertwined with the paraphrases of European cultural heritage, created space for reflecting on individual and European civilization experience and called for solidarity and tolerance at the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War. At the Slovenian national festival, the Borštnik Meeting (2005), the remarkable performance won the Grand Prix while Srečko Fišer was awarded for the best dramatic text and the actor Radko Bolčina for his role as protagonist

Ulysses/Aldo/Orpheus. Among others, the performance also toured the Sterijino pozorje festival in Novi Sad (2006). This synthesis of the production and artistic interests came to a good outcome. Quite the opposite was the experience of the Prešeren Theatre Kranj in 2006, when it staged the performance *Nočni azil (Nachtsyl)*, in co-production with the Freies Schauspiel Ensemble Frankfurt (Germany) and the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre Krakow (Poland). The artists considered it as a unique theatre experience under excellent production conditions and with the rehearsal period of the length that can not be provided enabled by repertory theatres. However, the production did not turn out to be a good one and received bad reviews and poor audience responses in all three countries.

International productions are characterised by the principle, or the ideology of connection, which encourages collaborations between European artists and institutions and promotes cultural diversity with the purpose of creating a joint European cultural sphere. For many theatre makers, especially for groups without own stage, entering networks is of crucial importance for their existence. However, it inevitably results in a specific aesthetic and political(ly correct) orientation of a 'festival productions', which hardly have an identity of their own. They are made to cater for international audiences, which indeed show themselves as a nationally and culturally diverse group of individuals, but as a non-differentiated theatre community. The central production and reception issue is that the boundaries between so-called source culture and target culture have been blurred: it is no longer clear which is which. In other words: if source culture, from which the 'festival production' emerges, can be defined as an accumulation of several national spheres, then the target culture (which focuses on their integrative connection and the grounding of a translational European citizenship), is in the process of development. Here, a democratic syncretism of various cultural forms and practices is formed which is still in the phase of searching for or establishing its audiences. The positions towards the phenomenon of cultural hybridization move between two extremes: the critical rejection and affirmative approaches towards the translational connections in so-called Google-Earth reality. The unsuccessful outcomes of 'festival productions' could be described as successors of post-modern theatre, "wide open to different cultures and various artistic practices, but without the wish for their meeting, exchange and mutual enrichment; quite the opposite, it publicly states that it is going to create out of them a certain patchwork, worthy of so-called one-world-culture, i.e. of the conglomerate of cultural ruins and botches without complexes" (Pavis 1997, 432). This is a picturesque and critical statement made by Patrice Pavis more than ten years ago about the multicultural patchwork of the postmodern theatre of that time. Superficial multiculturalism as a balancing act between various political, cultural and economic interests has been replaced by interculturalism as a strong ambition and will to merge cultural markers and

backgrounds. Over the last years, it has resulted in cultural hybridization, which is global from scratch. »Many signs suggest that the historical period defined by post-modernism is coming to an end: multiculturalism and the discourse of identity are being overtaken by a planetary movement of creolization: cultural relativism and deconstruction substituted for modernist universalism but give us no weapons against the twins of uniformity and mass culture and traditionalist, far-right withdrawal,« wrote the French curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud in the “Altermodern” manifesto of 2005. According to Bourriaud, contemporary artists are inventing a new modernity, so-called altermodernity, which arises from planetary negotiations and discussions between agents from different cultures. »Unlike the modernism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which spoke the abstract language of the colonial west, and post-modernism, which encloses artistic phenomena in origins and identities,« altermodernism in Google-Earth reality is characterised by translation: »artists translate and transcode information from one format to another, and wander in geography as well as in history.« (ibid.) The principle of translation, which directs cultural hybridization, includes also the possibility of producing singularities as conceived by Bourriaud. It is sensible to approach interculturality and the role of national festivals in the global altermodernity precisely from this perspective.

### **The National Festival and the Production of Singularities**

Although the term ‘national’ seems anachronistic in the current moment of transnational cultural initiatives and integrations, the national festival is by no means an exhausted and void institution. It is reasonable that a national theatre festival which features selected performances of a certain season, is established as a platform of representative domestic theatre production; it can also be presented as a specificity of a certain cultural sphere. The specificities of a national space are to be understood in the sense of the concept of cultural diversity (Klaić 2007, 27), i.e. as a diversity of aesthetic, cultural, social and political practices that connect the subjects of a national community (with the political borders rarely matching the ethnic and linguistic ones). It can also be established as a reflection on national identity, which was proved topical in Slovenian theatre last year, when Slovenia presided over the European Union. At the 2008 Borštnik Meeting, the theme of the accompanying program »Nation, Theatre, Community« was that of the historical and fictional narrations, traditions and specificities which define the Slovenian national community, also in relation to globalization processes and those of European integration. All this bore special interest because it related to the question of establishing theatre communities. Recently, there has been an increasing interest to promote the Borštnik Meeting as a platform of Slovenian theatre, that foreign

producers, theatre critics and researchers be invited to the festival in order to encourage international collaboration. Due to the lack of cultural policies, individuals and groups are left to their own initiatives and devices. For example, since 2007 the Mladinsko Theatre has been organizing the Mladinsko Theatre Festival, featuring its own productions, precisely with the intention of placing the theatre into an international context. Successful from this perspective has also been the Gibanica dance festival, conceived as a biennial showcase.

At national festivals, the specificity of a certain cultural sphere can be more prominently featured by being placed into an international context. This is frequently realized through guest appearances of foreign artists and performances. Nevertheless, the nature of theatre production, the numerous unforeseen circumstances that characterise the transport of the participants and equipment as well as the high expenses incurred, make it difficult for national festivals to offer conceptually elaborate programs of foreign performances. Foreign productions are well-integrated into the Week of Slovenian Drama festival, which features also foreign stagings of Slovenian plays. The welcome information on the presence of Slovenian drama abroad provides for exciting intercultural experience, especially when non-Slavic and non-European cultures are featured (e.g. in the stagings of Zoran Hočevar's *'M Gonna Kill You!* by the Chilean Teatro La Machina in 2003, Evald Flisar's *Nora Nora* by the Al-Soradk Pavilion Group from Kairo in 2005 and *What about Leonardo?* by the Gessyoku Kagekidan Theatre Company from Japan this year). The Week of Slovenian Drama not only sees its mission in encouraging and reflecting on Slovenian drama domestically, but also in promoting it abroad. The festival expanded its international programme in 2003, when it introduced new models of playwriting into the Slovenian theatre sphere. It organized international discussions on the publishing and promotion of drama and on new dramatic trends in Europe (among others, these events were attended by Graham Wybrow, literary manager of the Royal Court Theatre in London, the publicist and critic Aleks Sierz, author of *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, translated into the Slovenian language that same year, various publishers and editors as well as the playwright Martin Crimp. Next year, the festival organized a playwriting workshop in collaboration with the Royal Court and also supported the attendance of young Slovenian playwrights at workshops organized by the Royal Court in London. The mutual enrichment of domestic and foreign dramaturgical strategies has also been furthered by the PreGlej group. In 2006, they organized the first Slovenian festival of playwriting, *PreGlej na glas!*. The festival enables the networking of various production centres (the first one on the Ljubljana – New York relation, and over the following two years with the countries on the territory of former Yugoslavia), by means of staged readings under the direction of foreign directors and performed by Slovenian actors. The readings are accompanied by discussions focussing on the elaboration of the plays seen. Both festivals, The Week of Slovenian

Drama and *PreGlej na glas!*, shed light upon international exchange from the intercultural perspective: upon the meetings, transfers, adoption, appropriation of various artistic practices and production models from various cultural spheres. This is the purpose of the internationalization of national festivals: to enable intercultural experience and further the possibilities of developing the singularities of the domestic environment.

To set the question about the internationalization of national festivals means to place it into the context of interculturalism, more precisely: to shift this question from *intraculturalism* to the level of *interculturalism* and to open the question of the specificity of a certain cultural sphere in relation to the principle of translation, which governs transcultural society. Let us elaborate upon this notion with the thought of Georges Banu, who says that »interculturalism has always been there; it appears when we deny it, it disappears when we affirm its presence.« (242) Among other things, Banu also illustrates it with the following allegory. In Turkmenistan, where the Merl river disappears underground in the desert, there is a luxuriant oasis. Life is generated from an invisible source, but who knows that this river supplies the Edenic oasis with water? In transcultural society, where cultural differences are subject to relativism, shedding light upon the invisible connections between the sources of these differences is perhaps more topical than ever. The intercultural perspective opens the question how the specificities characterizing a certain cultural sphere should be made visible, introduced into the field of knowledge and defined as singularities in relation to external influences – with the purpose of seeing the differences, modifying a certain cultural community and understanding what its driving forces are.

Until recently, interculturalism was reflected upon mainly from the perspective of the knowledge produced on stage. Today, however, it is worth focussing upon the gaze of the spectator and shifting the question of the intercultural from the notion of *mise en scene* to that of *mise en regard*. Along with Marvin Carlson, we can find that events are given international character by their spectators rather than by their production. Carlson's article "Govorice modernega mednarodnega odra" (The Languages of Contemporary International Stage) deals with international festivals, but its arguments can also prove useful to our discussion. National festivals acquire an international perspective predominantly through international audiences – if they manage to attract foreign spectators, especially those who are ready to enter an intercultural dialogue with the domestic festival activity. With the selected production, national festivals allow for a broader reflection by domestic theatre researchers as well as researches from other fields (anthropologists, ethnologists, musicologists, sociologists and last but not least, cultural politicians), and put the uniqueness of source culture at the forefront. Events such as performance discussions, expert panels and

conferences on selected themes can make a decisive contribution to the establishment of intercultural dialogue, highlight the specificities of the festival space and reflect them as singularities in relation to other cultures. The point of the internationalization of national festivals is precisely that of turning them into intercultural experience. By establishing a market of opinions, a communication platform with representatives from the fields of culture and politics exchanging their ideas, national festivals also contribute to the bridging of the gap between the European public sphere and institutional practice – as the problem of the connection between the European and national cultural spheres is defined by Bo Stråth.

»At the heart of all considerations of intercultural penetration and exchange one is forced to make the choice between global village and a world of differences,« said Clive Barker in June 1991 at a Novi Sad conference on intercultural exchange (1996, 251). On today's Google Earth, this dilemma no longer remains. The two worlds that, nearly two decades ago, were possible to discuss in terms of duality and split, are today fully intertwined. Therefore, it is sensible to reflect on cultural hybrids as cultural diversities, which, by the principle of translation, flow between cultural spheres. Their specificities can be reinterpreted through the singularities which determine the configurations of perception and local ways of being. This is the role that can be played by national festivals: that of articulating the production of singularities in their domestic environment and exposing them to the intercultural experience of their (domestic and foreign) audiences.

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