



Theatre Expeditions in South–East Europe

Hamlet Landscape Bosnia	2003
Troy Landscape Macedonia	2004

The projects “Hamlet Landscape Bosnia” (July and December 2003) and “Troy Landscape Macedonia” (July 2004) are two large international Youth–Art projects under the rubric: “Theatre Expeditions in South–East Europe”, initiated by Diskoteater Metropolis – the inter-cultural Youth Theatre of the Youth Art and Culture Centre “Schlesische 27” in Kreuzberg, Berlin.

The Diskoteater Metropolis ventured upon exciting, international paths in the course of both of the theatre projects in order to realise one of its primary interests: the generation of inter-cultural dialogue and audiences.

History of expeditions

The aspect of the journey has continually played an important roll in the history of theatrical practise. A series of departures for far-off lands and out-of-the-way forms can be traced back through the works of P. Brooks, E. Barba, J. Grotowski, A. Artaud, B. Brecht, W.B. Yeats and so on. The manner of the departures and their emphases were various and occurred within differing contexts.

The expeditions of the Diskoteater Metropolis are significantly inspired by the experiences of the experimental polish theatre „Gardzienice“.

Franz Joseph Hödl and Ulrich Hardt (the two grounders and since then leaders along with Michael Kreutzer of Diskoteater Metropolis) took part as actors and as fellow creators of the productions „Avvakum“ and „Gusla“ and as participants in various expeditions of the Gardzienice theatre between 1983 to 1986.

In the Gardzienice-expeditions and their experimental transformations as theatre productions a heavy emphasis was placed upon attuning the attention of the actors to the value and the creative energy of marginalised cultures and disappearing everyday manifestations (“hidden territories”). A form of artistic production was developed in the encounter and confrontation with a concrete landscape and a social context. This form of production revealed potentialities, provoked surprising dialogues and made energetic and inspiring communication across cultural borders possible.

The creators of the Diskoteater Metropolis continued these theatrical explorations in the theatre in the Milch Street in Berlin, later translating it into a long–term project for youths in the urban space.

Inter- and transcultural dialogues – a source for agility and transformation

The youth theatre project Diskoteater Metropolis has been in existence since 1997. In the years which have passed by, Metropolis has called differing work- and project-forms into existence. It has developed these further and tried to bring them into relationship with one another: training forms, stage rehearsals, the writing of own texts and pieces, own publications, research for pieces and for newspaper articles, workshops, performances in differing contexts and theatre expeditions.

Diskoteater Metropolis is in many respects a travelling theatre. It travels to the realm of “being under way”, reproduces this condition in many and differing ways and makes it usable so that individual personalities can blossom within the communal work for a project.

The various project forms and worlds of experience are very much connected through a common theme which occupies the actors and the partners of Metropolis over a long period of time – at least for one year.

The differing, artistic project- and confrontation-forms of the Diskoteater Metropolis are paths and routes, through which a textual and thematic landscape may be explored from various sides. When it works, that a text is experienced as landscape and its depths and secrets are unlocked through joint action and processes, then particular activities and experiences can be combined into a story – a common narrative comes into being.

This is the real essence of Diskoteater Metropolis's work:

A common narrative comes into being within the dialogue between a textual landscape and the various project forms and artistic activities – individual activities and undertakings within the framework of the exploration are neither trivial nor disjointed, rather they are real and important parts of a developing narrative, each of which becoming consolidated into public presentations.

Theatre expeditions have an elevated position within the work of Diskoteater Metropolis. They make it possible to discern and to create a narrative within a narrow space and in the breadth of a real landscape, within a compressed time-period and to the tune of exceptional rhythms, in dialogue with a local topography and history and above all in the encounter and interaction with the unfamiliar people embedded therein.

In the course of a successful theatre expedition the diversity of impressions, actions and forms of cultural expression contribute to a common narrative. Two planes of dialogue become connected within a framework of compressed time and space: the dialogue of the multinational participants amongst one another and the outwards dialogue – with the real landscape and with the presence of the people living there – with their cultural diversity and their communal relationships.

Methods and Outlook

Diskoteater Metropolis visits locations of exchange or otherwise brings about situations of exchange, so as to reduce the separation between the theatre material, the participants and a social environment. In bringing these things together it is not necessarily about the complex interplay of meanings within an entire theatre piece, sometimes it is only particular important themes or passages (see *Lilac & Flag* in Macedonia) which the participants touch upon and which speak to them. It is real and staged places which are capable of stimulating the deciphering and the (re-)discovery of a personal understanding of the textual material.

It is not only the way into a text, which was up to that point remote, which is found during an expedition, but also an actual place, like for example an old hotel in a mountainous region of Bosnia or the workshop of a cask craftsman in a mountain village in Macedonia, which takes on an unforeseeable significance, having only a marginal connection to the place's superficial significance as a remaining economic resource. This is the situation that we mean by "exchange" and which we would like to draw out. Unexpected resources and potential arise from places, texts and people and these mutually lay themselves open in situations of creative exchange-processes.

Theatre comes from the Greek "theatron" and means "viewing place". Theatre is the art of being able to see. Seeing is not a passive activity, it is an active dialogue and an action. Every place can become such a "learning place" when the enrichment process has been activated.

In this sense the Diskoteater Metropolis finds itself, when it travels, in a state of permanent rehearsal – since the condition of „exchange“ can take place at any time, anywhere. This is certainly the most astonishing realisation for all participants.

Before situations of exchange are even possible one needs to have agility – bodily, mental, cultural, linguistic and musical.

Only those who are mobile are able to perceive and to follow their own tracks, can allow themselves to be provoked and to be stimulated by external impulses, are able to weave new experiences into the present text and can view it through a personal interpretation.

We call this DIALOGIC AGILITY – a condition of drawing upon impulses and stimulations, of seeking active contact and of involving one's self creatively.

A large part of theatrical training is related to the generation of sensitivity towards dialogic agility and to the practise of this. The possibilities of training in music and in acting and the conditions of theatrical production provide an outstanding and sensuous context in our awareness for the learning of and the encounter with dialogic agility. One can even say that this agility is a prerequisite of lively and arresting theatre.

Agility in the sense of attention (paying attention – to vary the stream of movement and of action, when something connects, when someone or something speaks to me or is interesting, when therefore an impulse provokes a reaction and a dialogue begins) adds meaning to the word "mobility" which is relevant to the practise of theatre expeditions.

This is so since an actor's agility is influenced by researches and encounters with the surroundings and the people of the community. With the help of researches and small expeditions the participants' agility and preparedness to enter into dialogue amongst themselves (inner dialogue) becomes carried over into a daily growing sensitisation and preparedness to enter into dialogue with the surroundings (outer dialogue).

The participants and the participating public of the theatre expeditions to South-East Europe were invited to travel into unfamiliar landscapes. Unknown ways and paths were put to the test in order, through dialogue, to find and to extend one's own limits and to get to know and to value the limits and the potentials of others.

"To feel oneself to be lively" – the actors and the surrounding public of the expeditions succeeded in having this feeling in sympathetic and surprising ways.

Metropolis strengthens and preserves the diversity of roles and interpretations through the practise of aesthetic productions. The preservation and the permanent, lively experience of the diversity of its own methods and those of others for cultural appropriation and participation are a significant contribution to the promotion of tolerance and the reduction of violence. To make contact while

heeding each person's creative independence: this is certainly the most lasting of inter-cultural dialogues.

Literature

Regarding the special project: Schlesischen 27 Diskoteater Metropolis see the brochure: Diskoteater Metropolis, *Wozu das ganze Theatre. Youth Art zwischen Spielraum und Ernstfall*. Berlin, März 2003.

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