TUNING IN TO EUROPEAN DISSONANCE

by Lonneke van Heugten

An in/outsider's view on Karaoke Europe

Karaoke Europe was set up, not just as four organisations working in unison, but as a transnational project, in which the partners would exchange knowledge and methodologies and collaborate on each other's artistic work. As the project is a case-study in my PhD research on "The EU as a Curator in the European Theatre World," this article will stage an encounter between slices of my experience as a participant-observer/dramaturge and theoretical perspectives relating to collaboration. This will serve to complement the historical genealogies of community arts that Eugene van Erven maps out in this volume, as well as the self-reflections of the Karaoke Europe-partners. This article asks how the transnational in the project is performed and given shape. It reflects on issues of collaboration, participation and community in Europe and analyses how they are related. Recurring over and over in policy jargon, these concepts seem naturalised, but how are they realised in practice? Instead of harmoniously sounding together, tensions may form between them; in some cases, one can even drown out the other.

CHANGING THE TUNE

In our first meeting at the end of 2012, Ondrej Hrab, director of Archa Theatre in Prague and project leader, told me the project title "Karaoke Europe" addressed the phenomenon that immigrants try to mimic the habits and culture of the local population, but they never fully succeed and are recognised as different. In other words, they sing - however slightly - out of tune.

With "Europe" in the title, the project investigates this as a European phenomenon and implicitly tries to deal with this designation of difference and creation of minorities as "others". In the project application for the European Culture Programme 2007-2013, the project directly questions the failure of the concept of multicultural society as proclaimed by Angela Merkel, and asks, within the context of right-wing and increasing xenophobia throughout Europe: how can we think majority and minority relations differently? The story of the Allstar Refjúdží Band, an initiative by Archa that precedes the Karaoke Europe project, is telling about what political dimensions are involved in intercultural collaboration.

Borne in 2008 out of the location theatre project Dance through the Fence of Jana Svobodová, the group consisted of an eclectic mix from refugees to production managers and professional actors with Chinese, Armenian, Swiss, Czech and Slovak backgrounds. Never intended as a band the random group became one when they were asked to play at a venue and found an audience. The director of the band, music composer Michael Romanyshyn, who later became a collaborator in the Karaoke Europe project, writes in the ICAF 2011 publication that differing musical conventions and aesthetics are the main area of disagreement within the band. Surprisingly, while the political views of the members differ, they seem less present in the process. There is, in short, a difference between individual political views and the politics of aesthetics.

You are now entering the EU
(photo © Lonneke van Heugten)

According to Romanyshyn, a temporary "peace" is established during the rehearsals and performances only by doing, not in abstract discussions (49). Also, they find common ground in the issues of "racism, nationalism, culture clash, and immigration rights" which are at the heart of their songs (50). These are aspects of the experience of migration and feeling at home that resonate in all of them, whether (former) refugee or immigrant.

Another aspect of collaboration that is highlighted by the Allstar Refjúdží Band is how the criticality of their performance is transformed when received by different audiences. For example, when they sung their version of

the Czech national anthem in the Netherlands, the non-Czech speaking audience danced because they merely heard the reggae beat. The affective frictions between respect for the anthem and the layers of meaning generated by the heavy accents of the voices, were inaudible to them. Both the way the audience participates and the meaning of the performance can change according to the context in which they perform.

From a random collection of people who made music in a theatre performance, it became a refugee band, which in turn transformed into a "Czech" band, according to Romanyshyn, referring to the common language and residency of the members. However, as a band in constant recombination, the Allstar Refjúdží Band challenges an idea of Czech imagined community as being tied to race, descent, language and homogenous culture. Fixing identities – even in dual nationalities – would sell the band short, as neither a common language nor nation could capture the cultural affiliations of the members nor the musical fluidity of the songs, music and performers combined.

If we take this analysis of the band as a reflection on the Karaoke Europe project, it shows that karaoke as a pop culture phenomenon which involves a necessarily imperfect mimicry, can also be considered a creative subversion of the idea of a national culture. Rather than singing out of tune, the tune is transformed altogether. This intercultural engagement challenges preconceptions of how things "should be done".

FORMING ENSEMBLES

"Hurray for public funding!", Romanyshyn exclaims (albeit between parentheses), acknowledging that it is what had been keeping the project and therefore the collaboration going (49). This raises the question of where the drive to collaborate comes from and under what conditions it may be sustained. The difference between co-operation and collaboration should be formulated. Co-operation means that the operation happens from two or more positions which are synchronous and aligned pragmatically. On the contrary, collaboration involves a working together in producing a temporary space outside of each individuals context in which collective work can happen.

From a basic sociological standpoint, the production of art always involves co-operation. Rather than being the result of an artistic genius operating in isolation, it comes into existence through the joint efforts of many, not necessarily sharing the same space or time, argued Howard Becker in Art Worlds. The process of making art involves the previous generations of artists that have produced traditions and aesthetics, theoreticians and critics providing the rationale for what they do, the producers of materials, the financers and curators that provide support, the cultural policies that shape the conditions for them to work, the space in which it is shown, the audiences that sustain it, and so forth. The artwork thus always shows signs of this co-operation.

Turning to performing arts, this social dimension seems obvious. However, there seems to be an inflation of the term collaboration, and an increase in

working across national borders in the performing arts. Four developments can be hypothesised that impel the theatre world to co-operate across borders. Firstly, there is the financial crisis that is both fuelling debates on cultural differences between European nations and intra-nationally between groups of people, as well as cuts in government spending on culture. This leads to the "prisoner's dilemma"[1] which gives the illusion of choice, while collaboration is almost a necessary condition to secure survival. Secondly, the EU invests discursively and with actions in the sphere of culture, as long as it has "European added value" and doesn't interfere with the nation-states. For example, co-operation is a pre-condition for getting support from the Culture Programme 2007–2013, meaning exchange and encounter across at least three European countries. Thirdly, the circuit of performing arts festivals has provided a model of co-production and drawn theatre closer to festival practices of curation. Fourthly, the pervasive technological mediations of artworks/performances (such as online availability of video registrations or surtitles in the theatre) offer the pre-condition of visibility and thus new possible collaborations.

The impetus to co-operate and collaborate is also happening on a broader societal level, which urges criticality to this new paradigm of artistic work. According to philosopher Bojana Kunst there is a fetish and an excess of collaboration; it has become the medium for visibility and depends highly on mobility and time. The impetus to collaborate is connected to the Post-Fordist mode of immaterial labour and "seems to be inscribed into the value of labour as based on the constant production and exchange of communication, relations, signs, and languages" (Kunst 25). Collaboration is - paradoxically - a mode of visibility of the individual, where difference is valued and self-promotion happens.

We can conclude that the arts - often seen as a sphere separated from the social or offering a temporary space outside of societal hierarchies - are caught up in the social. They are a node where social struggles become visible, and are reflected on or transformed. According to political theorist Chantal Mouffe this conflictual dimension of pluralism is typically negated by liberalism which claims that when differing perspectives are put together, "they constitute a harmonious ensemble" (2). Mouffe's agonistic model of democratic politics offers a different view where "the public space is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation" (3). There is no use in making distinctions between political and non-political art, according to her, because: "From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension" (4).

In recent critical articles on art that emphasises its own social dimension, the inherent self-reflexivity of the art and the work of producing it, the art/work, is often lost. For example art historian and critic Claire Bishop maintains that good intentions to contribute to the social situation in a positive way should

1 The prisoner's dilemma was the central theme in the symposium "Everyone for Themselves" on 12 May 2012 organised by Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (http://www.wdw.nl/event/everyone-for-themselves-nl-2/)

not acquit the artwork from critical review. The aesthetics and not how the collaboration is undertaken, should be the focal point of critique. While this opening up the possibility of judging social art by it's aesthetic merit is necessary,[2] it forecloses the interconnection of the process and the art to be interpreted together. We will return to this later. First, what does Karaoke Europe as a transnational collaboration entail?

SINGING TO A DIFFERENT TUNE

As Eugene van Erven has so clearly demonstrated in his contribution, contemporary practices are connected to historical movements. Even if the four partners do not find kinship in the roots articulated, they still choose their own route through the artistic, social, economic and political conditions that make up their context, transforming it on the way. Sometimes these routes cross and intertwine.

The artistic leaders of Archa, for example, had already worked with Dutch theatre group Dogtroep of which Titia Bouwmeester and Ted van Leeuwen were part before they started 5e Kwartier. The organisations were going to work together on a project in a refugee centre in the Czech Republic, but due to internal troubles in Dogtroep, this collaboration never happened. Archa instead continued with the project and so began their working with refugees. The reason for Ted van Leeuwen from 5e Kwartier to again collaborate with them was partly because of this previous cancellation. These interconnected international histories of theatre thus are partly held together by the social force described by Marcel Mauss' prestation, the reciprocal act of gift-giving which transcends the personal.

However, unanticipated collaborations emerge that were not projected by the proposal. One instance of unplanned collaboration is Anna Lengyel's dramaturgical work with Orchestre Partout in the Netherlands, to integrate stories of the refugee musician-performers with their music and songs. Furthermore, while Ondrej Hrab and Jana Svobodova of Archa had long followed the work of Marek Adamov his foundation, Truc Sphérique, provided new collaborators. Another example is my own changing involvement from "researcher of" to "dramaturge in" the Promised Land project of Archa. The unexpected is a central aspect of these collaborations.

Doing a European project, is not about ticking the boxes that were drawn during the application process. It is a constant negotiation between the work process, the subsidiser, the local conditions and the collaborators. The project - as it is projected into the future - can open opportunities, but also become stringent. As cultural policy and management professor Milena Dragićević Šešić writes, EU bureaucracy "imposes demands but often neglects the specific needs of art and cultural communities in Eastern and Southeastern Europe" (49). This problem of policy not being in tune with the realities of live

2 Bishop's article is a reaction and critical evaluation of the uncritical usage of Nicholas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics (2002)
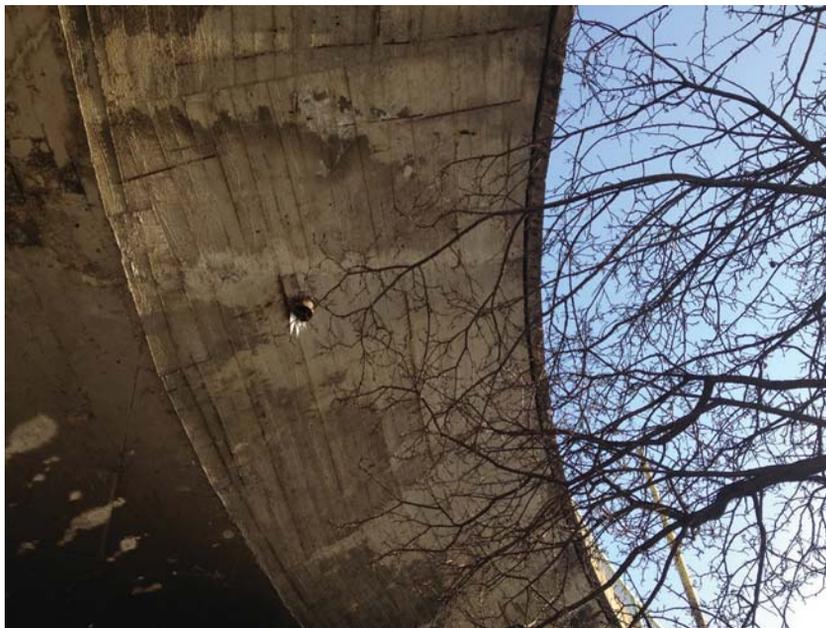
Žilina
(photo © Lonneke van Heugten)

Another example is the discrepancy between the Culture Programme's expectation that a substantial amount of the funding should go to travel between the partner countries, while some of the people central to the project, such as those living in the Refugee Centre in Kostelec nad Orlici are denied that possibility by their circumstance. Archa had to negotiate the re-allocation of funding with their contact from the Culture Programme.

The implicit expectation of mobility makes visible the assumption that "Europeans" are mobile, thus excluding the many who are living in the EU but do not enjoy the right to travel. European actions in the sphere of culture may aim at inclusiveness and diversity, it may nevertheless fortify Fortress Europe. Some may argue that the moral distinction of being the "guardian of human rights" that the EU likes to attribute to Europe, depends on hiding its own imperialisms and discrimination (Hooper and Kramsch; Böröcz). The role of the EU in the routes of cultural collaboration can thus be said to be both strengthening historical interconnectedness across national borders, as well as fuelling new connections, whilst implicitly curating the cultural field according to a political agenda. Still, the organisations and artists have agency to resist, elude, negotiate and transform these conditions. They can sing to a different tune.

Ted van Leeuwen in Kostelec
(photo © Lonneke van Heugten)

COMPOSING CULTURE

The symposia[3] organised within Karaoke Europe illustrate different ideas about the project. In the titles – "Karaoke Europe Symposium on theatre with social outreach" (Budapest, 23-25 November 2012), "The lure of the real. Methods of research and dealing with reality in anthropology and participative art projects" (Žilina, 6-8 December 2012), "Radical Theatre Yesterday and Today" (Prague, 15 November 2013) – the who (minorities), the how (participative) and the what (radical) indicate different dimensions of social art practices. The first two, the who and the how together address how to go from community and research to performance. In their art/work the four Karaoke Europe partners took on different strategies towards participation of the "communities" they worked with.

For the Karaoke Europe project it is important to define how community and multiculturalism can be connected. Political theorist Seyla Benhabib stresses that "We should view human cultures as constant creations, re-creations, and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between 'we' and the 'other(s)'" (8). Communities are therefore not homogenous wholes that are bound by a culture; they depend on their own and other's contingent imaginings, which often differ or clash. The failure of multiculturalism that was declared by Mer-

3 The symposia were an integral part of the Karaoke Europe project. These moments of exchange of experiences, methods and knowledge provide a catalyst for future collaborations and a way to generate a sense of community among professionals. Even though there was no lack of activity, there was not yet an established field of participatory arts stretching across the partner countries. The connections that were consolidated and newly created, as well as the exchange of insights offered, may lead to the development of such a field.

kel can thus be reconsidered not as a failure of politics to organise society according to a mosaic model of multiculturalism, but perhaps as a realisation that the view cultures as clearly defined wholes is untenable. How, then, do Karaoke Europe's practices of community participation reflect on the issues of multiculturalism it set out to address?

The road is long
(photo © Lonneke van Heugten)

At the culture node Stanica Žilina-Záriečie in Slovakia, the limits of the "The Lure of the Real" symposium were stretched by the excursion to the KIA Motors factory. During this tour the participants became complicit in the anthropological research, experiencing, asking questions and making observations

about the factory. Here, the mythologisation of the Korean "community" by the Slovakian population living around the area - that the curators Ivana Rumanová, Barbora Uríková and Martina Filinová described as the main point of entry to their project - became understandable. The factory had only forty Korean managers who, compared with the three thousand Slovakian labourers, were almost invisible. The factory is a machine that runs itself, fuelled by three shifts of workers in 24 hours. Behind fences, robotic machines with giraffe-like proportions of long necks and arms lift and weld car-parts with an immense precision. The Slovak workers complement this high-tech chain of production. There is not much space for social interaction in this human-technological organism. Most will probably have never seen or met the Korean managers. They have their own canteen and the language is barrier that is only crossed by a few bi-linguals.

For the Truc Sphérique team, the anthropological research was a large part of their project. Since they are not theatre practitioners, they chose to involve established Korean artists, as well as Slovak and Czech, to facilitate workshops in sound and animation with children from both contexts to encounter their cultures in a playful way. The children were involved in all activities surrounding the workshop and performed in the closing concert. The intimacy of workshops is a curatorial choice, different from a translation of the research into a staging of the myths surrounding the factory and the Koreans. The purpose is to encounter oneself, the "we" of the Slovakians, through the "others," in a process of producing sounds and animations with mutual input rather than narratives.

DEALING WITH DISCORD

The strategy of the who and the how of Orchestre Partout, the project of 5ᵉ Kwartier in the Netherlands, was much less about translating research into a project and more about doing. The participants are bound by a common, temporary space: that of the Asylum Centre in Alkmaar. Culture is exactly not what binds this random group with differing national backgrounds, even though in wider society "refugees" are often seen as a homogenous group, for example in the media. Individual refugees are rarely featured, and if they are, often as victims or potential illegals.

The title of the Orchestra gives away the purpose of the project; to show the diversity of music and the abilities of the (ex-)refugees who are marginalised by society. The approach of Ted van Leeuwen and co-founder Karim Eharruyen can be described as letting the music that is embodied in the people find a stage and an audience. They work collaboratively in rehearsals to learn each other's songs and melodies, techniques and add to them in a musical composition. While the process is open to all contributions, Ted is the orchestra leader who makes it come together for a concert. He and (previously) Eharruyen also facilitated improvements or elaborations in the musical skills of the participants. Van Leeuwen hoped that with the Karaoke Europe project a tour across music halls could be realised, to bring the orchestra to a music lovers audience. He felt that they should be heard.

5ᵉ Kwartier could not participate fully in the grant, but nevertheless participated in the collaboration. Philipp Schenker from Archa Theatre came to Alkmaar to participate in the rehearsals and add his expertise of bringing out stories of performers through drawing and giving advice on how to tell a story, complementing the songs. Translating the stories of the songs, or the memories of the performers about the place attached to the song, would enable audiences to not just admire the concert and the artistic competencies of the musicians, but also understand the narratives. Otherwise, through the language barrier a whole dimension of the Orchestre Partout would not be heard. Performance needs practice, and it was only later with a collaboration between Orchestre Partout and Panodrama that the stories were re-inserted into the concert performance. The narrative dimension, whether through visual means or spoken word, requires dramaturgical work to bring out. When this works, the orchestra becomes more than a showcase of different kinds of musical traditions, it becomes a story about multicultural engagement and complicates the hegemonic ideas of what "refugees" are.

The similarities to the Allstar Refjúdží Band are obvious, especially the platform function and the implicit critique to the societies whose structures make the refugees invisible in the public sphere. On the other hand, there are many differences. The Allstar band is aimed at wide audiences and plays in bars as well, while the Orchestre Partout aims at venues with a music audience. Another difference is the aesthetics: Michael Romanyshyn composes songs out of the musical influences of the band members with lyrics written by different authors in Czech next to lyrics in original languages, while Ted van Leeuwen works on the existing songs and melodies and expands them into a composition that comes about through the rehearsals, leaving the languages intact. One thing they have in common is that in music, the tension between process and performance becomes apparent.

Romanyshyn describes in his article how the recording of a duet was almost impossible, because out of tradition the Kurdish singer did not want to sing together with a female singer. After much negotiation his voice was recorded separately and softly. While in rehearsals it was possible, with an imagined audience with certain expectations in mind, it was not. Surprisingly, a few years later the two singers performed together on stage at a Kurdish New Years celebration. This kind of transformation and re-imagining of cultural boundaries is unpredictable. In Orchestre Partout the Sikh family of one of the girls did not like her singing in public, and in the end she left the band.

Through participation in performance, cultural differences become visible. Participation or collaboration do not translate directly to more equality, inclusivity or democracy; they involve negotiations and they encounter limits especially in the realm of performance. Considered in this way, collaboration does not produce a "safe space" - a phrase often heard in community arts - but rather Mouffe's idea of agonism, allowing hegemonic struggles to play out without rational reconciliation, meanwhile showing the contingency of "society" at any given moment.

LISTENING AND BEING HEARD

Contrary to the other two, the projects of Archa Theatre (CZ) and PanoDrama (HU) operate in the realm of theatre with social outreach. They take the everyday life experience of non-theatre professionals as their raw material. It is important to analyse the forms and limits of participation in this kind of documentary theatres especially, since it implicitly claims to have "bodies of evidence" (Martin 15). Archa and PanoDrama employ different strategies of participation in their process and of representing these bodies on stage, as well as staging a kind of audience participation. As most artists, they are acutely aware that "serving both the community and the art presupposes a very precarious balancing act" (De Bruyne and Gielen 21).

The history of Archa and the Refugee Centre runs long, because of an earlier performance, as can be read in their contribution. For the Karaoke Europe project, Jana Svobodova and Philipp Schenker together with their team of actress Jing Lu, video artist Jaroslav Hrdlička and sound designer and hip hop artist Jan Burian had been doing research through creative interventions in the Refugee Centre and in semi-public spaces of Kostelec nad Orlici. There were two stages in which an audience met with the process: one "presentation" in the Cultural Centre of the village, and a "theatre version" in Archa Theatre in Prague. How do the performances reflect on the work of research and collaboration and vice versa? What is absent on stage, what is visible?

In both performances the adult "white"[4] Czechs from the town were not visible on stage. This was not a conscious decision of casting. During the research process, those wanting to participate in the workshops leading to the performances were children, both "white" and Roma, a Roma grandmother and a young couple from Belarus, Hanna Sharypa and Yauhen Samouski, who were in the Refugee Centre for a year before getting refugee status. On stage, this meant an absence of one of the three "groups" of people living in Kostelec was not represented on stage. Typically, also in the audience of the "Promised Land" performance, the majority was Roma. In collaboration, each collaborator has their strategic reason for entering into the work process. For the Belorussian couple they used it as a platform to give visibility to the injustices happening in their country and to let people hear the difficult story of trying to find asylum and living in a Refugee Centre. For the Roma grandmother, paní Halušková, it is a chance to get attention for the issues of discrimination and her fight for a better future for the children, as the head of the Roma Association. It can be speculated that the absence of the "white" adults in the performance is because they have nothing to gain from performing. The resulting performance thus reflects on the social situation.

4 With "white" I am using this term for lack of a better one, to refer to the social division that existed between groups of people in the town along the lines of ethnicity and race.
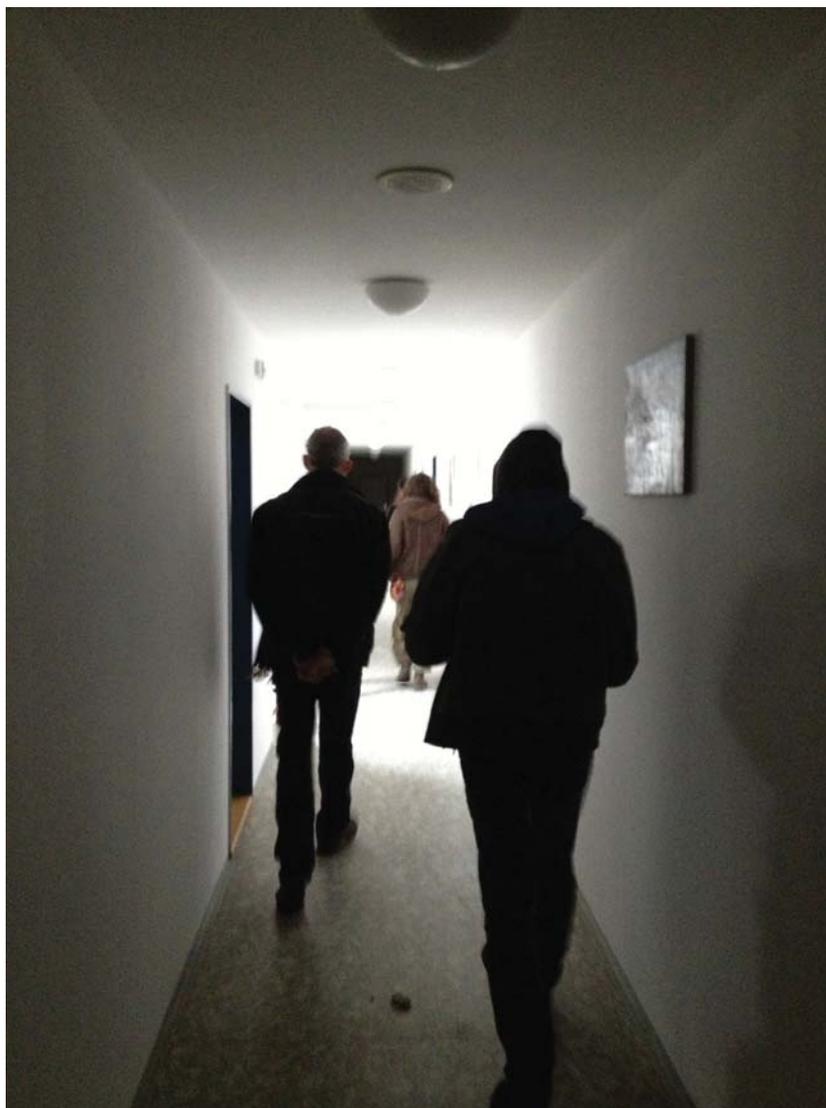
Refugee camp in Kostelec
(photo © Lonneke van Heugten)

In the performance "Matters-Doesn't Matter" in Prague, this reflection is less visible. The theatre version seems like a theatre performance with a mix of children, amateur actors and a professional actor. Video and soundscapes play a large role in the performance. The people on stage are a random collection of "specimens" who are put together by an outside force, the curators Jana Svobodova and Philipp Schenker. In this way, the dramaturgy follows the process of production. The characters of the scientists from the first version (played by Jing Lu and Philipp Schenker) are now replaced by Philipp, presenting himself and the team of theatre makers. The theatre version returns to the process of

research and thus becomes a search for how to find a common space where everybody fits in, rather than a search for the abstract heart of Europe.

The performance moves through the common spaces in the the town of Kostelec nad Orlici which for each of the inhabitants different associations and memories relate. One place relates to another and to a story of feeling at place or out of place. Through the people that live in the town, Kostelec's everyday spaces becomes a hub at the centre of the world - not the small town that is usually seen as cut off from the flows of globalisation. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has a name for this phenomenon: translocality. This is a place that simultaneously belongs to a certain nation-state and is divorced from it through the circulation of migrant populations and locals (339). Examples are refugee camps and neighbourhoods of migrant workers where there are disjunctures between "links among space, place, citizenship, and nationhood" (341). In the performance the imagined town becomes such a space, unfolding a world that remains hidden in the everyday, when intercultural encounter is avoided. In the end, the game of "spin the bottle" that drives the performance almost stops, but is saved by a video of the group flying off into space in their bottle-turned-rocket. The game is the device that brings the random group together, but it is also an imagined togetherness. To keep the game going in the everyday world, that is the real challenge.

PanoDrama's performance "Slaves of Justice" takes a different approach to events in everyday life, choosing the genre of word-for-word or verbatim theatre. It was the result of many interviews and research into the media coverage an act of violence and hostility against Roma in Hungary and the resulting court case. The resulting performance has two parts, that both deal with the participation. On the one hand the participation - or the lack thereof - of Roma in media discourses and the legal procedure. On the other, the participation of the audience in making judgements about what constitutes an act of witnessing, both in everyday life and in the theatre. Performance scholar Sruti Bala theorises that the fields of audience participation and the participation of the performance in the public sphere are connected (237). Through the title of the performance the audience become aware of their role as spectators in the performance and in the media landscape of everyday life.

In the first part of "Slaves of Justice" professional performers speak a selection of the oral archive from the research of the theatre makers. The focus is on speech, not on image or gesture. Standing between TV's that show images of coverage and interviews, but no sound, the performers are inverse but similar to these media. Bodies seemingly without commentary of their own, mouthing memorised memories of others. They mediate, but not without distortion. The audience is made a witness of partial accounts of the events from the Roma population that were not heard in the media, although with an uncanny feeling of misidentification. In theatre "evidence," either in the form of people on stage or selections of archive materials, is as much real as it is fiction.

The second part of the performance is a scene in which non-professional performers are invited into a court case on the stage to pass judgement based on the "evidence" just presented. This staging limits the participation of the

audience who is still sitting in the audience seats. They can identify with a jury member or disagree, but they cannot influence this judgement. In this sense it is a mimesis of the real court case. The safe distance that media offer to spectators, enabling them to remain passive in the events, is brought into the theatre. The participants involved in the jury spectacle are the only ones putting themselves on the line. The scene also offers a reaffirmation that this is theatre: the same can be done again tomorrow and the outcome might be different. While a final moral judgement is avoided, the audience is left wondering: who is speaking for whom, whose voices remained silent, what is our role as listeners, what did we hear?

TUNING OUT

This article has performed a karaoke version of the Karaoke Europe project, tuning in to the tensions between collaboration, community and participation, and thus producing different compositions. A few points and counterpoints can be mentioned before we tune out.

Firstly, the intercultural exists inside Europe, not just as a meeting between migrants and locals, but as a condition of Europe's changing borders and historical interconnectedness. This is evident not only in the projects, but also in the relations between the partner organisations. The late Dragan Klaíc demonstrated in "Restaging Europe" that the arts have a role to play in making visible the importance of culture in and for Europe. He also addressed the differences between the concepts used by politicians and the needs of those working in culture. This leads to the second point, that collaboration, community and participation should be continuously problematised and seen in their relations to each other. While these concepts are often mentioned in policies as goals in themselves, artistic practitioners should dance to a different tune. Thirdly, no fixed solutions for issues of multiculturalism were given in Karaoke Europe, but the projects all unsettle hegemonic views on communities and allow for exchange and confrontations. Each partner implemented different strategies of dealing with the process of making art and the performance. They are aware that to work with people who are perceived as different in a hegemonic view contains a risk, as visibility may reinforce the very issue that was set out to be critiqued. When dealing with international audiences or travelling, this aspect becomes even more unpredictable. And even if the project remains embedded in the local, the ever-changing social and cultural context may affect its reception.[5]

To end with a dissonant: the negative meaning of collaboration as treason gains a positive connotation in transnational cultural collaboration. Similar to karaoke, it asks for a temporary betrayal of an ordinary mode of thinking and being. Collaboration requires courage and a willingness to trust the unfamiliar and to allow for both failure and success. There is no common ground to start from. The common is produced by treading carefully, as in a dance, solidifying the ground beneath your feet without losing the awareness that it can turn into quicksand.

5 For an example of how theatre can get caught up in societal changes, see Van Heugten Theatre as a Vortex of behaviour in Dutch Multicultural Society (2013).

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