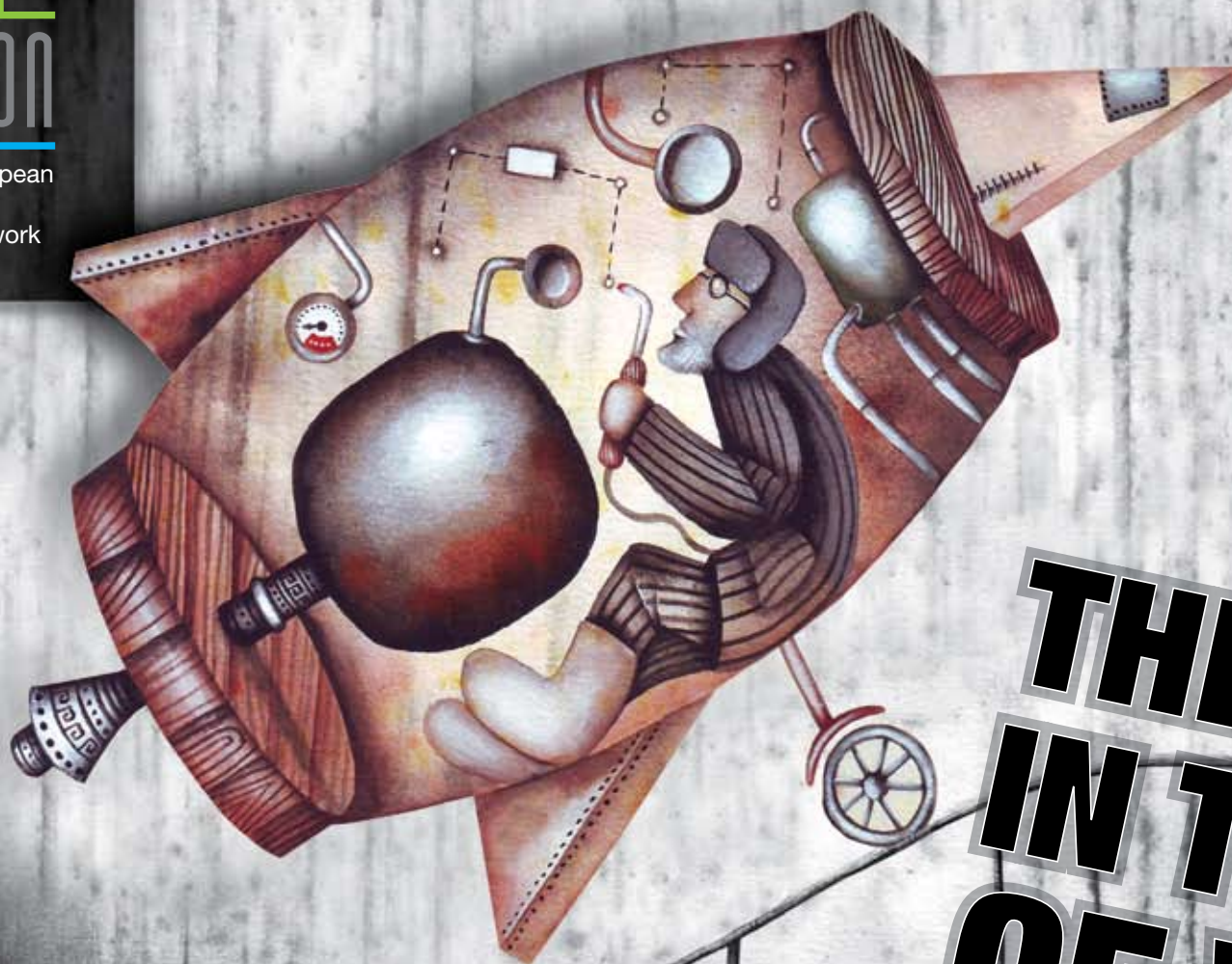




European
Off
Network



THEATER IN TIMES OF WAR

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Editorial

Dear friends,

We take great pleasure in presenting you with this report into a meeting of the European Off Network (EON) which took place in Brunnen:passage, Vienna between October 15th and 19th 2008. The meeting was supported by Kultur Kontakt Austria, bm:uk, city of Vienna, ÖESTIG and the British Council Austria, and organized by IG Freie Theaterarbeit. It took the form of a conference gathering more than forty artists, and theatre experts, from different parts of Europe and the Middle East. The conference was held in what would be termed by cultural theorist Homi Bhaba a Third Space – our intention was to create a safe and yet inspiring environment which would help stimulate us all to look for new choices, and to explore new points of view. We were certainly successful in achieving this goal. We held open discussions, and talked intensively about the extremely complex, and perplexing, subject of Theatre in Times of War. We shared opinions and experiences, clarified matters from different perspectives, and took aesthetic choices, and approaches, into consideration. The articles, reports, and commentaries contained within this edition represent the reflections and responses of artists, and theorists, to this meeting. Tragically the topic we chose to review, as thorough and complex as our analysis may be is far from being exhausted. It will undoubtedly continue to stimulate debate until the external realities of a world filled with hatred and conflict should change.

In her introductory article, Sabine Kock (Austria) gives us a brief history of EON network, and reflects on its origins. She also discusses previous meetings in St. Pölten and Brescia, and contextualizes the thematic framework for the conference in Vienna. This is followed by a short cultural provocation by Sean Aita (UK) and a personal reflection by Lena Stefenson (Sweden) on her subjective experiences at the conference.

There are also selected articles by Jeton Neziraj (Kosovo UMNK) on the subject of an interactive theatre project dedicated to missing persons in Kosovo, and another from Lisa Jacobson (Israel) on the experiences of ARMA theatre company in times of major social and political turbulence. Additionally there is Dorinda Hulton's (UK) article reflecting upon her own practice exploring performance aesthetics which interpret and reflect the experiences of those living within "zones of conflict". In an analysis of the problem of critical and artistic distance, Irena Ristic (Serbia) provides a retrospective view of the debate concerning various aesthetic approaches to the subject of war, and Petar Todorov (Bulgaria) reminds us about another kind of war, the war for free creative space, fought by independent artists for decades.

This a subject which would certainly be appreciated by our correspondent Ali Abu Yaseen (Gaza), whose moving war diary shows how immediate the subject of conflict and a place to work is for some of our members. Events in Ali's home city of Gaza reached crisis point following our meeting in Vienna and provoked a debate relating to this conflict which continued to dominate EON for many months. Events in the Middle East inspired members to respond to circumstances by beginning what was sometimes a turbulent, but without question extremely important, e-debate. This publication also includes a part of this precious e-mail correspondence which resembles a performative text. In our final article, Ilkay Sevgi (Turkey) explores the potential, and role, of artists in the times of war, and announces another important topic for our future consideration. The sense of empathy. Until we meet again in Istanbul 2010.

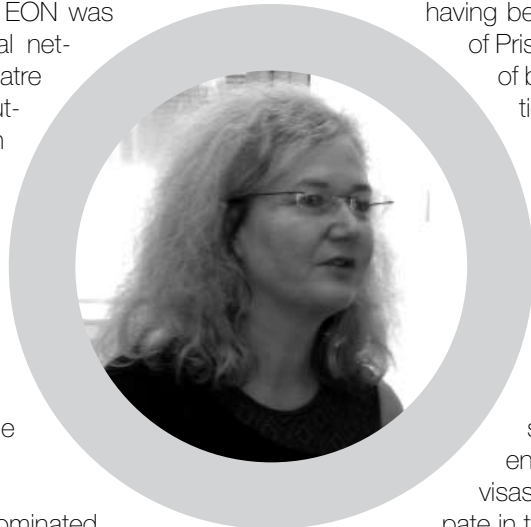
Yours
Sabine, Irena, Sean and Dorinda (EON)

A short story about how A Third Space could affect EON or the intention to put the wheel of history into reverse

By Sabine Kock

In 2005 the European Off Network EON was founded as an informal international network of fringe /independent/off theatre makers inside, surrounding and outside the newly expanded European Union. The 'act of founding' the EON happened spontaneously during a first meeting of around two hundred and fifty independent/off/ fringe theatre makers from eighteen countries taking place in St. Pölten, Austria, based on the idea and concept of the Association of Independent Theatre Austria (IG Freie Theaterarbeit).

The week prior to the meeting was dominated not only by last minute things and lots of practical decisions but also by the huge effort we put into solving several visa problems of potential participants. Jeton Neziraj, for example, was refused entry to the embassy in Skopje, Macedonia, on three occasions, (This is where people from Kosovo had to travel to in order to obtain visas, and they were only allowed to apply on Fridays). As a result, there was no realistic chance of Jeton obtaining his visa in time until we gave the embassy notice of a direct intervention by the Foreign Ministry of Austria – which had been promised to us at that time. This intervention became the first subversive act of 'performance' of the new European Off Network EON. Today, Jeton is a successful young playwright in his country,



having become director of the National Theatre of Prishtina in 2008. Unfortunately as a result of being occupied by his new responsibilities he could not participate in 'A Third Space' in Autumn 2008. Reality shifted also for Liljana Sebastjanowa, one of the rare female theatre makers from Uzbekistan, and one of the very rare theatre makers working with people with special needs. In her case we were not able to speak to a real person at the embassy in Uzbekistan, but could only leave a forceful message on an answering machine. In the end, both Jeton and Liljana obtained their visas caught their flights and could participate in the meeting.

Several international theatre meetings had already taken place in Europe before this one in 2005, but on this occasion the meeting was benefited by the specific circumstances of a free 'gift' of the location – the whole Festspielhaus St. Pölten which stood like a Centre Pompidou in the green fields with its imposing glass walls, offering several opportunities to meet, perform and talk. Additionally, adequate funding, and a reasonably priced hotel area in lower Austria, allowed everybody free participation, hosting and accommodation, and also for some of the participants to recoup their travel costs. All of this offered a unique opportunity for many theatre makers to meet. Artistic incomes in both the West

and the East do not in many cases allow artists to participate easily in international events, especially given the taboo of talking about the significant diversity of income levels within the new Europe as well as its surroundings. So although the topic 'theatre in conflict regions' was not on the agenda of that first meeting in 2005, current and former conflicts and the general circumstances of a wide diversity of life and working conditions, as well as the closed European Union of the so called Schengen borders, characterized the surrounding context of the meeting. Also, perhaps the specific setting itself created an open minded atmosphere within which to discuss this topic.

In 2006 it became possible to organize a second, smaller EON meeting in Vienna as an offshoot of the off theatre festival Höllenfahrt which was already occurring within the context of the Wien Mozart 2006. Under the title Precarious Performances a one day conference took place, where amongst others, Jeton Neziraj from Kosovo, and Lisa Jacobson and her partner Gil Becher from Israel, gave their presentations. These are included in the present edition in revised versions. Also, two German colleagues Heike Depenbruck and Wolfgang Struck, current professor in the department of (German) literature, media and film at the University of Erfurt, gave a lecture about the curious affectation in German movie productions in 2006 of bringing Nazi characters on stage. This lecture provoked a complex final round table discussion in which Israeli participants asked the Germans why they felt so strange about breaking the taboo of staging Nazi topics, and the Israelis were themselves asked, by participants



from the Balkan region, about the values of concealing the Arab conflict. At that point the already implicit topic Theatre in War - both in its historical and current dimensions - became relevant for all of us 'on the EON stage'. All of this could only have taken place because of the atmosphere of mental openness, deep interest and the will to understand differences as well as diverse cultural settings – in brief, the openness of the dialogue was not decreased or subverted by the gaps that, no doubt, existed between people. It was for me - as for others - a unique experience: to be part of such an open minded communication between cultures and it was this quality that encouraged the new EON network to grow in personal confidence.

Then, at the same time as the festival and conference were taking place, one of the members of the Ilkhom company from Uzbekistan who was performing in "Flights of Mashrab" in Vienna, died by fire in a flat in Moscow. The whole company was totally shocked and did not know whether he had died by accident or by criminal means. Two years later, the internationally respected director of the company, Mark Weil, was murdered in front of his theatre – and it was unclear again, whether this had happened as a simple criminal act or because of his Jewish background and his involvement in staging certain cultural taboos of Uzbekistan society. Neither of these cases belonged directly to a war scenario, but both showed the general vulnerability and precariousness of artistic freedom and work in sensitive political situations.

Eventually, Theatre in War was chosen as one of the three

main topics for the third meeting of the informal European Off Network EON which took place with around two hundred participants in Brescia, Italy, in May 2007. One day of lectures and two half days of discussions were planned. However, at the last minute, Zoe from Belgrade, who was scheduled to give a keynote speech did not get her visa to come to Italy – and out of a potentially bad situation, an unexpected and surprising solution resulted when, spontaneously, a number of creative theatre practitioners from current crisis regions like the Gaza strip AND Israel, from Kosovo AND Serbia AND Croatia, and further countries that were involved in the Balkan conflict, showed short video and DVD clips of their work. War and post war realities in the former Yugoslav area were there on the stage for all of us to see - although at times they were hidden by aesthetic choices and a kind of 'alienation' (though not necessarily Brechtian). For example, a production from Croatia included a sequence originating in the brutal murder of babies, and in this sequence the babies were portrayed by puppets that were moved in such a smooth, dance like way that the horrible acts of violence that were at the origin of the scene, remained difficult to comprehend. At other times, references to war and post-war realities were realistically graphic. For example in one of seven scenes of a Kosovo improvisation, it was difficult to witness a young actress rooting and digging in a large lump of raw meat, whilst speaking of rape with a deep quality of existential emotion.

From what we witnessed, it seemed to me that theatre in the Balkan area is related to the conflicts of the recent past and that these experiences are represented symbolically. It also

seemed that the trauma and taboo of the lived-through could be removed by its representation. This concept of catharsis seemed to be common amongst all those who participated in the EON meeting coming from Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia. Indeed, all of the sequences shown from that area were related to tragedy and all of the production elements (lights, sounds, music etc.) were presented with a quality of pathos. Some young Serbian women analyzed this perception fundamentally critically: in their eyes the medium of theatre -with its ability to represent reality symbolically - overloaded the performances. They felt, therefore, that such methods could never be more than an aesthetic discourse or useful as a tool to understand (emotionally) the reality of war.

The Arma theatre from the little artists' village, Einhod, in Israel near the border of Lebanon, operates from a very different base: beginning from comedy and influenced by elements of the Buffon. For example, in a few minutes of street theatre, the company 'improvised' a bomb assassination attempt on a bus, portraying it with grotesque exaggeration and irony, inviting the public to participate: " We need another child, the scene will work more realistically. Thanks. Beautiful, you represented the incident very convincingly, we are very content"; or dealing with the corruptibility of the Israeli parliament by performing open public 'elections' in a market place with grotesquely exaggerated costumed figures. Grotesqueness as a mode of reflection, laughter as tool for empathy as well as for creating a distance in order to provoke a critically reflexive view of the reality of daily life, humour always com-



bined with a subversive perspective towards missed humanity: all of these qualities seem to be critical theatre concepts to note. At outstanding moments we became speechless in response to these and other scenes, whilst the Israeli participants could smile or even laugh about them, as could the participants from Gaza.

In contrast to this - in a very strange but sensitive way - everybody could smile in response to Pablo Ariel's miniatures about the Israeli and Palestine 'neighbourhood' and misunderstanding...as well as Ali Abujaseen's solo performance of a Palestine worker who could not pass the border to Israel because of an assassination attempt. The checkpoint was closed once more and imprisoned the man in the Arab part of the world - a precarious life reality, made even harder since the current escalation of the war situation in Gaza, which also includes an acute fear for life.

A parallel session on the topic resulted in a dialogue between independent theatre makers from current crisis regions such as Gaza and Israel, Kosovo and Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. These participants were able to stay together with others in one space and discuss how independent/fringe/off theatre is possible in such crisis periods, why it is a need for them, how they work - both as professionals and as human beings - how they have no chance for any such dialogue during the ongoing conflicts in their areas. There were amongst the group, some artists such as Ali and Rajad, who had to go back to their difficult life conditions in Gaza after this meeting in 2007. Also participants from Cyprus, Turkey and Greece

became involved in the discussion. However, they were able to smile about the political conflict of their nations.

So in Brescia a "third space" outside of the reality of war and crisis areas was spontaneously developed and all who were there, felt the explosiveness and responsibility for that extraordinary and sensitive situation. For me, and for many others, it became a certain wish and goal to figure out any opportunity to continue this sensitive dialogue.

After the meeting I came to understand that 'Third Space' is an existing discursive concept: Homi Bhabha, theoretician of cultural and postcolonial theories, defined the term 'A Third Space' as an intermediate area. He characterized it conceptually also as an unidentified thinking area. The conference 'A Third Space' in Vienna in the Autumn of 2008 tried to follow this concept of Homi Bhabha.

In Autumn 2008 around forty theatre practitioners from Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, England, Italy, Sweden and a certain number of interested Austrian theatre makers met, worked together, and collaborated in 'A Third Space' on 'Theater in times of war'.

The meeting was structured by a number of working questions:

1. Theatre - War

- What capacity can theatre take on?
- What dangers may be expected as a result of ideological affirmation in times of war?

2. Ways of working in conflict regions or in other regions of the world

- What settings/topics/genres/working methods are possible in conflict regions?
- What topics are tabooed?

3. Crisis - Aesthetics

- How are aesthetic traditions affected or ruptured by crisis?
- Does the (actual) tragedy of daily experience in conflict zones bear any relation to an aesthetic recourse of concepts of tragedy? (Hypothesis: in the whole Balkan region)
- Is humour (or grotesqueness) possible - and if yes, under which conceptual circumstances? (Hypothesis: in Israel, Gaza, Lebanon)

4. War - Performance - Gender

- To what extent do gender aspects significantly affect the perspective?
- To what extent is a gender perspective qualified or intensified in conflict regions?
- How do artists deal with stereotypes of gender roles in their performances?

5. Theater in times of war is everywhere

- How do "outside" practitioners see the crisis?
 - Does an "outside" even exist?
- (Specific Austrian perspective hypothesis by E. Jelinek: theater in times of war is everywhere nowadays)

Unfortunately, although a lot of energy was put into making it possible, all attempts to enable Ali Abu Jaseen and Rajad Abusyrrieh from Gaza to participate in the conference



were in vain. Their visas had already been prepared but they could not get their passports back in time, and were not able anyhow to cross the border. Retrospectively one can say that those borders have not been opened again since that historical point up until the war that followed – an escalation, which nobody during the conference foresaw. Now, after that escalation, I realize that the same conference could not have happened in the same unprejudiced and unbiased way. There is no longer any possibility of naivety. I'm lucky we did it at all.

A main part of the money to realise the conference was dedicated pretty late, so that we had to figure out the precise concept that we were going to focus on in a very short period. In order to achieve that timescale, it became impossible to invite international speakers (as for example Homi Bhabha himself). We therefore changed the focus to a working conference of theatre people, all of them seen as experts in certain fields of knowledge, and in their involvement with work in crisis regions.

Some of the participants missed a certain theoretical input related to the questions raised – and I would have loved to have offered this opportunity – on the other hand a serious and non hierarchic atmosphere amongst all of the participants developed, and the goal behind our intentions and thoughts became real: to offer a space for open minded complex thinking theatre professionals to meet, and to include the opportunity of getting in touch and having several exchanges. This is not nothing – developing confidence in

an open minded dialogue in spite of differences, rests not only on the abilities of communication and knowledge, but also on personal sensibility and referential integrity.

Nothing was expected as a certain result with regards to content. The meeting itself was the first target and it is an achievement that this kind of communication could happen at all. I personally suffered in my role as organizer, but at the same time it was truly amazing to be aware of the multitude of diverse discussions and private side talks. As I could not take an active part in every moment of all the complex discussions because of my duty to solve practical and organizational questions, I feel unauthorized to summarize the content of the conference. Just a small part of the diverse and complex discussions, as well as the aesthetic variety of presented artistic material, is collected in the present edition. Hopefully it will give some diverse glimpses on content.

With lots of thanks to all participants and in remembrance of so many precious, intimate and unique moments of dialogue, I personally would appreciate developing a long term project to carry on with the topic and also to include real scientific research as well as to offer the opportunity of scientific and artistic networking and developing real artistic collaborations. Perhaps the meeting itself has already given certain impulses for personal, professional and conceptual networking up to the certain point of practical collaborations (which was proposed during the meeting and may happen).

Based on the agreement of all participants the meeting was

documented by video (by Berenice Pahl and Peter Hirsch who are also members of EON). This documentation includes short video portraits of each participant as well as more general shots of the discussions. It is currently being produced and may become another sign and tool to continue with border crossing and open dialogue based on personal interest, confidence and at the same time high professionalism to create sustainable continuities engaged in an intercultural dialogue and a possible cooperation over the borders of conflict regions. Video documentation also offers the opportunity of a specific artistic reflexion and as such it offers another tool to spread the scientific and artistic intercultural dialogue to a broader public.

On a very practical level there is another hope, that the European Off Network EON can become a part of (political, personal, artistic) empowerment not only for open dialogues but also to open the Shengen borders for all open, wide, complex and cosmopolitan thinking artists to have the opportunity to come into a real dialogue with each other and with diverse foreign audiences.

Sabine Kock is scientific worker and one of the founders of European Off Network. In 2000 she came to Vienna to coordinate and build up an interdisciplinary curriculum of gender studies at University of Vienna. Since 2003 she is manager of the Association of independent Theaterwork Austria, and also works on cultural affairs as board member of Cultural Council Austria. Actually she is taking a sabbatical and spent the spring semester 2009 as visiting scholar at the University of Berkeley, California.

Theatre and / in war

A short cultural provocation by Sean Aita

In 415 BC when the Athenian audience sat down to watch Euripides "Trojan Women" in which the men of Troy have been massacred following Agamemnon's victory, and the plight of the women who remain captive is graphically depicted, the spectators were fully aware that Athens had committed a similar atrocity that very winter when their armies had executed all the men and enslaved the women on the island of Melos. We do not know how these Athenian citizens, watching this drama responded to it. Perhaps they found it moving, or thought provoking. What is certain is that in spite of it, they marched off to war with the Spartans shortly afterwards. That ancient conflict may be long forgotten by all but a handful of scholars, but Euripides work lives on and its message remains as pertinent today as it did then.

This anecdote demonstrates the power of drama to inform, challenge and on some occasions to produce strong feelings of empathy within its audience, but also its potential to be ignored, or circumvented by those same individuals once they choose to link their identity with broader potentially de-humanising concepts like The State, or The Nation; with their economic and cultural imperatives of conquest and imperialism, and fear or hatred of the "other".

The theatre has long been used as a carrier of the message

of tolerance, as a metaphorical olive branch challenging the hegemony, but has also periodically been used as a crucible for refining exclusive concepts of separation, and racial or cultural superiority, as in the Nazi German Thingspiel, fermenting resentment, alienation (in its non Brechtian sense), jealousy, and sometimes inciting revenge. These emotions can of course be used to positive effect;

to build empathy for the victims of War and to encourage the spectator to act to end their suffering; or to negative effect, by building the conditions through which alternative racial and cultural heritages can be demonised and their people reduced to objects suitable only for subjugation, or depicted as rapacious potential invaders and aggressors.

It appears then, that we have a powerful weapon in our hands, perhaps as powerful as the tools of the military, if we are to believe in Bulwer-Lytton's famous adage; "The pen is mightier than the sword". There seems little doubt that works of

dramatic fiction, or more recently pieces of verbatim theatre, based on textual or oral records, have influenced the policies, the conduct and the outcomes of armed conflict, in recent years with seminal works such as Peter Brooke's "US", during the Vietnam War, which challenged its audience to take action by threatening to burn a live butterfly at its climax

unless stopped, which they used as a metaphor for the use of napalm on civilians or Stephen Berkoff's "Sink the Belgrano" satirising Margaret Thatcher's conduct in the Falkland Islands, in a style not unlike that of Aristophanes.

Theatre critic Michael Billington recently lambasted the British Theatre for its shortcomings in addressing public issues of importance, and then issued a retraction in the face of a recent notable re-politicising of the art form, evidenced by a proliferation of works challenging the concept and practice of the 'War Against Terror': The Royal Court Theatre's "War Correspondence" a series of works involving plays, poetry and discussions; The National Theatre's "Collateral Damage" programme; "The Madness of George Dubya" in the West End, and David William's drama "War Crime" focusing on the myth of precision bombing.

How then should we approach the issue of what the Independent sector has to contribute to this debate? There is of course a bitter irony in the description of a specific geographical area of conflict as a "Theatre of War.' If one takes its literal meaning Theatron, as "a seeing place" it becomes a place for us to observe the worst elements of humanity, tempered perhaps by moments of self-sacrifice, or heroism, which are of course purely subjective, their interpretation depending completely upon which side of the conflict one falls. In a world in which protagonists in the real-life conduct of Wars, make themselves part of the ultimate meta-theatrical event, assign themselves the roles of Conqueror, Protector or Liberator, wear elaborate costumes, and perform in a





Feeling of responsibility

**A personal report from the EON seminar in Vienna October 2008
by Lena Stefenson, director and dramatist, Stockholm/Bologna**

production in which the hapless spectators pay the ultimate price. We need to find, and define our own "seeing place" in and through which we can capitalise on the Independent artist's status as "alien" and "outside the system" and offer our critical analysis, our testimony and bear witness. We need to explore diverse methods of releasing new dramaturgies to explore how alternate practice can engage with both the intellect and emotions of our audience, and most of all we must take pains to ensure that whatever we make, we conform to Albert Camus edict that; "In a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, NOT to be on the side of the executioners."

Sean Aita is Senior Lecturer in Acting at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth (UK). He has worked for Forest Forge - a professional company that specialises in touring rural towns and performing in venues such as residential care homes and village halls. He has also worked as professional actor and Guest Director in Writer Vienna's English Theatre as well as Associate Director in Royal Theatre Northampton.

Why do I feel guilty whenever there is a war in the world? Why are other Swedes astonished when catastrophes happen to our well-protected country, whilst I just wait for them to occur? With whom can I share this somewhat adolescent feeling of responsibility for the situation in the world?

These thoughts were in my mind when attended the seminar Theatre in War which was held in Brescia in June 2007. Now I am on my way to Vienna to participate in another EON conference which aims to deal with the same subject in a more thorough way.

Sabine Kock from IG Freie Theaterarbeit in Austria is the organizer of the conference. The participants are artists from independent theatre and dance companies from all Europe. We are all members of EON, the European Off-Theatre Network. The network is based around a mailing-list, and a social website, and produces large and small conferences with different themes. Since it started EON has had two larger meetings with hundreds of participants taking part, plus a number of smaller seminars in between. The next large meeting will be in Istanbul 2010. Now some of us are in Vienna to talk about theatre in war, and in times of war. Sabine Kock gives us the background to the seminar:



"I was very moved by the seminars in Brescia on the subject of theatre and war. It felt very intense listening to people with direct experiences of war telling us about their work during and after a conflict. It made me think about Austria, the country where I've been living and working since 2000. How as "later born Germans" we tend to neglect the memories from, and our share of responsibility for the Second World War. I want to continue the talks we began in Brescia, to provide the possibility for us to discuss this topic in more depth. I want us to create a third space, a space outside the conflicts."

The first day: We are around 30 people placed in a circle. There are many Israelis here. Side by side there are Israeli Jews, Muslims and Druzes. Bulgaria is represented by a group of performance-artists, there are artists from Serbia, Cyprus, UK, Austria, Kosovo, Turkey...and me, from Sweden, living in Italy. I keep close to the director Davide d'Antonio, the only other "Italian" in this seminar. Two people are missing, the director and actor Ali Abu Raseen and the writer and journalist Rajab Abu Sirriyeh, both Palestinians living in Gaza. The conference's intention was to have Ali Abu Raseen show his play *The Arab in the Corner* which we saw parts of at the last meeting in Brescia. But though visas have been issued neither of them



have had their passports returned. Their absence is strongly felt all through the conference.

The subjects for the first day are - what genres and topics you choose for a theatrical performance in and after a conflict, what taboos there might be, and what grade of sensibility you have to have.

Sabine Kock (Austria) : What struck me in Brescia was that people with experience of the Balkan Wars during the 90s chose to do tragedies following the conflict, while theatre makers from Israel and Palestine often work with humour and the grotesque.

Arian Krasniqi (Kosovo): After the war in Kosovo "Hamlet" was The National Theatre's first production. But I actually don't know whether producing that performance was based more on the need to show that we were fully professional again, or if it was based on the need to see a tragedy on stage.

Lisa Jacobson (Israel): Humour is a tool for the artist and for the audience to work through their circumstances in life. But does an artist, just because he or she lives in a conflict-zone, always have to deal with that conflict in his or her work? I don't feel that.

Pablo Ariel (Israel): But it drops into what you do anyhow.

An issue that we discussed a lot was the question of taboo.

Djordje Brankovic (Serbia): It's a taboo for a Serb to be good. I do a performance where I create a character that doesn't fight at all. I do other things, take care of the house, cook, dress in women's dresses. That's not the way for a Serbian man to behave. People love it. But, I still haven't performed in military camps...

Mila Odazhieva (Bulgaria): We need taboos, it's through and against them that we create art.

Eva Brenner (Austria): The strongest taboo in Austria is our participation in the Second World War.

One question that is asked is - if theatre can make a change? If it can have an influence on a conflict?

Davide d'Antonio (Italy): We went to Auschwitz with a train. It was 2006, we were 600 people. We knew that there were discussions in Poland about transforming one of the buildings of Auschwitz into a discotheque. We turned the issue all around: we created a discotheque that was slowly changed into a concentration camp. We made the walls of the room moveable, and as they got nearer to the centre of the room people got less space, and started to panic. There were many newspaper-articles written about it, all around Europe. The building was never transformed. Maybe what we did helped, I don't know, but I hope so.

Eva Brenner (Austria): If you don't preserve your memories you are nothing.

Day two and three: The talks continue, we pick other themes such as gender and what aesthetic choices are made for theatre in times of war. Now it is also time to start looking at each others pieces of work. Director Dorinda Hulton and the dancer and choreographer Arianna Economou who do performances together in Cyprus start the process. Dorinda shows us pieces of her performance Agamemnon where Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon is sacrificed to the gods to give the outgoing warships better wind. Iphigenia is performed by a puppet. There is a discussion whether this is

the right choice or not:

Lena Stefenson (Sweden/Italy): To me the choice was right, if something powerful needs to be felt by the audience, then sometimes it helps to create a distance from the subject matter, which was what the puppet meant to me.

Willy Prager (Bulgaria): To me it kind of destroyed everything, it just reminded me of all the lousy puppet-theatre I had to watch as a child, where the marionettes also scared me. It's typical that you who come from Western Europe want distance to everything. A real actor would have been better.

Next to let us see her work is Lisa Jacobson from Arma Theatre in Israel. She shows extracts from the play "Made in Israel", a street-performance shown in a small city in France. Lisa has been asked to "move the French audience to Israel", to let people see what daily life in Israel is like. The performance ends in a scene in which a little bus made in a cartoon style comes puff-puffing along, BOOM! The bus explodes and the audience is asked to turn themselves into victims and lay down on the street. Just like the recent real victims of an attack against a bus in Tel Aviv. The scene is upsetting but also very humorous.

Lisa Jacobson: I can transform it into comedy, I think both, I and others, need to laugh at the situation. But still, when I visit Tel Aviv, I never get into a public bus...

The productions we show each other are of large breadth in terms of their chosen subjects and aesthetic aspects. We watch border-crossing Bulgarian video-works, Serbian site-specific performances and a Chinese wedding with an interactive Austrian audience. We look at a Human Peep Box,



a children play about the Shoah, and a play about seven stations in the life of the Arabic poet Mhammad El Mhagout: "I was singing/and you were firing bullets/I was writing/and you were firing bullets/I was reading/and you were firing bullets....". Saleh Azzam, director, writer and actor from the Israeli company "El Niqab Theatre" has directed the play about Mhammad El Mhagout. Saleh is Druze and he tells me everything I didn't know about the Druze people: They have their own religion, which broke from Islam. They live in Lebanon and in Palestine/Israel and they usually adapt to the country where they live and try to assimilate. In conflict situations Druze people often become mediators, says Saleh.

Tell me about your theatre?

"We were founded in 2001, and we do approximately two productions a year. We play in both Arabic and Hebrew since we speak both languages. We speak about co-existence between different cultures, and we perform all over Israel, on the West bank but until now not in Gaza... Hamas does not support the culture. I dreamt for a long time about doing the play you just saw, the life of the poet El Mhagout. El Mhagout was so poor. He spent most of his life in prison. People watch the show and see their lives being told."

Other dreams, other plays?

"I would like to stage Miss Julie by Strindberg! A Jewish actress in the role of Julie, and an Arabic actor as Jean. That would be good!"

Serbian Milan Vracar is an ex-DJ and actor who found out that his real talent was producing theatre and art. Together with his organization Kultura Nova he has initiated many

projects in the province Novi Sad and its capital, Vojvodina. One of the projects was to create and perform contemporary dance in an abandoned Turkish bath:

"It was crowded, I think it was the first time people of Novi Sad saw something like it."

Milan Vracar is a tall and somewhat mighty man. I want to ask him about his relation to Serbian nationalism, but he anticipates me:

"What image do people in western Europe have about us Serbs? Honestly?"

Well, I say, soldiers... tough and nationalistic soldiers...

"We are full of energy" Milan answers, "We can dance all night. We should continue like that - but we should do it without the rifles and the nationalism."

The seminar is about to end. I ask Sabine Kock about her reflections:

"We made it! I'm happy, but as usual when you are the organizer there is no time to participate as much and deeply as you might wish....But look at all the people who really met one another: the Israelis, they didn't know each others before. And I have heard many friendly jokes among the people from the Balkans..."

I pull my suitcase through Vienna and I recognize that the seminar Theatre and War has been important for me. I think about my childhood in a Swedish military family where there were endless discussions about war from all times. I realize that being brought up so close to these issues might just have given me a certain awareness in relation to other

people in Sweden. I also notice that the old and sometimes burdensome feeling I have of responsibility can be shared with others.

Next stop - Istanbul!

Lena Stefenson is a director and dramaturg. She often works with Teater Tre in Stockholm and travels between Stockholm and Bologna, Italy, where she writes and organizes festivals.

Voices

An interactive theatre initiative addressing the issue of the missing in Kosovo

By Jeton Neziraj

Full-scale armed conflict began in Kosovo in 1998. The Yugoslav National Army, Serbian Police, and Serbian paramilitary organizations carried out acts of deportation, killing and forced disappearance against the ethnic Albanian population. "Forced disappearance" means that groups or individuals are arrested and taken away, with no information being given as to their whereabouts or condition. Many of these detainees were then killed and buried in secret locations, leaving their families with no knowledge of their fate. The ethnic Albanian armed groups have also been linked to acts of forced disappearance against some Serb civilians. In total, 5287 people were reported missing as a result of the Kosovo conflict and related events.

Although almost seven years have passed, there are still over 2400 Kosovars who are considered missing since the war. This is one of the essential challenges of Kosovo society today, a challenge which doubtlessly will accompany the communities that live in Kosovo – the Albanian majority and also the minorities – in the coming fragile future.

The fate of these people is unclear. An "official" answer about their fate is hard to get. Many people believe that they are still alive and kept in prisons or secret camps in Serbia, Kosovo or elsewhere, but there are also people who think that they all are dead. Those, who have already lost hope that their loved ones are alive, make an effort to find their remains so they can at least bury them. Those, who still believe that they are alive, continue to live with the agony of waiting and with the strong belief that they will all one day return. The stories

of all those involved in this drama are shocking. Many mysteries that have provoked the curiosity of the families of the missing throughout all these years after the war are also shocking. Such mysteries gave the chance to speculators and extortionists to benefit from the tragedy of the families of the missing.

In 2005 and 2006, the Center for Children's Theatre Development (CCTD) and the UN Office on Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF) worked together on an interactive theatre initiative addressing the issue of the missing in Kosovo. The two common projects, "The Longest Winter" and "Voices", did not intend to give "the right direction" to people's beliefs, nor to create and promote an idea or a certain vision. The essential idea was to hear the voice of the families of the missing and to preserve their feelings, ideas and beliefs. The future of Kosovo is strongly connected with the suffering of these families; therefore, the aim of these two projects was to strengthen their voice, to articulate their demands and to distribute them for all the citizens of Kosovo and people all around the world.

Work with children and young people

- How do these people benefit from this theatre project?
 - Well ... it gives them the chance to speak openly!
 - But, so what if they speak? They've been speaking about this issue for seven years now.



- Maybe this will help them understand that they're not the only ones who have been hurt and that ...
 - But this won't ease their pain.
 - But most of them never had the chance to express their opinion publicly. It's good to hear their voice and to show them that they are important for this process ... And, all that they say will be published in a book.

- And then what? What's the use of this book to them?
 - Well, the book will be distributed in many places ... People all over the world will understand their grief, they will learn about their challenges.
 - The whole world already knows, they need something concrete – investigations with results. They want to know about the fate of their loved ones.

This is an imaginary dialogue that reflects in general our aim and the reason why this project had to be done, and it also reflects the radical opinions of those who didn't realize how anyone could benefit from this project, or people who wanted to see only "concrete" results come out of it. But, definitely, as we originally thought, the project was very beneficial, because the problems of the families of the missing since the war in Kosovo are not strictly what some people have always thought: "to find out about the fate of their loved ones." The issue of the missing includes many other problems that concern the families of the missing. In this initiative, theatre served as a magnifying glass to go deeper inside an individual, inside these families, in order to understand the



other side of this problem, which is the psycho-emotional processes they all go through, the challenges and the dilemmas that resonate inside them, and to give them the chance to tell their stories.

One of the conditions of cooperation that OMPF proposed in working with CCTD was the involvement of the Serbian community in the project. I must emphasize that since the end of the war in 1999 until 2005 there had been no serious initiative that would connect Serbs and Albanians in the field of art, especially not in theatre. The challenge was even greater, because the cooperation was supposed to be built upon an issue that is still considered very sensitive. Yet, embracing the essential principle that the role of theatre in a society is to go beyond current processes to prepare society for facing problems that are not easy to face, we decided to get involved in this initiative. Of course, the perspective taken by this initiative did not have a direct political connotation; nevertheless, it aimed to shed light upon the emotional and mental state and process of the families of the missing and to strengthen their role in the society.

The first project that was realized by CCTD and OMPF was “The Longest Winter”, a theatre performance that addressed the issue of the missing and was used as a catalyst for educational discussions with children and young people of both the Albanian and the Serbian communities. The Longest Winter, as a play, was inspired by materials collected from discussions with children and small pieces that they wrote in an earlier stage of this project, called Collecting Stories.

The children and young people that we targeted during this phase were very young during the war. We worked with them because we wanted to send a message to adults, that the role of children and young people is very important in social processes, even in the issue of the missing. After each performance OMPF employees and the actors from the production would talk with the children, about the issues in the play, about the position of children and young people in this whole issue, and about their roles inside their families. Also, the staff of OMPF answered questions that the children asked about the number of the missing, about the identification of bodies, DNA testing and similar questions.

“This is what we’re trying to say also ...”

From our experience with “The Longest Winter”, we decided to work again with OMPF on another common project, but this time our target was the families of the missing – the adults. “The Longest Winter”, as a concept, was built upon “standard” theatrical communication. The performance had a normal structure and the only interaction with the audience took place when the show ended, when the discussions with the children started. After many debates, we agreed that this second project of ours should be more interactive and that it should offer the audience the chance to see themselves inside the creative process. Forum Theatre and the concept of interactivity seemed to us a very efficient means to achieve our aims and one worth exploring. To create a clearer idea about Forum Theatre, we organized a special session with families of the missing and representatives of their family associations. The fate of our project depended on the suc-

cess or failure of that session. We chose two scenes from “The Longest Winter” and presented them. The result of this “experiment” was amazing. We were surprised by the desire of the families to tell their stories, to make remarks or suggestions about the scenes, to alter the scene, to correct the actions of the characters, and to make the dramaturgical motivations more convincing. The first scene that we presented was the scene in which the “Antagonist” shows a woman a document to prove that her husband is alive and that he is being kept in a hidden prison. He demands 10 000 euros if she wishes to have her husband back alive. People in the audience were shocked and confused at the same time. They were shocked by the content of the scene and confused because they didn’t expect something like this, something that was so similar and close to their requests and their needs. “This is what we’re trying to say also,” said one man when the scene ended. The debate about the problem presented in the scene was very productive. According to them (the families of the missing) the situation shown in the scene was very common in their everyday life. They said that through scenes such as this people could easily understand that there are those who extort them and use their grief for personal benefit. An explanation like this one was a strong argument about the role of theatre: “look what happens in the scene, and then decide for yourself which side you would take ...”; or, even more directly, “look how this woman is deceived in front of your eyes, and learn that you shouldn’t be defrauded like she was!” The presentation of these two scenes strengthened our conviction that this form of theatre – where the actor is very close to the audience and where



the audience can say, “No, I think this should be different ...” – is very efficient and serves our mission.

The second project was called “Voices”. Two playwrights (one Albanian and one Serb) were assigned to write short scenes based on the real stories of the families of the missing. Also, we visited family associations and asked them for their opinions. I must mention that the Albanian family associations were very doubtful about involving the Serb families of the missing in the same project, and the same doubts were also found in the Serb family associations. However, we had predicted such refusals, but they were not in keeping with the nature and the aim of our project. Actually, this feeling led to political problems. For example, there were voices that thought the involvement of the Serbs in the project was same as “equalizing the victim of the crime with its perpetrator”. But, the angle from which we observed the problem was more human than political; therefore, our arguments were accepted as honest by families of both communities.

Forum Theatre

The Albanian playwright wrote four scenes that were then prepared for three weeks by the company of Albanian actors. These scenes were dedicated exclusively to the Albanian families of the missing. The Serbian playwright also wrote four scenes for the Serbian families of the missing, and the scenes were prepared by the Serbian company, in parallel with the Albanian crew. One director worked with both companies. The reason why we didn't use the same scenes for both communities is that in either community there are small

differences in the same phenomenon. Most of the missing Albanians were taken during the war, usually in big groups and organized by Serbian military and paramilitary forces. Serbs, however, went missing individually, and most of the cases happened after the war. In this way, we wished to build the trust of the family members, and at the same time show them that this is not a political pamphlet, but rather a serious effort to understand and respect their grief and to sincerely “reproduce” their experience.

The scenes prepared for the Voices project were presented in different parts of Kosovo, mostly in rural regions. The audience atmosphere at the beginning of the sessions was always one of nervousness. The audience, although previously informed, always found it hard to accept the nature of the project. Thus, there was always room for scepticism and disbelief. Of course, we should here mention the fact that almost 90 % of them were experiencing theatre for the first time. The session would begin with a general explanation of the project and of this specific form of theatre. Then, we would give information about the content of the scenes, in order to help the audience develop their ideas about the problem in the scene. The unfinished ending of the scene, the unresolved problem, the “behaviour” of the characters, the words and phrases, the actors' movements, and intervention of the moderator, became a base from which to open the debate.

The problems subject to discussion often expanded beyond the context of the problems presented in the scene. In dif-

ferent regions people face different problems, and therefore the debate was often oriented towards these specific problems. Among many issues discussed in these forums was that of the position of women in Kosovo society. The victims of the war in Kosovo were mainly men. They are the majority of the missing in Kosovo. In traditional Kosovar mentality (in the Albanian community as well as in the Serbian community – typical for rural regions) men are considered as the breadwinner of family, someone the family cannot exist without. This concept has caused considerable trauma in many families in which men were killed or went missing during the war. In such situations women have found it easier to isolate themselves from society. Isolation is a defence mechanism for repairing against the damage and the pain caused by the absence of the men, but also a defence mechanism against the reactions of people from the outside. During the sessions many women showed that they cannot leave their village, that they are not allowed to travel on the bus alone, etc ... Isolation is seen as preventing immorality, preserving honour, and as signifying respect for the dead or missing husband. “By staying at home you prove ‘loyalty’ and grief for your husband.”

One of the scenes dealt with this specific problem: the woman's position and her role in the family after the disappearance of her husband. This was undoubtedly the scene that incited the most debates. Many of them understood the absurdity of this mentality, but at the same time they felt powerless to oppose this moral “norm” set up by the society, as they called it. A woman in one session, although she talked



about the women in the scene, accepted that she was herself in the same situation. She had been offered a job, and her missing husband's family made her refuse it. About ten members of her family live on only 60 euros per month. She could not predict the consequences if she accepted the job offer and opposed the will of her husband's family, but she was convinced that something bad would happen. In another session, a 30 year-old woman said that she agreed not to get married because she didn't know what might have happened to her missing father. This was the example that proved the emotional process that many of these families go through during this period. According to some very old traditions, this girl decided not to marry until she finds out what happened to her father. She felt proud about her choice. In this way, she believed that she was honouring the memory of her father. Giving up on her happiness was a sacrifice she believed she was making for her father.

Towns and regions were facing different kinds of specific problems. In the town of Klina we faced a very tense atmosphere and crisis that required the intervention of police investigations. Klina is a small town that was considerably damaged during the war and one of the towns with the greatest number of missing persons. The presentation in Klina was extraordinary and maybe the most successful. One of the main problems there was the continuous action of extortionists that were taking money from the families of the missing, in return for information about their disappeared loved one (information they never received). The stories were shocking. The most tragic part of these stories was that the families of

the missing believed that their loved ones were still alive and that they were being held in hidden prisons in Serbia. The names of the extortionists were kept silent because nobody dared to report them to the police. They were convinced that if the extortionists were reported to the police, that they would take revenge by doing harm to their loved ones in the hidden prisons in Serbia. The extortionists were protected by the families of the missing because they were considered the only "connection" with their missing. Although none of the missing have returned alive and none of the promises made by extortionists were kept, people continue to live by believing and hoping. At the end of this session, when we were preparing to finish the debate, a woman that hadn't yet said a word, stood up and said, "I don't want to be silent anymore. I've been silent for seven years now. I want to speak. Let them kill me, I don't care..." and then she started naming people who were involved in extortion of the families of the missing. Her story was shocking and her action was very brave – too brave, given the circumstances.

In Lybeniq, a village not too far from Peja, we had around 30 women in the audience. The situation we encountered there was really sad. One of the women had lost four sons, having buried two of them earlier and the other two only ten days before. Other women had also buried their husbands or sons, and there were women who still had family members missing. Some of the women there weren't convinced about the reliability of DNA testing. They didn't accept this form of identification, and argued this point naïvely: "How can they know he's my son when they haven't found any piece

of his clothes or any other sign ... Nothing, nothing." One woman that had buried four of her sons continued to believe that those were someone else's bodies and not those of her sons. "Until I die, I will never accept that those bodies that I buried were my sons". The problem in Lybeniq was very specific, and it turned out that one of our scenes was very close with the problems they had in that village. The woman from our scene did not agree to give the blood sample for DNA testing because she believed her husband was still alive. In the end of the session, a girl said, "I've never seen theatre before. I liked it a lot and I think it's very important for the people here. It can make them think again about DNA testing and about many problems that were presented in the scene. I would like to watch a theatre performance again. I want to remember my father."

The fundamental issues and problems that the families of the missing talked about in these sessions were:

- social problems
- dissatisfaction with the work of institutions
- the atmosphere within the family, and the relations between different age groups and sexes
- the position of women who have lost their husbands
- disengagement from mechanisms for investigating the whereabouts of the missing
- the reliability or unreliability of DNA testing
- arguments and counter arguments on where the missing are and whether or not they are alive
- hidden prisons where the missing "are being held"
- extortion



- interethnic problems
- the emotional state of people ("how do I feel now")
- stories about the war and personal stories
- detailed descriptions of the missing
- general reflections on the situations presented in the scenes by the actors

These and many other issues were the subject of the debates in these 17 organized sessions. The audience was seemingly "hungry" to tell of their experiences. Sometimes these were long stories and it seemed like they could talk for hours: "No, wait, I'll have to tell my story ..."; "Can I say something?"; "Can I speak?"; "I'd like to tell you something...". These were the most common words that came from the audience. A session usually lasted for two or three hours, and we were always the ones to end it, not them.

The span of the results of this project covers many areas. The benefits we could name are:

- The chance given to these people to talk in public about what they feel and think ("I don't want to be silent anymore. I've been silent for seven years ...")
- By sharing their own experiences and by talking about their grief they experienced a catharsis ... ("We want to express our pain. We want to talk. When I meet people that don't respect my suffering, that don't have patience to listen to my pain, then the pain just grows.")
- Their coming to the sessions and the fact they had to face other people can be understood as a form of breaking the isolation that they have been living in for years ...
- Families have understood that their suffering and grief have

not been forgotten, and that there are people outside their community that can sympathize with their pain.

– Through theatre, they saw their experiences played out by someone else. In this way, two important elements were brought into focus: "recognition" and "memory". Their recognition as victims and the recognition of their terrible experiences. And, also, recognition of the "victimization" of others: "This happened to you and to others as well; others are suffering in the same way." Also, the sessions helped and activated their memories: "You are a victim because this thing has happened to you, and now it is being reproduced by the actors. You used to be these people; you suffered like the characters in the scene, and you had to face these situations ...!"

- The project, in an indirect way, aimed to mobilize Kosovo society towards more active engagement in the process of finding the missing, and at the same time to show solidarity and to share their pain by offering support and encouragement for the future.

Of course, these and other observations of this project could be elaborated broadly, and a thorough study would bring to the surface other "invisible" benefits that we haven't analyzed as much as we could.

In the end, our effort and our engagement in these two projects were rewarded with the words of a woman whose husband and four sons were missing: "It's six years now that I haven't left my house, and today I felt very good watching your play." Such impressions were found in other members of the audience, too. And, surprisingly, both companies, the

Albanian and the Serbian, after these 17 presentations were over, felt the need to continue with this activity, because these people still needed our help and support. The practical help and similar activities are very helpful for the families of the missing. We hope that this working model that we applied will inspire others to work with families of the missing in the future.

To conclude, we would say that although in the beginning of these projects some things were unclear, now one thing is for certain: theatre can be a strong mechanism for exploring the most sensitive issues of the society. Mankind needs theatre.

[This article was written for the book "Voices" (2006), published by CCTD and OMPF in Kosovo]

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www.qendra.org

The Antigone project

Towards a 'new aesthetic' for creating theatre in a conflict zone, by Dorinda Hulton

The question of a 'new aesthetic' for creating theatre in a conflict zone was raised most recently by Sabine Kock, the organiser of the European Off Network conference A Third Space: "Theatre in times of War" in Vienna in October 2008. Amongst other questions, it was addressed through the presentation of video documentation of contemporary practice by Bulgarian, Israeli, Palestinian, Kosovan, Serbian, Turkish and other European creative artists and producers working in their own countries, and also through discussion. In both these forums it became clear to me that there was/is a very real need for space in which to explore the question further – in terms of principles, but more especially in terms of practical processes which may be shared with, and between, international partners. At the Third Space conference itself the Turkish scientist Ilkay Sevgi proposed a forthcoming conference in Istanbul 2010 as a focus for such potential sharing. Everyone in the EON conference participated with generosity and insight and my own response to the question posed by Sabine was immediate and positive: yes, I believe there is a need for a 'new aesthetic' for theatre in conflict zones and yes, I would like to contribute through practice and analysis to this debate.

A great deal of work in understanding performance practices in conflict zones has been done by the In Place of War project (www.inplaceofwar.net) and a major publication arising from this is scheduled for May 2009. James Thomson's *Digging up Stories: Applied Theatre, Performance and War* (2005) is also a key text. Additionally there are a considerable number of significant historical reassessments such as Michael

Balfour's *Theatre and War 1933-1945* (2001) and articles describing contemporary and recent historical practices listed in the In Place of War project bibliography. Nothing, however, in this list focuses specifically on the question of a 'new aesthetic'.

I was invited to be a partner in the "Theatre in times of War" conference because of my work in Cyprus with Echo-Arts Living Arts Centre (Artistic Director Arianna Economou, www.echo-arts.info with whom I have been developing a series of practice as research projects with creative artists from both sides of the military border since 2003. With Arianna, I spoke at the conference about a performance entitled "One Square Foot: the still small voice of the people" which represented Cyprus at the "New Plays for Europe Festival" in Wiesbaden Germany, in June 2006. In the program to this performance, Mr Neophytou from the Theatre Organisation of Cyprus, offered a summary of the political and historical background of the island, writing of the "many deep wounds amongst the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots that have been caused by the war, that don't seem to heal." He refers here to the war that began on July 20, 1974 when Turkish troops invaded the island and occupied 37% of the north. As a result, about 150,000 Turkish Cypriots, under pressure from Ankara, relocated to the north, and since then Cyprus has been ethnically divided. A line now separates the country and its people. This historical and political context is made yet more complex by the numbers of dead and dis-



appeared on both sides, many of whom are still publicly remembered through their faded photographs on trees in city squares, and in posters that line the road to the border. Further to this, a number of settlers from the Turkish mainland now occupy houses and land belonging to Greek Cypriots and many properties on the predominantly Turkish Cypriot side of the divide have been sold on to people from outside Cyprus.

The One Square Foot project—also discussed by Deirdre Heddon in her article in the *Performance Art Journal* 86—places the performer, rather than the playwright, at the heart of generating material for performance. The project has been a collaborative one between Echo-Arts Living Arts Center, Cyprus and Theatre Alibi, UK (Artistic Director Nikki Sved) www.theatrealibi.co.uk. Arianna Economou of Echo-Arts, Cyprus, and I have acted as co-directors for the entire project, which has been conducted in three phases, each culminating in performances of new work collaboratively authored by a number of creative artists using interdisciplinary methods. In Phase One, which took place in May 2003, site-specific performances were presented near the military border in Nicosia, Cyprus, and in the Troodos mountains. Studio performances took place in the Open Studio Season, Nicosia, and also at the Chorotheatro Studio in Nicosia. Phase Two in July 2003 staged performances both on site, and at the Drama Department of Exeter University in the UK. In Phase



Three, which took place in September 2005, site specific performances were presented on both sides of the military border in Nicosia as well as in several indoor spaces, south of the military border at the Ayios Andreas Market Theatre, and north of the border at the Arabahmet Cultural Centre.

Throughout the project, we worked together as a group of artists—Arianna Economou (choreographer and dancer), Peter Hulton (video artist and documenter), Ilker Kaptanoglu (musician and composer), Larkos Larkou (sound design and composition), Serhat Selisik (sculptor and installation artist), Horst Weierstall (installation artist and documenter), and myself (director and dramaturg)—to find a way of responding to the “many deep wounds” to which Mr. Neophytou referred. In a situation dominated by the macro politics of the UN, the EU, Greece, Turkey, the UK and the USA, we attempted to do this by creating an artistic forum and structure in which the individual voices of ordinary people might be heard: that is, a structure that might include their stories, their experiences, their memories, beliefs and hopes, rather than those of public institutions. This piece, then, created in the divided city of Nicosia, one of the last divided cities in Europe, aimed towards multi-authorship and micro political action, giving space to tiny, private moments, bringing them into the public arena and allowing them to be heard, hence the title: the still small voice of the people. Video interviews were conducted with elderly people from both sides of the military border and their stories and memories of living in a mixed community before the division were interwoven into the piece. Stories were told about those who had died in both the Greek and Turkish

Cypriot communities; and significantly, the two main performers were from the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities respectively. Their autobiographical stories to do with childhood and memory formed one of the main threads in the piece, as did their individual performance practices: music and dance.

For collaboratively authored work, the first question is often one of establishing common ground between the artists involved. In making “the still small voice of the people”, we chose to address this question quite literally. This was one of several pieces created under the umbrella of the “One Square Foot” project as a whole, based on the use of a spatial location as site for generating material: one square foot of planet earth. Within the project, each square foot was chosen by the creative actors and artists involved in making the work both because of its political and historical associations and also for its autobiographical resonances. However, in addressing the political and historical context of creating a piece in Nicosia, the artists involved in “the still small voice of the people” were forced to choose two square feet of earth as starting points: one on either side of the military border, now separated by a buffer zone. In travelling between the two, from one side of the city to the other, we were required to show our passports and have our visas stamped, something that some members of our technical team were unwilling to do (later in the project, this necessitated hiring technical teams on either side of the border and alerting the police, in order to safeguard car tires from being slashed during performances).

Within the “One Square Foot” project I believe that in the process of answering other questions we were also consistently evolving a number of strategies for creating ‘new work’ in the theatre. I have documented and analysed these strategies in an article entitled “Sites for Micro Political Theatre” (PAJ 2008). There is also a documentation of the first two phases of the project in the form of a DVD-ROM published by Arts Archives (www.arts-archives.org.uk). In the PAJ article, I attempted a reflection and analysis of that process of creating a multi-authored piece, examining five compositional strategies—(1) Interplay, (2) Site as source and resource for generating performance material, (3) Metaphor, (4) Momentum and rhythm, and (5) Repetition—and their development and response to the political and historical context of the particular situation we were working in. I hoped, however, that these thoughts would open up as well to problems and questions inherent in similar, less-situated, work. It is this framework for creating ‘new work’ that I would like to try out and analyse in a project planned for 2010 called “The Antigone Project”, and which, I believe can contribute to the question of a ‘new aesthetic’ for creating theatre in a conflict zone. I believe there is an urgent need for provocative practice and discussion in order to address the question and encourage future, diverse possibilities amongst artistic communities - as well as further analyses and conceptualisations amongst scholars. The contribution made by “The Antigone Project” will develop insight into practical approaches to the question. Outcomes will be of particular interest to those engaged in applied drama and classical reception, contributors to the “In Place of War” project, and the independent artists who comprise the

European Off Network who are approaching the question in their own ways.

"The Antigone Project" is a practice led project planned for May 2010 that will explore artistic processes within a framework for a 'new aesthetic' for creating theatre in a conflict zone. It will analyse these processes, as well as the performance outcomes, with a view to proposing and provoking strategies for future development that may be more broadly applicable.

The framework of a 'new aesthetic' that I would like to propose and work within is defined by:

- Artistic representation of shared experience and concerns rather than subject matter that emphasises differences
- Creative artists from both sides of a conflict zone bringing their individual aesthetics together to create performance - rather than working in separate teams
- A multilingual approach that allows space for the voices of ordinary people to be heard on a micro political level.

The project will be devised to address the following research questions through practice:

- What processes might facilitate an exploration of shared content?
- What processes might facilitate a non hierarchical approach to working with creative artists from both sides of a conflict zone?
- What processes might facilitate an exploration of multilingual form?

The media for the creative work in the project will spring from the artistic disciplines of the creative artists involved, including myself as a practising dramaturg. English will be spoken as a common language of process within the project because the Greek and Turkish Cypriot artists do not speak each others' languages. The ways in which each research question will be explored will be specific to the context of Cyprus. As mentioned above, however, the aim is to propose and provoke strategies for future development that may be more broadly applicable.

Shared Content

Processes concerning the question of shared content will be explored through fragments of text from Sophocles's Antigone. As dramaturg, I will select these fragments (from the Cambridge University Press translation) in relation to the theme of burial in the play - this theme being integral to Antigone's need to bury the brother she loves, as much as it is integral to the lived experience of the people of Cyprus where hundreds remain missing in both the Muslim and Greek Orthodox communities - and unburied, since 1963. The reason that I have chosen to work with fragments of an ancient Greek play whilst exploring the question of a 'new aesthetic' within a conflict zone is because a further strand of my prac-

tice, in parallel with my work with Echo Arts, has been an investigation into ways in which the contemporary actor can approach questions of 'character' in ancient Greek text. I pursued this research with Foursight Theatre, UK (Artistic Director at the time, Naomi Cooke) www.foursight.theatre.bolt-blue.net/frameset.htm, in a series of projects that extended between 2001 and 2004. An enduring problem arising out of these investigations related to representation of the dead and the dying: how the 'character' of the dead might at one and the same time represent a figure in the play at the same time as inviting contemporary resonance for an audience. It seems to me that Sophocles's Antigone presents this problem again in the form of the 'character' of the dead brother Polyneices - and the question of his identity, and how it might be represented artistically, appears to me to be particularly challenging in a context in which the exhumation and identification of the dead on both sides of the conflict zone is still

being experienced by relatives whose loved ones remain missing. (Within The Antigone Project we are interested in investigating this problem through the concept of 'one of a kind' artists books rather than through representations of the human figure.)

My work as dramaturg will therefore be informed by a strand of my research concerning 'character'.





A Non Hierarchical Approach

Processes concerning a non hierarchical approach involving artists from both sides of a conflict zone will be explored with an interdisciplinary team of established artists including myself as dramaturg. The team will comprise people with whom I have been collaborating in the One Square Foot project – an evolution of trust being imperative for artistic process in any ‘new aesthetic’. Also, two young performers will embody the ‘character’ of Antigone (one from the Muslim community, one from the Greek Orthodox).

Artistic responses to the fragments of text will be in the performance media of each of the artists’ disciplines, sometimes in collaboration with each other, and sometimes individually. These artistic responses, each informed by individual aesthetics, will be documented in the form of micro-performances in outdoor sites on both sides of the border. Each site will be chosen by one of the creative artists because of its associations with the theme of burial. The processes of generating imagery for performance in outdoor sites is particularly appropriate to this project situated in a country where land remains contested. Micro-performances will be shared with local audiences and other members of the artistic team.

Multilingual Form

Processes concerning multilingual form will be explored through video documentation of first hand testimony from relatives of missing persons. I see this as a defining characteristic of a ‘new aesthetic’ – allowing space in performance (in this instance through video projection) for the voices of ordinary people in conflict zones to be heard on a micro political level. The gathering and/or documentation of first hand

testimony related to the significance of burial ritual will be approached with the utmost sensitivity, and permissions will always be sought from individuals and the relevant authorities for access and possibly inclusion in publication, either in the form of DVD-ROM or public performance. Documentation, editing and projection will be undertaken by the Arts Documentation Unit, UK (www.arts-archives.org.uk).

The creative team will be supplemented by a choir of young people from both sides of the military border who will sing in their own and each others’ languages, and their recorded voices will represent the ‘character’ of the Chorus. The participation of these young people will hopefully draw in young audiences to see the performances and also inherently embody a feeling of hope for the future which I believe to be imperative within any ‘new aesthetic’.

As dramaturg, I will draw up a series of ‘scores’ and make them available for discussion to the creative team as a whole. These scores will propose a number of possibilities for indoor performance in which each artistic language will interweave with each of the others. I will explore particularly the way in which a multilingual approach influences questions of form. Translations of fragments of text into Greek and Turkish will be undertaken by members of the artistic team.

The overall performance language will take the shape of an exhibition/performance/installation that interweaves selected material from the outdoor performances documentation of first hand testimony from relatives of missing persons and fragments of ancient text in Greek, Turkish and English. Final indoor studio performances will be presented in workshop form at an international conference in Cyprus.

Ethical implications

Although “The Antigone Project” includes investigation into the forms and significance of burial ceremony, custom and ritual within Muslim and Greek Orthodox traditions, members of the creative research team will not always be practising members of these religions. The focus is on understanding different and/or overlapping forms, and significance within traditions, rather than identification with them.

Also, although the “The Antigone Project” will explore ways in which the arts can contribute to notions of ‘understanding’ between peoples of different faiths and cultures, clearly the sense of historical division within Cypriot society is contingent upon a multiplicity of macro political issues that are beyond the scope of this project to address. Rather, the project seeks to explore the hypothesis that society as a whole benefits from the sense of resolution in the individual that occurs when a loved one is buried with the attendant burial rites. This hypothesis is posed by the character of the prophet Teiresias in Sophocles’s “Antigone”. I believe that any ‘new aesthetic’ must take as a premise a vision for the future that is healing rather than divisive.

Dorinda Hulton is a part-time Senior Lecturer in Drama (University of Exeter) and freelance Theatre Director and Dramaturg. Her research, professional practice, and teaching focus on ‘the creative actor’ and the development of processes that facilitate innovative theatre making. Her writings include chapters on Joseph Chaikin for “Twentieth Century Actor Training” (Routledge) and ‘the creative actor’ in “Theatre Praxis” (Macmillan).

<http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/staffsite/hulton/welcome.shtml>

Performing in a precarious reality

By Lisa Jacobson

The 20th century will be remembered as the most murderous century ever, with its world wars, millions of lost lives, its alienation and its destruction of mother earth by nuclear bombs. Politics and borders today, all over the world, are still constantly changing, creating many lost identities. The control of the mass media has turned the world into "the global village" nuclear energy and weapons result in us facing the greatest possible threat to our world. The search for power has brought ever more corruption, pollution, death, poverty and destruction to the globe and its inhabitants. In Israel, we live in a constant situation of being "between wars", a shattered economy, unemployment, religious and class differences which increase the cultural-economic gap; we are witnesses to causeless hatred, and the loss of human values.

In Europe we see similar developments due to a mass of immigrants moving to European countries, changing the demographic map, and creating the age old problems of native-born against immigrants, right against left etc. which creates constant cultural flux.

Apart from the great contribution of Freud and his colleagues to the studies and research into psychology in the 20th century, and due to the social political circumstances I have mentioned before, it is no wonder that the theatre of the

20th century will be remembered in the West as the century of psychological realism. Actors have developed phenomenal skills in acting from the neck up. This has been increased by television and cinema cameras with their close-ups on the actors' facial expressions. But the expression of the body, the joy of play, of the moving actor on stage, has been lost.

There has fortunately been a revival of a more physical approach to theatre which began to spread around the world over the past 30 years. In our opinion the credit for much of this new movement should be given to theatre master, Monsieur Jacques Lecoq, who has been a profound influence on this practice and who opened his Paris-centred theatre school in 1956. His physical style of performance has revolutionized theatre stages. Colleagues and students of his, such as Steven Berkoff, Arianne Mnouchkin, Peter Brook, Dario Fo, Philippe Gaullier, Lassad, Theatre de Complicite, Mummenschanz, Footsbarn, ARMA theatre, and many other ex-international students went back to their countries of origin, created theatre companies and productions, founded new movement and acting schools, and have been spreading the idea and techniques of physical theatre ever since. They have explored new relationships between the actor and the space and architecture around him, they



tabooed topics

taboos on national levels
↓
tabooed political or social issues?
↓
Invitations from Festivals mostly are based on political issue! (Cave in Israel)

AT STAGE
From the Nazi side
↓
as emotional taboo

forget about conflict & start with common ground.
Emotions & the universal
artists often seen as a taboo.

ethnicity
↓
Mixed ethnicity
You can address taboos at an emotional level but through art.

WAGNER!
IN ISRAEL
was played
The taboo was broken

conflicts on a micro-level are seen as taboo.

You can address taboos if you abstract them into fables or metaphor.
What platform art should be free + uncensored
Can we use to discuss taboos?

WOMEN AT THE STAGE AND

• LANGUAGE
PUBLIC INTO
WORK?

FORKS? → CONTENT
METAPHOR
REALITY

THUMAN
more
to feel & little bit

discourse

ACV
is a political
em bodiment
em pathetic

special
genres
working
methods

Forms:
- non hierarchical
- collaborative
- Language (empathetic
of the other)

Borders
= integrated
testimony of ordinary
people into the performance
essential:
representation of both sides of the conflict

Performance

radio language

Censorship





have heralded a return to playing with masks and exploring archetypal characters, they have delved into the joy of poetic clown work and the poetic grotesque sense (and criticism) of the bouffon. They have also above all developed collaborative work and rediscovered the meaning of the word “play”. In 1978 professor Arie Sach's published his book *The Prankster's Decline*, which discusses the decline of the character of the fool in the 16-17th century and explains how his role in society has been weakened in our fast growing urban and industrial societies, the loss of religious control and authority which functioned as “social glue”. I believe professor Sach's may have missed the beginning of a revival or neo-renaissance of the character of the fool, playing a new role on the theatre stages in a variety of diverse forms - such as clown, bouffon, stand-up comedy in clubs, and the new street theatre festivals - which we can perhaps see as the new form of carnival, and possibly in some of the new fringe or contemporary and independent theatre companies.

We feel that people are searching once more for that good old “social glue”, since the 20th century turned into such a fast tempo video-clip-style-life, with exaggerated permissiveness in politics, and in education. It seems as though society is losing its respect for even a tiny bit of tradition and human value. The fool is necessary to provoke and awaken society - to try to show us the existence of the other side of the coin.

The state of Israel, which is celebrating its 58th anniversary in a few days, is a state which is still undergoing political and social formation. Jews, secular Jews, Arab Muslims, Arab

Christians, Druze, Bahai, Cherkessk, Russians, Ethiopians and immigrants from around the world, are the citizens of this young country. What is Israeli culture? It's hard to define a culture which is still being formed. The mainstream theatre scene in Israel today is mainly repertory theatre, commercial theatre and straightforward entertainment. Television is extremely popular, particularly its reality shows, and this process has been leading inexorably towards decadence, and degeneration of the theatre.

In our theatrical work we choose not to ignore the precarious political, and social, reality we live in, in the state of Israel. Therefore we choose to create theatre that will make our audience active and oblige them to participate in one way or another in the theatrical experience - like in a tribal ritual. The work of ARMA Theatre Company (which means Earth, Wind, Water, Fire) is influenced by ideas of the DADA movement (we live in a village founded by Marcel Janco - one of the DADA founders), by Antonin Artaud, and most of the actors training is based on the physical theatre methods of Jacques Lecoq. We aim for a collaborative work process, with a diverse range of artists. We are inspired by the spirit of the bouffon and the idea that theatre has an important role in society, as a critic, who reminds society of its misbehaviour. Whether the production is an intimate indoor show or a large-scale site specific bouffon spectacle, our aim is to convey a message of criticism.

Just like the fool we are on the margins of society. We are not supported by government money on a regular basis, and perhaps one of the reasons is that we don't really care

about or believe in the system. What we offer is a certain kind of anarchism. It's a conflict because it seems hypocritical to criticize the system and then use its money to make a living.... We criticize, we break taboos, some of our work is very grotesque, and we are very straightforward with our social-political ideas. The genres of work we use are for the most part not realistic; we hardly ever use the theatrical space in its conventional concept. We break the fourth wall, which means the audience is forced to change its habits of theatre viewing - from being passive to being active - For many people this is the first time they have encountered anything like this. For the most part this new cultural experience is welcomed by the spectators who are moved by their experience, and most importantly remember it long after the show is over. Being an independent theatre company in Israel, with social-political issues on our artistic agenda, is a rare phenomenon.

The political situation in Israel is one that is always on the edge. The political and social issues strongly affect our theatrical creation.

After the assassination of prime-minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, we produced a show for the Israeli fringe theatre festival called Azazel, at Chan-El-Omdan, the old Arabic quarter of Acco, in the north of Israel. The show's main theme was the issue of the scapegoat, and political assassinations from a universal perspective. We wanted to discuss these issues in a way that would sweep people into a fantastic theatrical experience - to take them into an imaginary or ancient world, to feel a total theatre experience and be a part of the show. Therefore it was necessary that the spectators have an ac-



tive role in the play. The genre of work was site-specific in a large ancient inn with an inside court-yard. The characters were grotesque bouffons, devised collaboratively with the directors and actors. The story was inspired by the biblical rituals of the scapegoat, and also included some materials from biblical texts (those which were not chosen as part of the canon of the Jewish library). The process of work took several months, in which the last month was spent working at the chosen site. We were the only theatre company actually living in the Arab quarter for such a long period of time, as the other productions (mainly from Tel- Aviv) arrived 2 or 3 days before the festival. In that time we met local people, worked with them and got to know them better. Sometimes we also had kids throwing stones at us. You get that feeling of wanting to present your work on the one hand, but on the other hand, even if you stay there for a month and make close friends; in certain cities and villages of Israel we are considered to be “outsiders”. There is always that gap between Arabs and Jews. In the Israeli theatre scene, we are outsiders as well, because of the genres of work we choose and the unconventional theatrical spaces we choose. In the show, the spectators have to walk and follow the theatrical action through a few different spaces within this large inn (the French use the term “Parcours” for this kind of show, the British call it a “promenade performance”). It seems typical that the professional criticism we received in the press was not about the acting or the visualization of our ideas, but how difficult it was for the critic. He complained about the discomfort in his legs and his back not being able to sit down in a red velvet chair for the duration of the show! The

choice of making a site-specific production with 17 people working on a production is in itself an “on the edge choice”. Where could this production possibly go afterwards? Israel has one fringe festival which we were already appearing in. The rise of Bibi Netanyahu as the new Prime Minister of Israel also affected our work. The popularity and public perception of the country went down drastically. A Belgian theatre agent said to us “Israel? Not at all a popular country to sell now to any theatre festival in Europe.” When will it ever be good to sell Israel anywhere? When will the Israeli artists stop being regarded as the ones in charge of government’s decision? Unfortunately we encounter discrimination and prejudice from within as well. A representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs department of culture, left the show in rage because we dared to use the bible as a source of inspiration and the grotesque world that the buffonesque characters presented was sacrilege to him as he was devoutly religious. There was no real nudity, but bouffon costumes imitated a distorted representation of nudity, and that was too much for him. Orthodox and extra religious Jews are not a part of our fan club!

Another piece of work we would like to talk about is *Government of Fools*, which was presented at the Acco Fringe Festival in 2001. Over a period of 6 years following the assassination of Rabin in 1995 the government was changed 4 times. What kind of normal life can people lead with this kind of instability? We put together a show which criticized the absurdity of politicians and their corruption. Our aim was to provoke people to think about what was happening and not necessarily accept every politician’s word as a word of god.

However we did not want to recreate a representation of reality on stage – we have enough of it every day. It’s terrible enough being exposed to it through the news broadcast on television or facing it on the streets. Our chosen genre was once again the bouffon. Its ability to create a fantastic world, rich with metaphors that can be both funny and cruel at the same time, allows to explore harsh ideas and concepts and to imprint them on our audience but with a lightness of touch. This alienation-effect which distances the audience from its feelings about everyday reality is a necessary step. It gives us the ability to mock and criticize our own contemporary social and political realities. This kind of show is inspired by the ancient rituals of “mocking” and the Lord of Misrule.

A great deal of the instability in our daily lives has been provided by the complex and longstanding conflict with the Palestinians. The second Intifada, the Palestinian uprising, erupted in 2000 and the state of Israel suffered many terror attacks, which became almost routine. Violent riots in the Israel-Arab cities as well, begun as part of their identification with their brother Palestinians. 13 Israeli-Arabs were killed in these riots. The grounds where our performance was to take place in the city of Acco were still very tense. Performing in one of the main Piazzas of the Arab part of Acco, while having a dozen snipers on the roofs of the buildings around the Piazza, was a difficult experience. One of the main ideas of this festival was to create a sense of “co-existence” in the city. But the presence of a group of soldiers dispersed around the space did not create a good ambiance. It felt to us like performing in the middle of a war.



There are many ways of expressing theatrical ideas on stage. In a performance of our project *Made in Israel*, which we performed in the Eclat Festival in Aurillac, France, we wanted to convey our difficulties with everyday life, caused by regular terror and suicide attacks. Personally, I have refused to travel on busses since the suicide bombings on the bus system started. For our show, we made a Cardboard replica of a bus, blew it up, and then asked people in the audience to play dead people, because we don't have enough for the television cameras. Then the TV camera-man said "cut" and we helped everyone up, back on their feet, thanked them and said how well they had played their roles. It was actually presented as if we were filming something for television or cinema, and was delivered with a lot of humour, in spite of the shocking central idea.

That same year a theatre production named *Rust* for the Acco Festival used the real front of a number five bus which was blown-up on Dizengoff street in Tel-Aviv, as their stage design. The heavy ambiance was there throughout the whole show, you could sense it physically in the theatre. So the question is, do we choose to bring the horrible reality onto stage or do we convey our message through the medium of humour and critical distance? It's not a judgmental question – it's a matter of artistic and personal choice.

The precarious reality in Israel dictates a new kind of work contract between festival organizers and artists. A new clause added to the contract says that the festival can cancel the festival or performance at any given moment, due

to reasons of "force majeure" – Which means in the event of a terror attack or bombing, the festival will not be obliged to pay the artists fee, which was previously agreed upon, and will have no further commitments towards the artists. For artists like us, who choose on many occasions to work outdoors, where the danger is most acute, this creates a serious problem. You can work on a production for several months, in the knowledge that one day before the premiere it could be cancelled with no compensation for your work. This actually happened to us in 1994 in Tel-Aviv after a suicide terror attack, on the same street where the performance should be presented. So we at ARMA create theatre under conditions that do not allow us to be sure of our financial income – it's part of the risk in making art we have to take into consideration in this country.

It was very exciting for us to arrive in Vienna on the Israeli Holocaust Memorial Day. This is a day of commemoration for the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis in World War 2. Personally, I had family here in Vienna, and it was a very exciting situation for me to be in the city they had lived in. As second and third generation relatives of Holocaust survivors, the Holocaust theme is still relevant to us, as it should be to the whole world. But, as theatre artists, we are not interested in bringing the Holocaust theme to the stage; we prefer to discuss the vanity of war from a universal point of view. Our project *Point of Departure* is an interdisciplinary theatre project with dance, physical theatre and plastic arts forming the show. It was produced for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Gertrude Kraus, an Austrian born artist who

brought the spirit of expressionistic dance to Israel in the late 1930's. This production's main theme is the vanity of war, and the needless deaths caused by it. Kraus, who began working creatively in between the two world wars often used this theme in her own work. Deborah Gzesh of the Tschik-Tschak Festival has offered us the opportunity to bring this project to Vienna. The idea would be to perform it in the Nestroyhof, which was a Jewish theatre until 1938. From the moment the idea is suggested we are overwhelmed by it. The symbolical implication of bringing back a Jewish theatre to this location is incredible. It's even more exciting as Israeli – to do this project at the Nestroyhof – because in spite of all the racism, hatred and well planned genocide, the Jewish people have their own state today. We do not agree or justify many of the political decisions of the Israeli governments, and we believe Israel has made plenty of mistakes in its attitude towards Palestinians and the Israeli-Arabs, but, with all the bubbling formation of culture and differences between us and even other Jews, it's the only place where we – as Jews – can feel at home and not be outsiders. And how symbolic it is that the day we go back to Israel is its Independence Day.

Lisa Jacobson is an actress, director, designer, writer, teacher and choreographer. Co-founder and Director of ARMA Theatre, since 1990. Taught Acting and movement for theatre at: the Tel-Aviv University, Haifa University, Seminar Hakibutzim- teachers college courses, Teatron Haguf and ran international workshops in France, Austria, Croatia, Italy, and Spain. Directed Projects in Interdisciplinary theatre at Matan and the school of visual theatre in Jerusalem. Ein-Hod Artists' village, Israel.

On aesthetic distance and war

By Irena Ristic

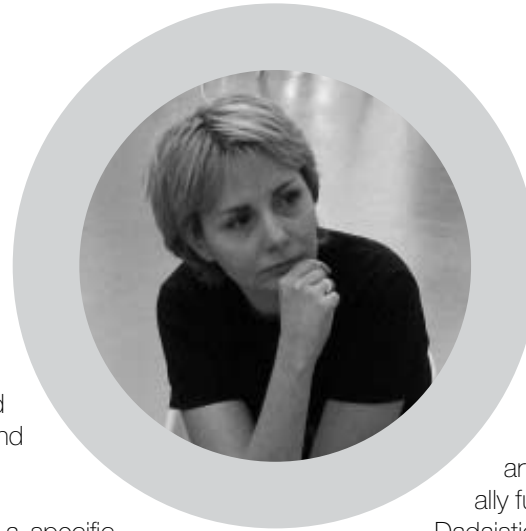
During the EON meeting in Vienna we began a discussion which explored the different aesthetic approaches to the issue of *processing* the topic of war. Two examples of contemporary theatre practice were chosen as a starting point for this debate. Dorinda Hulton, theatre director and lecturer in the drama department at Exeter University (UK), showed us fragments of the Foursight Theatre's production of *Agamemnon*, and we were also offered the chance to watch extracts from several projects produced by Lisa Jacobson from ARMA theatre company (Israel). We identified two distinct and authentic artistic models, each of them conditioned by a different context. The first was a radical re-interpretation of the classical Greek tragic form, in which the use of a puppet character to represent the role of a victim presents its audience with complex questions relating to emotional and critical distance.

This piece produced the first stylistic debate of the session as participants discussed their response to the use of puppetry in this context. The second performance aesthetic we analysed used the grotesque bouffon approach. Interactive in character, this aesthetic involves the principle of the audience as a consumer of theatre being replaced by the demand that it should actively participate in the event. Defining the border line between artist and audience becomes a challenge, and produces a new transformative space in which new creations can flourish. We were fully aware, of course, that these two examples could not be taken as universal models for a precise genre division when approaching the subject of war. Contemporary artistic practice offers a wide-

ranging field of formal experimentation in its search for aesthetic and poetic responses to the relevant questions of today. However, these two examples of practice provided the contextual platform for a lively and challenging discussion.

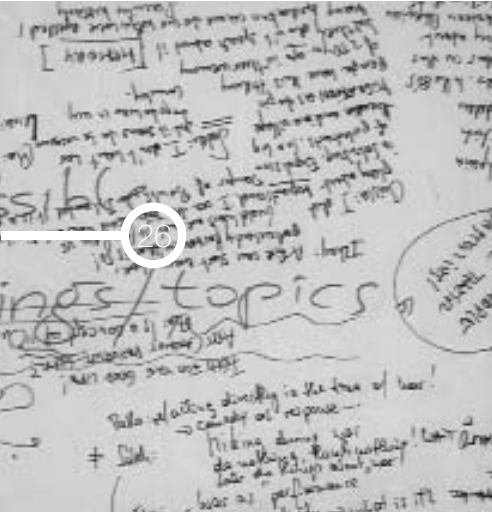
So how do we go about choosing a specific aesthetic approach when we want to examine war? Do determining factors such as time or space, as they apply to actual conflicts, provide us with a direct path through which certain aesthetic choices arise naturally? To what extent is an artistic form stamped by a particular conflict's framework?

Time and time again the subject of war in art seems to encourage the familiar theoretical dilemmas of social conditionality, as it relates to the artistic act. Lisa believes that there is a tangible difference between aesthetic approaches embraced by artists from the Balkan region and artists from Israel. When an artist has to confront the continuing presence of a long term conflict directly, there is a tendency in that artist to produce the type of grotesque creations that serve to highlight the absurdity of war. This is the reason there is so much black humour in Israel, says Lisa – The Balkans are a different case entirely: they have a need for a tragic framework where catharsis is central to the aesthetic, since their war has been much shorter, and in some ways more intense. Sabine agrees with this line of thinking, referring to fragments



of the performances of DAH theatre and the Multimedia Center Kosovo which we saw at the previous EON meeting in Brescia. I don't agree with them completely, because I believe that the most remarkable Serbian artistic projects in the 90's were actually full of bizarre, poetic, blackly humorous, Dadaistic elements. I can recall performances made as anti-war demonstrations, and live acts by LED Art, as well as the cynical artistic comments made by Milica Tomic on the subject of the "turbo-folk" culture of the New Balkan Wars. Thinking out loud, it seems to me that artists from Israel and Serbia do in fact show a similar aesthetic 'taste', and that artists from Western Europe, when dealing with the subject of war generally manifest an aesthetic preference for the framework of tragedy.

I wonder if the differences only reveal themselves when we come to analyse the degree of involvement the artists have had themselves with the reality of war. Is it possible that the degree of aesthetic distance grows proportionally with geographic distance from the conflict zone? Or, does only its character and function change? Perhaps in England or in Austria, where the war is only distant echo, artists still can believe in the premises of Greek tragedy, based on the collision of two equally positive principles. Perhaps those of us who have grown up close to the reality of war, no longer cherish the collision of positive principles. We have no principles we can truly believe in, and therefore search for our



creative soul in the bitter laughter of the grotesque. 'War is the death of tragedy' – I remember this motif from Rudolf Steiner's well known book so clearly. It's a motif which went round and round persistently in my head many years ago when I directed my first production of Brecht– producing the play at the time the regime I was living under was in a state of complete denial that it was actually involved in a war, at exactly same time when we had to hide our friends under our beds to protect them from the late night mobilizations. And as Brecht's drums echoed through the Serbian nights and a whole generation matured in darkness - we could have thought that even if we had lost our ideals, we could still take the time to give one another a rough tickling. Not because an ironic or blackly humorous smile strengthens or amuses us, but because that smile, cold and cruel in its indifference, brings us far more unusual, and lucid, insights into the absurdities of everyday life – in the context of an "invisible battlefield." Of course, I'm describing the subjective experience of artists in Serbia here.

I suppose that artists living in regions where there is peace have a completely different view of wars taking place in distant lands, and consequently have a different approach to the problem of war. When war is remote an artist can observe it from a position of safety, horrified and aware of the peril facing others, yet able to consider the conflict subjectively. This produces a sophisticated, and quite necessary, distancing process which can project an aura of romance, and make the situation appear, either in its scenario or true-life events, somehow almost appealing. As a type of *voyeur* the artist is

able to analyse, to 'watch from the wings', as though he belongs in the neutral position of a concerned but untouchable giant who is trying to help. This sense of distance provides a tool for him to conceal his consumer's soul, which on occasion he can allow to dominate him as though he were observing a real reality show. He can afford to allow the war to become a media spectacle or simply an inspiration. He can express his desire to scream, or can revolt at the purity of this tragic genre. He can recognize the comforting illusions of tragedy it contains, and can see its potential for catharsis which he knows is desperately needed.

This suggests that the form and quality of aesthetic distance is not only the starting point for the author's attitude or decision, but also represents a simple human need to explore, examine, interpret, and make sense of social events - or at least to protect oneself from the absurdity of life, if it comes too close. The key position remains the one from which we observe or experience war. This position leads us to certain aesthetic choices, and perhaps defines the differences between our artistic works to a great extent. I wonder: is context really, and completely, the dominant factor? Do differences in aesthetic approach come primarily as consequence of social conditions, or should we give more consideration to the issue of individual author's choice? What is the relationship between the emotional attitude and aesthetic approach of a particular artist?

The way we grow up and develop as artists certainly influences the differences we exhibit in our inclinations and our aesthetic preferences. Our cognitive style and emotional make-

up stipulate both the aesthetic and life choices we make when we are required to deal with any subject, whether it is war, trivia, or a major set-back. These internal motivational factors could be crucial to our behaviour, more powerful than any social framework. Or, perhaps, in the creative process, the artist is permanently balanced between the opposing forces of external stimulation and internal reflex, developing ideas somewhere deep inside and somehow seeing how to realise them, as well as sensing which communication channel with audience might be the most appropriate?

This question is not easy to answer; however, I think that the aesthetic approach of an artist always arises from the tension between contextual factors and personal contemplation. This duality has specific dynamics, even when a work of art is produced in extraordinary circumstances during a war. It's important not to forget that whilst it is possible aesthetic choice is an expression of an individual human need, it still remains a form of tool, and the artist doesn't commute its function, regardless of whether this function is intended to be confrontational or defensive. We select the language and style we want to use, dependant upon on what function we choose to ascribe to a new artistic creation. Certainly, there is a link between style and genre choice, and the way we communicate with our audience in war zones. If we wish to escape reality, or cover up our feelings, then we can produce beautiful dream-like escapist fairy tales, based on classic themes, and resulting in the victory of good. If we want to confront our experiences, or force others to confront them, then we can create expressionistic parable. If we want



to frighten and disturb, then we can choose horror. If we are frightened enough already, but still want to understand intellectually, then we can distance ourselves further through the severity and eminence of the tragic form, allowing ourselves to obey the dictates of political correctness (which often denies Western artist the chance to “breathe freely”) by avoiding any touch of absurdity or humour. The style-genre analysis brings us back persistently to the subject of aesthetic distance.

EON-ites continue to debate - Confrontational opinions arise.

I still believe that this aesthetic distance which is the focus of our dispute is not simply a treat or privilege reserved exclusively for West European artists or those who live in protected or peaceful regions. This sense of distance present, regardless of the stylistic choices we make, and regardless of whether we express ourselves through the medium of provocative buffoonery, the genre of horror, or using the Aristotelean pathos of classical antiquity. Whatever the case, each form bears the attributes of its own context, since they arise from both artistic and human needs, and their means and effects vary depending upon their origins. The theatre practitioner who wants his audience to recognize and experience certain paradoxes of war, particularly those related to the understanding, or interpretation, of various degrees of guilt or culpability, will identify closely with the magical field of illusion. He will find inspiration in tragedies, epics, historical chronicles, or psychological drama. He will use sophisticated forms, seeking for purification and an exhortation of

emotion. If, on the other hand, he wants to confront the audience, then the boundaries between artist and spectator will be moved and violated, and we will enter the interactive field of performance, so influenced by Brechtian dialectic. The artistic action becomes an expression of the author's standpoint, and a potential corner stone for social change. The artist himself becomes the corrector or tribune of social conscience.

Brecht believed that ‘If we want to move things, we have to move ourselves’ and wrote about his desire to demolish the ‘fourth wall’ in theatre. Perhaps this is the only possible role for the artist in an era of powerful political struggles, in which we are always close to war. Contemporary artistic practice seems to tolerate no escape. It calls for, and requires, responsibility. Space for action is demanded, and found in interaction. ‘Go out among people and work with them’ it demands. Presentation is replaced by exchange; participation takes the place of consumption, there is creation instead of relaxation, in a personal, social and aesthetic framework. Its full dimension is released by giving us the freedom to think that art is able to change thing (after all).

But even if he can't initiate this change himself, is the artist ever be free from the responsibility to try? This thought brings us neatly round to the challenging subject of artistic responsibility. But, we are running out of time. The debate is coming to an end. As we drink our coffee, carefree and safe for the time being, in our cosy Third Space environment, the conversation continues. If we must deal with politically and socially responsible theatre, as artists working in regions of

conflict, how can we avoid the trap of the ‘agitprop’ tradition, or any of the other forms of ideological indoctrination? Can an artist choose sides in war, supporting the nation, tribe or state he believes in, and fight for them? Is he allowed to justify or support the decisions made by his official political representatives? Can he examine crimes of the ‘other side’, and tacitly justify the actions of ‘his side’?

I believe he should not. I can see no justification for either side in a war. Whether we are referring to degrees of justice or to the concept of justification both are merely weapons of manipulation. I do not measure victims on a sliding-scale. In art that arises from the cycle of war, I see only the vital importance of dialectics. There is nothing I know of which is more essential. If we use national, party, territorial or so-called patriotic arguments to take the place of genuine dialectics, then what we are actually doing is choosing the argument of war, and undoubtedly killing the art within ourselves.

There are so many questions left. This might actually be the conference's greatest legacy. I am still searching for answers. Until the next EON meeting...

Irena Ristic is an artist and researcher. Primarily, she is focused on research into creativity, and both experimental and participative approaches to the performing arts. Since 2000 she has moderated a series of empirical researches into different modes of aesthetic decision making in the creative process of artists. She is co-founder and Programme Director of Hop.La!

www.hop-la.org

A sample of the diary of Gazan's after twenty days of war

By Ali Abu Yaseen

All spontaneous ...

In the spirit of fun ...

I convey to you a sample from the diary of a Gazan citizen after twenty days of war. Every day people say this is the worst ... the deadliest day. Up until now it hasn't been true ... but today is the heaviest and the most devastating day of all.

We used to see the bombing on television ... but now it is in front of us live.

And all night there is lightning ... like fireworks ... the whole world has fireworks from land to sky ... but in Gaza ... it is from sky to land.

Now that the Israeli forces have reached the Tel Hawa area ... it means that it will cost them only one shekel, and not one and a half shekels to reach us. In spite of this I sit at the computer ... and all my family members became military analysts and together we make a joint operations room ... they are astonished that I am on the net ... because we were at war they think I should continue slapping my face.

After three weeks of staying at home without leaving the house and without anyone coming to it ... without jobs... with no electricity or water ... there is much boredom and confusion about what to do. Sometimes I count the tiles. At other times I number the curtain folds ... or play with the mobile phone (if I can get hold of a battery) or busy myself with one of my brothers.

Never mind, the beautiful thing about the situation is that the Israeli army has showed its kindness at a time of war, saying that in order to preserve the welfare of the Palestinian people it will grant us three hours truce every day. People are free to do anything within these three hours. The sweetest thing about these three hours' truce is that the hours vary from day to day; one day they extend from 1 p.m. through to 4 p.m. on another day, from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. and on a third day from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. People say: "guess which hours will mark the break for the next day, and call out treble eight, two yellows zeros and one red to win a prize".

Really, people are puzzled about what to do in those three hours ... when they have finished thinking about where to go (on the basis that there is no place in Gaza to go to) the three hours are over. Today I sit thinking about what to do ... I find that the best thing for me to do is to sleep and then there will be relative calmness and no bombing sounds ... the noise of the bombing and the sounds of the unmanned drones for the whole of the night do not allow you to sleep ... and it feels like someone is making a hole in your brain with a drill.

All of the time people can hear the sounds of bombing nearby or far away, or sense a shaking ... and we start to hear also, that the Israelis are bombing strange places (like a cemetery or a wedding hall ... or an apartment building ... or an abandoned house ... or they are bombing a place that they have bombed before, as if for confirmation).

I would like to take this occasion to thank the pilot who

shoots a small warning rocket before he splits a house into two halves with the next missile. Can you see how humane such people are? You might claim that they are 'bad' but such actions, after all, mean that a person who has escaped the first missile still has a chance to save his skin before he is killed by the second one ...

I try all the time to console myself with the saying: "do not be afraid of the sound of bullets because you will not hear the sound of the bullet that will kill you" but this saying does not apply to missiles ... do you have another opinion?

The most enjoyable thing for me is when the telephone in the house rings. My brothers and I quarrel over who is going to respond in order to talk with people who may have called from other Arab countries. If we are lucky...the caller may be from Morocco ... Algeria ... Egypt ... Libya ... Saudi Arabia ... Sudan ... or if we are unlucky, we hear the sound of the Israeli War Army spokesman warning us about owning weapons, or dealing with one of the resistance people. One day I felt that it was only our telephone in the whole of the Gaza Strip that did not stop ringing:

- Hello peace be with you
- And peace be with you too
- I am X from Libya ... God is with you ... God help you ... God support you
- Thank you Haja (old woman) ... pray for us
- God help and keep you
- Peace be upon you at night
- And peace be with you too

This is a sample of one of the phone calls that we received ... even though the calls were short and did not last for long ... we felt that we were not alone and that there was someone with us.

You cannot imagine what would happen if, during a phone call, a rocket landed nearby, or if five hundred machine guns from the Apache started ... you would hear a cry on the telephone and instead of the callers calming and consoling us, we would start to calm and console them.

And the new thing that made me angry is the phosphorus story ... all of my life I have been told that phosphorus is available in fish and that it is useful for shesmo (sexual potency). As long as people eat fish they will feel alright with phosphorus ... but here the situation is different ... here it is true that phosphorous will make you light, but once the phosphorus missile hits you and you catch on fire, people who see you will say "you are lighting up the place Haj". May Allah have mercy on us.

Of course, people want to use their leisure time positively. I use my leisure time practicing a new sport. It is the water barrels' sport. I practice this daily sport first thing in the morning after I wake up. I climb onto my roof to check the water barrels by knocking on them. I have developed a barrel music ear. From the sound of the knock I can differentiate whether the barrel is empty or full (of course everyone knows how to do this). But now, from my long knocking experience, I have learnt to tell how many litres of water there are in a barrel.

I find myself still alive up until this moment and tell myself to write to you about our condition.

I might be alive tomorrow but not able to write to you, or I may not want to do that in the first place.

Hope to see you well

Signature

Someone still alive
From Gaza

January 2009



Re: About communication

E-mail discussion of EON members from 10th to 22nd of January 2009 *

Subject: [EON] FW: Do you still remember us "GAZA"?!
From: "ali abed" <alii_21@hotmail.com>
Date: Sat, January 10, 2009 9:03 pm
To: جروج الوكين <info@filastin.at>, eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear friend
 Do you still remember Gaza?
 Do you still remember us?!
 We are still under siege, darkness and hunger.
 Do you still remember us?!
 To get water we have to walk so far, to fill a bottle or a jar...
 Do you still remember us?!
 We still have No food, or medicine to be fed.
 Our kids are dying every day in their beds
 And many have just tears to shed...
 Do you still remember us?!
 Death! Is everywhere.....
 Sometimes we have no place, to make our prayer....
 Do you really still remember us?!
 We have nothing but pain, illness, and daily sadness to share.
 Gaza children implore you!
 They are dying due to the blockade!
 Please! Don't forget us!!
 Please do remember us!
Gaza Needs Your Voice!

Ali Abu Yaseen

Subject: Re: [EON] FW: Do you still remember us "GAZA"?!
From: "ilkay sevgi/quote" <bilgi@meditativedance.com>
Date: Mon, January 12, 2009 12:31 pm
To: "ali abed" <alii_21@hotmail.com>
Cc: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear Ali,
 We are everyday at streets in Turkey. There are millions on the roads. Many of them is very angry. There are also crowds in England and Brussels making protests for GAZA... We make campaigns and collect signatures. I write to public authorities. We couldn't understand behavior of Israel government in the age of communication. Violence and force should be remained at Middle ages... We also write to Foreign Ministry of Israel feedback@mofa.gov.il to stop embargo and bombing innocent children... We tried to inform them about human rights. We wait for all the nations and artists from Israel to write and protest their government. We learnt that 9000 people were died in spite of legal numbers. They are complete civil because Gaza is not a country to have their own military. There is a group for demanding head of governments should be adjudicated for war crimes www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=47721032815&ref=mf. Please give us idea, we are ready to do everything we can. We are tired of crying for the children burning in Gaza and for all people and humanity. If you have a possibility to come Turkey, we are ready to host you and make connections to bring you.

On January 12th 2009, the members of EON mailing list received the message with link to video clip that shows the children-warriors, trained by Hamas.

Subject: RE: [EON] Dear friends as we all know reality have more than one color
From: "necati sonmez" <necson@hotmail.com>
Date: Mon, January 12, 2009 9:10 pm
To: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

I can't believe that you post here this kind of demagogic and provocative shit. Yes, Hamas is a awful... SO WHAT? Is this how you justify killing those children! Because they are brainwashed by Hamas, so let's kill them all, ha!! What an insane logic...
www.documentar-ist.org / www.zezefilm.com

Subject: Re: [EON] Dear friends as we all know reality have more than onecolor-
From: "ilkay sevgi/quote" <bilgi@meditativedance.com>
Date: Tue, January 13, 2009 7:25 am
To: "necati sonmez" <necson@hotmail.com>
Cc: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear Friends
 As artists and cultural workers, our aim should be providing continues peace not maintaining anger.
 Two sides may be right in their way however it has to be



thought more to accept the claims of Israel as written in their web site of foreign affairs ministry; about their promise to returning to motherland. They believe that their actions are logical because the promise is written in their holy book. On the contrary every nation has deep determinations and antique worldview. If countries act with their antique aims and give no right and respect to others right to exist, the problem would stay unsolved. The violence does not have a reason. We have to do whatever we can for saving international order otherwise our dreams of living in a bigger world can disappear. I think every book had the aim to unit us not to separate people!

Ilkay Sevgi

On January 13th 2009, a member of EON who would like to remain anonymous asked the other members not to use EON list for this kind of discussions. With full compassion to Gaza, the member expressed the opinion that EON network should provide space for political or intercultural discussions, but on social site or in some other way - NOT via mailing list which should be just info page regarding events or possible actions on the issue. This opinion strongly polarized the attitudes of the other members.

Subject: [EON] RE : Ali abu yaseen Gaza
From: "ali abed" <alii_21@hotmail.com>
Date: Tue, January 13, 2009 5:58 pm
To: "anjela anjela" <amisnuh@aon.at> (more)

Dear friends, Unfortunately, if you're bothered by the pictures you sent, but what is happening in Gaza, more than carrying capacity of human beings. Believe me, most people here dream of peace in Gaza and most of the vic-

tims are innocent people who have nothing to do with politics, we believe in the idea of living in peace with Israel and Israel's right to live in peace, but also have the right to live in an independent state and we also peace I hope this war will end soon and that crazy, bringing peace to the region as a whole Thank you for your support

Ali Abu Yaseen

Subject: [EON] do you still remember that any person who dies by war is humanity's failure?!

From: "arma theatre" <arma@netvision.net.il>
Date: Wed, January 14, 2009 5:10 pm
To: "ilkay sevgi/quote" <bilgi@meditativdance.com> (more)
Cc: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear Ali, Dear Ilkay, dear friends who are thinking and hurting what is happening in this crazy land....there are always 2 sides to each coin... true. The horrible thing is that it is all caused by radicals/fanatics who are not the majority ! Yes - it is easy for others to judge, yes - the media is a big public relations machine - serving economic and religious purposes manipulated by power and money!!. This hate has got to stop - there has to be another way! Please stop the blood !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

There is no good and bad- its all bad!

This Saturday there will be a quiet demonstration in Wadi Araa of Arabs and Jews -holding hands in a human chain - no screaming - no provocations - the violence has to stop!

Lisa

Subject: [EON] issues
From: "Pro Rodopi Foundation" <prf@prac.biz>
Date: Thu, January 15, 2009 8:24 am
To: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

dear friends from east and west, north and south,

my sincere wish is that we keep eon from politization. otherwise this will be the beginning of the end of our pretty young network. all we have our very different personal political and social engagements. eon is a cultural platform and let's try to keep this fragile space for all us to be able to meet and to talk about arts and culture. there are many other ways any of us could express his/her own political and social disagreements, protests etc. i know that in every conflict we artists are concerned first about the human issue, but could also be very dangerous specially for a network like ours.

i send to all friends in israel and palestina who experience the terrible time of this conflict my support and courage, and hope that the arts and culture could keep us together through eon.

lets keep eon for all of us and for our future as an artists, in order to be able to meet again and to give a chance to our artistic dreams.

best regards to everybody,
 petar todorov

Subject: Re: [EON] Re: aboutcommunication
From: "Jeton Neziraj" <jetonneziraj@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, January 15, 2009 11:57 am
To: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear friends,

I can imagine that some of you are bothered by the e-mails of Ali and people from Gaza. I can imagine that some of you would like to stay rather neutral not get e-mails of killed children in Gaza! But not me: I want to see and know what is happening around me, I want see how other people are suffering. I do not give a shit of your theater projects made in nice theatres surrounded with the nice smell of the food! I want to, at least, read an e-mail from someone who is just suffering in Gaza and let him know that I do care of him, that I do respect his fight for freedom. Only no-humans can stay neutral to things happening around us. By staying neutral 250,000 people were killed in Bosnia, and million in Rwanda!

Our friends from Palestine are also part of this network. So, let them, at least write what they want to write in this moment. Thanks for understanding me right.

Jeton

Subject: [EON] Re: aboutcommunication
From: "Semolinika Tomic" <semolinika@lanticteatre.com>
Date: Thu, January 15, 2009 12:42 pm
To: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear Jeton and all,

Thank you very much for this email. I also want to say almost the same thing in different words...

But I'm always more radical, reveal, most of you know me and know me like a strong political fighter, and after email of A. I was so disappointed that I didn't know if I will be just one only again saying that The world, wars, theatre are all the same things...

And WE DO CARE!!!

The last meeting of EON what it was?

Theatre and War?

So we make the meeting because we care and now when the war is reality

WHAT WE DO ABOUT IT.

A lot of regards to all of you

Semolinika from Barcelona

Subject: AW: [EON] Re: aboutcommunication
From: "MHK" <contact@culture-management.at>
Date: Thu, January 15, 2009 2:26 pm
To: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

Dear all,

Jeton and Semolina thank you for your Email. I am with you. Although we every day see pictures about the war in Gaza

in TV I was very affected about your Email Ali. I became aware of "You, your family and your friends have to live in this war". For me it is very difficult to say something, I am lost for words about what is happening. I know there are always two sides of conflicts. And there are always the innocent people (like children) who suffers from the conflict on both sides. I want to do something concrete, but I feel I don't know what.

I am not your opinion A. that this mailing list is only a forum to post information about performances. In my opinion it should be a discussion place, a place for networking, a place for sharing thoughts and feelings - also a place to visualize life situations like yours Ali - and a place for solidarity. I enjoy reading Emails from every one of you - so I always know what happens in other countries and with other people!

The last EON meeting was about theatre and war, we had this topic at the meeting in Brescia and there was another meeting in Vienna with this theme. It seems to be a central topic in our EON.

It cannot be that we discuss "theatre in war" in theories and when it is reality we close our eyes. Ali has to do "theatre in war" and that's reality!

Snowy greetings from Austria

Maria

Subject: RE: [EON] Re: aboutcommunication

From: "Zoki" <portalsbb@sbb.rs>

Date: Thu, January 15, 2009 11:59 pm

To: "Semolinika Tomic" <semolinika@lanticteatre.com> (more)

Priority: Normal

I am giving my personal voice for all nonviolence fighters in the world! Hope everybody will understand that everything is connected here in this small universe and that "we have to be change , we want to see in the world"(Gandhi)
Stay connected and supportive, best wishes,
Zoran Zlatkovic
Theatre "EYE"
Belgrade, Serbia

Subject: [EON] concret proposal for gaza

From: "artenauti.project@libero.it" <artenauti.project@libero.it>

Date: Fri, January 16, 2009 10:57 pm

To: eon@lists.culturebase.org

Priority: Normal

Dear EON people,

I'm Adele Madau of Artenauti. In this days I'm thinking what we can do concretely and all together to share in the peace and to tell what each one think about this war. Maybe it's not a good idea but I have a concrete proposal that anyway is open to yours suggestions.

1) Ask our Palestinian and Israeli to join a mix group of artists to do a production to tell what is happening, what is happened, what's their opinion about it. The text of the piece could include excerpts from the letters that everybody of you is writing in this day about the war. Everybody of us

could write one's mind about this war.

2) Someone of us could give to the mix company a residence in a neutral country. In this residence the artists from the two countries could work together to the production of the piece. Of course the residence have to include a space where is possible work. (I have a free house in Italy, but is only possible work in a open space).

3) Everybody can organize a public collect of money to finance the project (travel tickets, food, fees, costs of production....) and send it to the artists or to the company that give the residence, which can became the coordinator of the project.

4) When the production is finished, who can of us could engage their self to provide to organize one or more performance of the piece in their city.

This could be the first EON colective production. What do you think about it?

Have you some other suggestion? Who would be disposed to give a residence? Who would be disposed to find some money for the production? (I'm disposed) Who would be disposed to organize a performance? (I'm disposed).

I'm feeling so frustrated to can't help people in Gaza so may this my idea is just a fantasy!

Please let me know your opinion!

Yours sincerely

Adele

Subject: Re: [EON] concret proposal for gaza

From: "arma theatre" <arma@netvision.net.il>

Date: Mon, January 19, 2009 10:44 am

To: artenauti.project@libero.it (more)

Priority: Normal

Dear Adele and dear EON members,

First I want to thank all of you who were caring about the situation here in MadLand. We participated in the rally of Arabs and Jews against any violence. "Bridge over the Valley" - is the name of the organization- because it took place in the valley where the geographic border between Israel and the West Bank is. There were 350 people. That was 100 more than the week before, and next week will be bigger. I have friends that volunteer to bring people from the West Bank to Israeli hospitals to get their medical treatments, there are many organizations in Israel collecting food, tents, blankets and clothes for people in Gaza, to be sent still this week. There have been many demonstrations by Israeli's against the actions in Gaza. So there are many opinions in Israel - not only one side as you see on the European media. In this MadLand- there are more than 2 sides... there are politicians and violent religious groups, money makers, and simple people who all want different things and all have a very different future plan for this bloodied land. I think that any person who captures himself as enlightened and plural- has to search for information and of understanding all these sides in order to better comprehend the complexity of this MadLand. It is not black and white. I believe artists should know more than 2 colors. And I am

of 2008 with 2 theatre artists from Lebanon, I suggested a joint project of Palestinians and Israeli's - either in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon or in a Neutral place in Europe. in 1998 - it was rejected by the Europeans. As for Ali & Rajab and the 2 Lebanese artists - they all explained to me that it is impossible for them to work with Israeli's, even in a neutral place, because that will create real danger for them, for their family and their career. Even a life and death danger. I would never want to put them in danger. So this is part of what happens in these countries. It might be difficult to understand for people who live in a country where their artistic choices are more or less free. That is very sad, because I do believe in projects like this- and that the impact of them is important to help change the awareness in the people themselves. Therefore - my work now- is invested in writing a project which will be a travelling theatre group- mixed of Israeli, Arabs, Druze and Jews- presenting theatre plays and shows, workshops and art exhibits, to small villages and poor/underprivileged neighborhoods in cities in Israel (Arab, Druze & Jewish, I can only dream now of Palestine...). This will be produced towards the end of 2009-2010. I hope I can find enough funding. This is my way to bring a message of friendship, No - to violence, Yes - to mutual respect- Live and let Live !!!

Your sincerely
Lisa
ARMA theatre
Eln Hod Artists village Israel

Subject: RE: [EON] Re: aboutcommunication
From: "rajab abu sirriyeh" <rajab22@hotmail.com>
Date: Wed, January 21, 2009 4:42 am
To: jetonneziraj@gmail.com (more)
Cc: eon@lists.culturebase.org
Priority: Normal

hello all
hope you are all ok
first of all i am sorry that i didn't be able to share your discussing about what happen in GAZA because i were in the dangerous, no internet, no electricity and no time to think in anything else of being live with my tow kids.
thank of you all for your asking, excuse me to ask you some thing only as human and artists, just think how to stop the next war, how to make peace in this area, always we must to have the hope and the interest to fight for peace for all people in the world.
best regards for all
Rajab

Subject: Re: [EON] Re: aboutcommunication
From: "Kultur AG" <walter.baco@telecom.at>
Date: Wed, January 21, 2009 10:37 am
To: "rajab abu sirriyeh" <rajab22@hotmail.com>
Cc: eon@lists.heimat.de
Priority: Normal

Dear all,
It is my true wish that anyone on this planet could experi-

ence what we all have in common: a longing for harmony, living in peace, consciously with love and respect for every creature. This can cross any barrier, beyond all our different opinions or even artistic preferences (which may seem like a luxury to people who are fully busy with staying merely alive...). Someone who has helped me a lot in getting a basic understanding and also a feeling of peace and fulfillment is coming to Israel soon. His name is Prem Rawat. He says that peace starts with every human being, because it is a inner feeling waiting to be discovered within. This is not a "political" solution and may seem slow, but it works (in any country).
Give it a chance!

That best for all of you
Walter Baco
www.baco.at
www.wordsofpeace.net

European Off Network – A political or a free artistic platform for respecting of different ideas?

By Petar Todorov

Every time we speak at EON meetings about the topic 'Theatre and War', we focus on countries that are in military conflict. The issue is an important and difficult one to discuss especially because there are often people from both sides present – Serbians and Kosovans, Israelis and Palestinians etc ... As a person who comes from a 'country at peace' I would like to give more space in our EON meetings, and also pay more attention to the little 'wars' that every artist has in everyday life. Sometimes these 'wars' become even bigger than they need to be. For most of us, they engage our whole time and energy – independent artists from all over Europe trying to overcome bureaucratic and/or political problems in order to secure some life and space for the art we want to do, and really believe in.

A refusal to be engaged in actual war conflicts does not necessarily mean that as artists we do not take an ethical position. Sometimes our position is a matter of personal belief in human values. Sometimes it is simply a matter of character or personality. Sometimes it is an unwillingness to serve this or that political or religious doctrine.

Going back to the topic of 'Theatre and War', 'wars' and 'enemies' are not always around us. Very often they are inside us, inside our institutions, inside our societies. Getting funding for the independent art scene and applying for a grant is always a war, between the people in political and bureaucratic power and us, as artists with our ideas. How should this conflict be constituted? Recognition of what is 'good' and what is 'bad' in art is another type of 'war'. We have

to deal with these types of 'wars' almost every day.

I do believe that every life has equal importance – the lives of artists in 'danger' zones, and lives of artists in countries at 'peace'. We have to be aware of that and pay respect to each one of us, to the needs and opinions of every EON member. That's why I joined EON, because it is a platform of personalities with very different artistic, social and religious backgrounds. That is the unique value of EON – having a free artistic space to discuss and try and understand each other. Politicizing, and attacking people with different opinions will simply mark the beginning of the end of our still fragile network.

Talking about different types of 'war', I was recently amazed by the really weird 'war' that the Bulgarian government waged against the Czech artist David Černý. As many of us in the boring European cultural landscape noticed, Černý's exciting exhibition 'woke up the sleepy ghosts' and finally encouraged the politicians to move their lazy arses...of course, to criticize...I am referring here to his installation 'Entropa' which was exhibited in the European commission in Brussels to celebrate the Czech presidency of the EU for the first half of 2009. For the unlucky Czech government the installation created only trouble. For the provocative artist it brought only fame, though I heard that he had to pay back the fee he had



been given to create it.

In his installation, Černý, with a help of few colleagues, gave a way too funny view of each of the 27 EU countries: the Netherlands was presented as a completely flooded land with only tops of minarets of mosques visible above the water; Germany was a labyrinth of highways with little cars running around inside of it, in the shape of a swastika; Italy was a football field with a bunch of football players making nice 'dirty' movements; Romania was in the style of a Disneyland castle of the famous count-vampire Dracula; Poland was represented by Roman Catholic priests trying to raise the gay flag; the UK was missing from the map, etc.

It was so interesting and funny to see all of these representations including that of my own country, Bulgaria, which was represented as a system of Turkish toilets. Our current corrupt government (consisting of former communists, now 'socialists'), and also the former king's party and the Turkish party (what a combination!) became furious and started a real 'war' against the art work. They protested officially to the Czech government requesting that the Bulgarian part of 'Entropa' was removed, and the Czech ambassador in Sofia was sent a 'modern' toilet as a present etc. The whole thing was made into such a big deal and officials were so insulted by being given the 'truth' in a straightforward way. It was



they are not capable of taking care of - and keeping clean - the natural environment and also the whole living and social environment of our really beautiful country. Finally, the Bulgarian part of the exhibition was covered by piece of black cloth (!) which as you might imagine made things even worse ... like representing a dead country.

I do believe that art should provoke people's emotions and people's thinking. David Černý's installation and the 'war' of the Bulgarian government against it, played an important role for the Bulgarian people, and I hope for the politicians as well, prompting them to re-think their sleepy attitudes of what 'representative' art should look like. Hopefully, as a result, we will all be able to look at our common living environment and put more effort into improving it.

Petar Todorov is a Bulgarian theatre and dance director with a large international experience that includes performances and tours in Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Germany, Sweden, France, UK, Iceland, USA, Morocco, Mongolia, Pakistan etc. Petar is Founder and Artistic Director of Pro Rodopi Art Centre, based in the Rhodopes mountains – the first residential independent performing arts centre in Bulgaria. www.prac.biz





A space for dialogue

By Ilkay Sevgi

The conference “Third Space: Theatre in times of War” was held in Vienna between 15-19 October 2008 with the participation of 20 countries from Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. It was organized by IG Freie Theaterarbeit from Austria with the partnership of Israel (Arma Theater), Turkey (Simya Sanat) and the UK (University of Exeter). The participants included cultural operators and artists from countries in conflict as well as those from other European countries.

The basic question addressed by the conference was ‘Is theatre in times of war even possible?’ The work of artists in conflict regions was presented through video recordings and DVDs and these made it quite clear that it is, indeed, possible to make art in every condition because art is a fundamental requirement of being human. But what else can art be? Can it also be a means of sharing knowledge and feeling, of explaining to other people what is going on? What capacity can theatre take on? To what extent is it possible for art to take on a critical role? These were the other topics discussed during the conference.

In addition to Pakistan, Israel and Kosovo – countries that are living in times of war – there are many other countries, such as Bulgaria, Cyprus and Turkey, that have also experienced conflict in their recent history. What should the role of an artist living in conflict region be, as well as what should his/her role be in regions of peace? Is there a ‘third way’ to overcome such disputes?

‘Third Space’ is the concept of Homi K. Bhabha, an Indian philosopher from Harvard University. He believes that culture is not a solid entity that has ended its formation. Culture maintains its process of formation. It’s dynamic rather than static. ‘Third Space’ also refers to the space not belonging to the first or second; but rather is born from the mutual relations between the first and the second. Sharon Todd explains ‘Third Space’ as being the shared space where each one is involved in an exchange with the other. It is not fixed at all; it is hybrid. It’s the understanding that provides the opportunity to escape from a dualistic and static world-view. It is the space ‘of always becoming’.

In today’s world, generally in public policies, it is sometimes forgotten that the arts have the power to introduce different possibilities and healthy ways of communication. In fact, the power of emancipation is rooted within art work in a most healthy and direct way. Thus, the arts can offer a therapeutic method for people to engage in during a post-war period. It can foster communication and create a common platform for dialogue and understanding.

During the Conference, all of the artists were sensitive to the questions they were engaging in and felt their responsibilities

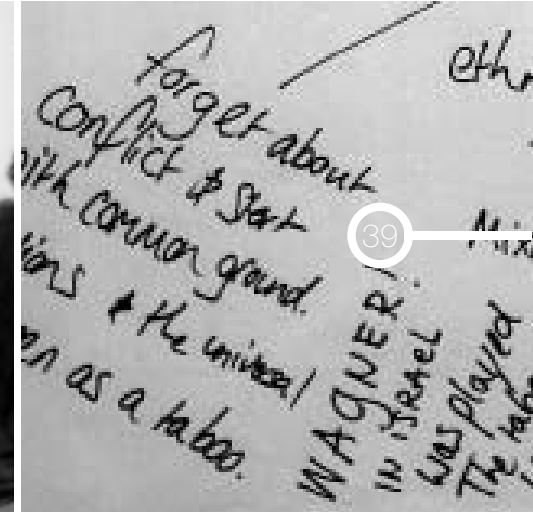
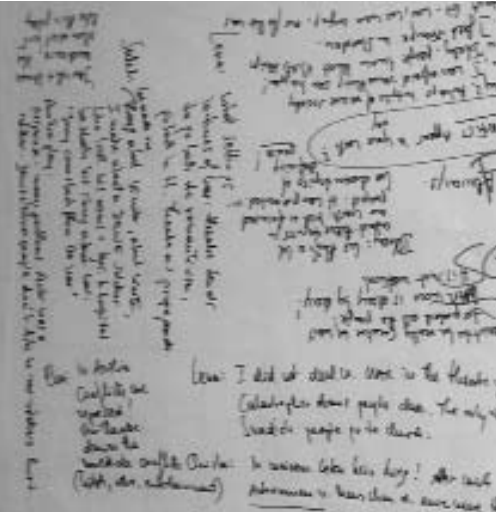
both as human beings and as artists. Representatives from art groups shared their work, generally related to the theme of the war. Middle Eastern countries seemed to prefer drama and performing with live music on stage. European groups generally included elements of risk in their performances and were experimental and challenging. ARMA theatre from Israel chose a comic style to show the absurdity of war.

In the discussions, the representatives of art groups from conflict regions approached the questions addressed by the conference in a detached and calm way. All of us thought that it was a great plat-

form for coming closer to understanding some of the answers to these questions and more importantly, the participants from conflict regions, as well as the many participants who have lived in conflict situations in the recent past, also believed this.

Sinan Temizalp and I were amongst the few representatives participating in the conference from Turkey. Since the majority of the participants were from the Middle East and were our close neighbours, we felt that our role was to act as mediators. Despite the opinion of some others, we see Turkey as a country of peace and we represent it accordingly. Anatolia, which brings together many cultures, may sometimes act





as a point where cultures and civilizations are separated.... Which is more essential? Bringing cultures together or separating them? Nobody is sure about the answer. However, we, as artists are always chasing for the bigger picture. We are aware of many perspectives and the different points of view that are possible. We know very well the extent to which deeply perceptive efforts are required sometimes in order to perceive the reality of an image. As we look at humanity with the eyes of theater, which is at the center of humanity, and if we are able also to see from a historical perspective, we understand that something within the bigger picture is going wrong.

In an age of communication and discoveries, when our lives have changed completely compared to only a decade ago, we are still forced to endure wars that are whipped up by prehistoric greed and instincts. Since communication tools have globalized, the intangible effects that the war creates on everyone are materializing and neuroses are rising. Generations are growing up without hope and a lack of enthusiasm as a result of excessive individualization and wars. However, raising a voice against injustice is not the only way for each generation to proclaim its own existence. Each generation may also draw attention to issues with its perception and representation of the world, and may eliminate the taboos associated with war in this way.

Within the scope of the conference, the participating artists presented their work in relation to the time available and the perception of people. We recognized also the thinking

system that creates narrow possibilities, such as the binary distinction between winning and losing. By making art and increasing opportunities through dialogue, civil societies may become the reason and the source of actions for building peace. The Third Space conference was a good example of how an international organization can create awareness amongst people from different countries, as well as a common language with the help of artists. This was a free space for dialogue and understanding between artists and it was special in the sense that artists have the facility to reach people in a deep manner. As artists, we walked through sensitive subjects related to war, ethnicity and identity without harming each other. In the conference, it was also expressed that natural disasters are amongst the effects of war, in the form of environmental pollution due to guns.

An observation made by Sinan, was the perception of some European artists that Turkey is a far away country in terms of its culture and space. However, Istanbul is placed in, and acts as, part of Europe; and the capital city located in the center of Anatolia was designed as a modern city. Moreover the education, cultural life and sports as well as the law system in Turkey is quite similar to the European secular and social system. The educational languages in the leading schools and universities are English, French, Latin and German ... Turkey also has the unique feature of being the closest neighbour of Europe, affected by all the European developments in science, arts and trade.

The fifth and the last day of the Third Space conference was

related to the outlook of the future programme for the EON, video interviews with the two documenters of the conference, and planning the next meetings. We also had the intention of creating special sessions for the EON during the 2010 Istanbul conference. The meeting in Istanbul, with the theme of 'Communicational Intelligence', will be based on Jurgen Habermas' work in communicative action and how it can be applied to arts. The theme has been developed with the idea that arts act as a direct communication medium in Intercultural Dialogue. It focuses on the building empathy and searches the way for building a common artistic language, increasing opportunities for joint works and mobility and establishing a wider communication network throughout Europe for new stages and audiences. The priorities of the EON for increasing the mobility and cooperation between artists, intercultural dialogue, and the role of artists in international dialogue, are going to be discussed in the seminars and panels to be held.

As an artistic reflection of the conference subjects, 12 innovative artists from 5 countries of Europe, including Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Turkey, who are members of EON Network, will prepare a joint work under the theme of "Empathy" during September 2009-April 2010. The artistic works created in scope of this joint works program will be staged during the Integral Move Festival to be held in parallel to 2010 EON Meeting in Istanbul. Following this, meetings are planned for the UK in 2012 and in Sweden in 2014. There are also some calls from Italy, Bulgaria and Kosovo for special meetings and joint work projects.



During the discussions of the Third Space conference, artists and cultural operators have sought ways of analysing what peace is, as well as what war is. To explain peace and demonstrate the state of peace to an audience is as crucial as explaining what war is. The identity of each concept is enriched as you become familiar with the other. At that point, you begin to discover the unity of time. You realize that despite the place or geography that separates people in different countries, time unites them ... You realize that you have many more similarities with a person living in the present time but a thousand miles far away, than with the people who lived a hundred years ago in the same place or geography in which you are ... As noted in the Peace Culture conferences organized by UNESCO in the recent past, human beings are naturally in a state of peace; and the responsibility of creating reasons for war, and consciously depicting human nature in a negative manner, largely belongs to the audio-visual information networks. With this understanding, artistic communication methods may be utilized with this aim in the most natural way. Theatre may be used to inform and create empathy. Through Communication, everything changes. Art is the communication by heart. This is not a trivial matter related only to the brain, but in fact, reflects the full shape of reality.

With a strong sense of 'empathy', civil societies and artists as cultural representatives may feel the sorrow and pain beyond their own borders. From our point of view, artistic understanding does not accept artificial borders among humans. A strong sense of equity and respect for human rights

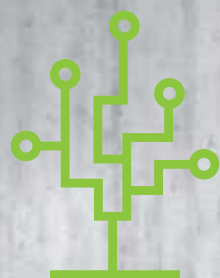
allows people to live together in the world. With such developments, we may be witnesses to the phenomenon that civil societies and artists might act as protectors of peace in the world.

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