

NOMADISM + AIRPORT THEATRE



Z = ZANE KREICBERGA
director and working for the New Institute of Latvia as a project co-ordinator. Their main activity is the bi-annual festival Homo Novus of contemporary theatre. Zane is the program director for this festival.



AL = ANDRES LAASIK
critic writing for Eesti Paivaleht. Has seen Finnish theatre since the mid-eighties, Estonia



L = LARY ZAPPIA
a freelance theatre director in Croatia and a PhD student in Toronto, Canada



V = VIVICA BOCKS
worked on Transeuropa Festival 2003, is now working with the Tanztheater in Hildesheim, Germany.



C = CAROLINE HOCHLEITER
worked on Transeuropa Festival 2003, is now working at the theatre Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin.



AT = ANNIKA TUDEER
contributor - digging deeper into the idea of networking

Written by Annika Tudeer | Photos: Krista Keltanen | Strip: Jaakko Toijanniemi

AT: Thank you for coming. Today I would like us to discuss networking, international collaboration and trends in theatre. If we start by discussing how you are part of the Baltic Circle network and how the network works in your countries.

Z: We had a meeting in the autumn, during our festival talking about future plans and how we could collaborate. Not only by exchanging performances, but also on other ways of collaboration, maybe co-productions. It is important to have meeting points and see what others do. Only in that way I think you can feel the process of what is going on in neighbouring countries.

AL: In Estonia our audience have possibilities to see results of the Baltic Circle collaboration in the production directed by Erik Söderblom. Connecting people, that was a big success in Tallinn. Now Taxidrivars is a sold-out production. Collaborations between Finnish and Estonian theatre is not always so easy although we are so close. It seems that we know each other, but our societies are very different.

Z: We do not have this kind of co-productions in Latvia. The theatre there is still very much on its own. It is not so flexible on taking someone else on board. Our organisation is trying to change this and show how one can benefit from international collaboration.

AL: One of the important subject of networking is new writing. Nearly all participants of the Baltic Circle area are staging new drama. The possibilities to take in new writings from partner countries is a big opportunity.

C and V enter.

C: Sorry, it was the time change...

L: I think that most people step in to the network by pure accident. I do not really think that you can come up with a firm structure of how a network operates. It is different from case to case. There are cases where you hire hitmen at a million dollar. They come, direct and never return. I do not see this as a true result of networking. There are linguistic and cultural barriers, because transcultural bonds are hard to form. It is not an easy symbiosis to transfer something from its natural environment.

A lot of impact have been made by those productions that were born in their mother culture, - and now I play the devils advocate - and then brought into a showcase and shown in their fullness. I think that theatre works stronger when it has roots. I envision networks more as exchange than experimenting into hybridizations.

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Z: But I think that networking has different aims and forms. To make co-productions can be one, but it is also exchange on theoretical levels. Exchange of theatre critics and education, like work-shops and seminars. For me the important thing is to get an awareness of what is going on and the best way is to speak with people and meet. So it doesn't matter how you call it.

C: On one hand you need roots and a basis to make theatre, but on the other hand the view from outside can be important. One way is to ask a group from another country to work on a theme that is specific for the region they are invited to. Something that would not be of first interest for them normally. Networking functions on different levels. It is organised in terms of financial structures, like in EU 2000 you have to figure out how to get five collaborators. So at some level you really have to invent -

L: Who is going to be the fifth?

L: But the impact is still quite limited. You work for two months, perform for one and then it is over. People in international co-productions will have tons of money, but the larger community will benefit more of exchanges. I think that the Baltic Circle has more impact in Helsinki than one single international co-production.

AT: There are also scheduling problems in international co-productions. After dispersing you might not be able to get together for another year. On another level there are companies that are based on friendships, where you work together because you like each other. What I have found very intriguing in this kind of work is to get to know a different working culture.

Z: This is the main thing. I think. When a collaboration is organic and comes from a relationship that was before. We should think about how we can support that kind of work. How we can develop a system that can support activities that are organically developing from relationships between people. Not with rules and requirements coming from the outside.

L: Europe has places that are structured for meetings like this, since several decades. If you look at Barba's work, Odintear and what Peter Brook is doing. You get people from all across the world. They come there

to do truly intercultural performances.

AT: We tend to forget Barba and Brook in these discussions. Maybe because they are another generation. Their work is transcultural on a grande scale. But it is as if it is stemming from another cultural climate, another era. Whereas we are talking on a smaller scale when talking about international collaborations, where also nationality in a paradoxical way plays a strong role.

AL: International collaboration is fruitful if you start it carefully with limited numbers of partners. For example, the Swanlake is made with Russia and the Taxidriver with Finland. It's easier to operate if you do this complicated work with only a few partners. You can address the problem of different understandings, face the differences and make use of them in the performance.

AT: Theatre is so language based, which makes the willingness to collaborations difficult sometimes.

L: That is the trouble with western theatre. We are mainly focused on logocentric theatre. Luckily there are other forms.

Mainstream theatre is logocentric which is a great fortune and misfortune at the same time. It makes networking much more difficult. I am coming from a corner in my country that is bi-lingual. I belong to the Italian minority and worked for four years as the artistic director in the National theatre there, where we had two Italian speaking and two Croatian companies. They share the same building, but there are very few co-productions. I do not like this aspect - but minorities have this feeling of being threatened, that they are going to assimilate and vanish. So, we have net-work crusaders who exclaim "let's all work together in an open minded attitude", and on the other hand we have people who are afraid of losing their roots. You guard your territory, especially with smaller nations. It is understandable that people feel a little xenophobic. You look with suspicion on any kind of initiative.

THE THEATRE OF NO-BELONGING. THEATRE IS LIKE A CURSE, IT HAS THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT MAKE THEATRE FOR EVERYONE BUT MAKE THEATRE THAT DOES NOT BELONG TO ANYONE.

YOU CAN CALL IT AIRPORT THEATRE.

On the other hand, in Canada they pride themselves of not being a melting point like the US, but a mosaic. "Every little stone remains untouched and can keep its own individuality". Toronto is a city with 30.000 equity actors (union belonging actors). There you have people who never can land a job neither in the movies or the theatres because of their accent. They can work on an international project once or twice in a year. Then the audience close their ears and make the effort to understand this person who is talking with a not perfect accent



...THIS INTERNATIONAL TRAIN GOES VERY FAST. IT IS A TRAIN WITHOUT SCHEDULE, YOU DO NOT KNOW WHEN TO CATCH IT...

AL: In small countries theatre has a task to serve the language. Theatres should serve the language in order to protect it. It is kind of a mission, therefore this restriction. On the other hand because theatre must reflect the life, accents should be there. But it is always very special situations when accents are allowed on stage.

C: It depends on the kind of theatre you do, if you do a bi-lingual project. If you have an accent you have the accent as the actor, not the character in the play.

L: There is a theatre in Stuttgart that shows only works by and with immigrants. I was talking to an actor from ex-Yugoslavia who worked there. He said he was really happy to have found work as an actor, but he had this feeling of being isolated in a ghetto, acting and working for immigrants. It is like a little island in the sea of another country.

C: Regions and small identities become more and more important. A big question is to try to invent projects where the theme is really specific and at the same time open. To pin-point something that is specific for the area where the project is done, but also address issues that are found in other places, like ghettoising.

Z: For me it works as a rule that if something is deeply rooted in one situation - national or cultural - and is answering crucial questions of those people living there, it is also interesting for me.

L: The theatre of no-belonging. Theatre is like a curse, it has this group of people that make theatre for everyone but make theatre that does not belong to anyone. You can call it airport theatre. You have these groups that are travelling and get huge funds, but they never truly belong to their mother country. You can never see them in their homeland because they are always on tour.

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AL: Nomadism. Theatre without any roots. And theatre that is not interested in roots either.

AT: But there are also quite a lot of people who do not feel that they have roots, or that their roots is in another community than their home country. It might not be a bad thing to make this kind of airport theatre.

Z: We have been working for some five years on this issue. It works like this - you go to one festival and meet people, your work is seen by important people and from

there it goes on. I also see a danger in the festival touring, because you might change your mind and try to make the performances for the festivals.

The aim is not to show performances in different countries, but when it happens it is good; you get feedback and feel another cultural background. You might find new aspects of yourself and your work. That is important, to know yourself better through this communication with other countries and cultures.

AT: What you say leads also to the idea of trends, do you as programmers, journalists and researchers follow up trends?

Z: I do not really know what trends are. With our festival we try to think what would be interesting for our audience. We might not bring a very popular performance that is travelling through different festivals in Europe. But we also want to show theatre that is not usually seen in Latvia.

C: I have to return to the idea of audience and how it works in theatres. Recently I have been in two extreme situations. In Hildesheim where there is hardly any theatre life and now in Berlin where there is so much. The Hildesheim audience was very interested, they wanted to see things and discuss. In Berlin there is so much theatre and much less audience. Nobody is interested in anything. When you think about who to invite, you feel that you have to invite people with a strong vision. But it is not always interesting to invite those who are touring all the festivals. The big question is how to set frames for those artists that are not so strong or so far in their work. Last week we made a festival called No name. That was the frame for German groups that had not been to Berlin before. Another possibility is to have themes. We have lots of projects that want to be presented, but we know that many are so small so they don't reach out. Now we are putting them together to give them more strength to be recognized.

Z: There are very fast changes. First you invite someone unknown and then suddenly they are so big that you cannot invite them anymore. If you jump on this international train it goes very fast.

L: It is a train without schedule, you do not know when to catch it. Are these trends not somewhat repetitive? The age of returning of the image, the age of theatre going political... back to the story. It is basically the same thing.

V: Trends are made by critics who try to find a line. Then looking forward to what fits into this trend.

AT: On the other hand people happen to deal with the same issues at the same time. I use to think that trends have more with form than content to do.

THEATRE IS PROBABLY THE LAST OF ALL ART FORMS THAT CHANGE.

L: But theatre was never really avant-garde. Theatre is probably the last of all art forms that change. The cutting edge is everywhere else: architecture, visual arts, music, literature. Theatre is slow, its nature is to be on the tail of events. Yet we are living in the age of borrowing. The nature of the beast - that is theatre - is to rely heavily on borrowing from other people. You are definitively borrowing whether you are looking for trendy things or not. I am writing a thesis on copyright and theft, because that is what we actually do: we steal and try to copyright it. It is not like in the renaissance where artists were paying homage by taking someone's work and rework it. Today it is called stealing. Even if you exactly take something inspiring and place it out of context, it will be different, translated into your own language and culture. Even when we think that we are really avant-garde and radical, I think that we are

essentially conservative and traditional as a form of art. Think about how much has changed in the art world and still 99 % of the actors are rooted in Stanislavsky. Even the most avant-garde directors are working on how to influence the actors.

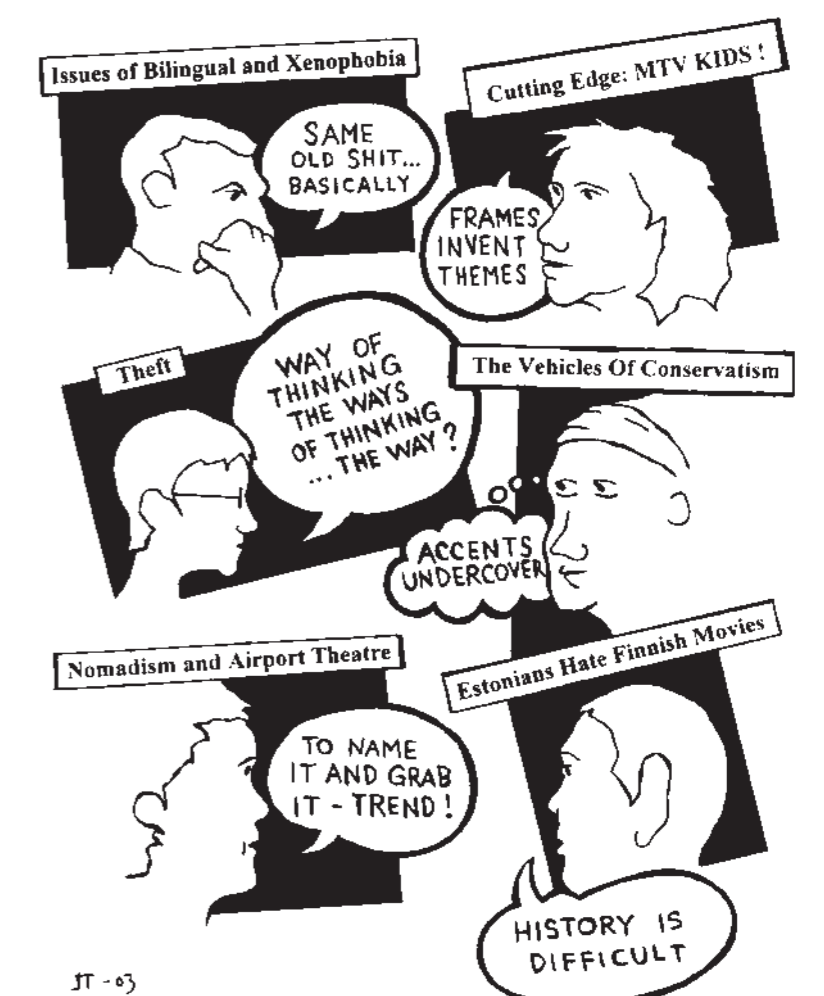
AL: Stanislavsky was radical.

L: So was perspective in the renaissance.

AL: Talking about mainstream it also has an impact on the radical movement. In Tampere Theatre Festival last summer, I realized that Finnish new writing has become an art of mainstream. The audience is looking for Finnish authors. The same is happening in Estonia. It is a new situation. In Finland; the Q-teatteri, Kom-teatteri and Ryhmäteatteri always staged their own stories. It was an alternative theatre, but now it is part of the mainstream. In the mid 90's Von Krahl staged their own stories. Otherwise very few new plays were staged in institutional theatres. Now every theatre is producing new plays and the audience is very interested in new writing. But what is radical now?

AT: And that is an excellent question to end our conversation. To be continued, hopefully!

"THE GREAT DEBATE"



... BUT WHAT IS RADICAL NOW?



A RIGHTEOUS BROTHER

Richard Turpin wants theatre to get political.

Written by Liisa Kukkola

Richard Turpin's play *The Axis of Evil* (Ondskans Axel) is a love story in the spirit of Romeo and Juliet. It reminds also *The Dream Play* of August Strindberg by travelling in different times and rooms. It will be performed by TEATER TRIBUNALEN at Media Center Lume on Tuesday, 25th at 14 and 19 o'clock.

The first **Baltic Circle -festival in 2000** discussed the total absence of the political theatre in the Nordic countries. This year's festival surely doesn't have to worry about the same problem: the Swedish **Theater Tribunalen** says aloud, that it is a politically orientated theatre. – Why wouldn't we be political. Theatre is just like other organs of the society: It reflects politics in the same way as for example journalism or education. – Theatre should have political responsibility for and it should ask the fatal questions of the society, like where is this land going to or what is the relation between the citizens and those who have the political power, says *Richard Turpin*, the artistic director of the Theater Tribunalen. According to him the politicization of the theatre is important at the very moment, because the politicians want to show us a very simplified view of the world. – For example George Bush uses all the time religious terms to convince the world that his actions to conquer countries in Asia and in Africa are legal. The international laws or the United Nations have no meaning when Mr. Bush is striving for to be the master of the world. The theatre should question the given positions along with the rest of the society and

decide, who's good and who's bad, says Richard Turpin. On the political map Theatre Tribunalen is found from the left, but it has nothing to do with the one-sided political theatre of the 1970's nor with the left-wing parties of today's Sweden. – The left-wing parties of Sweden are quite weak and descendent. If they win the elections, it usually means, that they have had quite populist thesis. But Richard Turpin is not pessimistic about the new, upcoming leftism. He thinks the youth is going to change the idea of the contemporary left-wing politics. – The demonstrations against ever-growing globalization and people marching for peace are good signs. The bigger the influence of the United States on the whole world is, the more people start to act against it, Richard Turpin believes.

From the Middle East to a Swedish suburb Richard Turpin himself gets political in many ways in his new play *The Axis of the Evilness* (Ondskans Axel), which had its premier at Theater Tribunalen only a month ago: on the 25th of October. The play is a modern love story in the spirit of Romeo and Juliet and it takes place in the

Middle East as well in a Swedish suburb, and it moves freely in different times and rooms, just like *The Dream Play* of August Strindberg. Before writing the play Richard Turpin traveled to Israel–Palestine to meet people, who live under extreme conditions. – The play is about the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which seems to be difficult to solve. But at the end, the solutions are quite simple: the Israeli occupation has to end and the Palestinians must be allowed to have their own state, Richard Turpin says. The Swedish part of the play concentrates on the life of the refugees living in a suburb – Think of the problems in a family, in which the children are born in Sweden and the parents elsewhere. The situation in those families gets very problematic when children, who know the language and culture of the new homeland have to act as parents for their own parents. But *The Axis of Evilness* is not about being a offer – neither in the Middle East or in the Swedish suburb. Richard Turpin wants to raise the hope and the will of the people. And so he does – by being a man, who believes that the just world is still possible. And by reminding the theatre, that it must take part in the construction of it.

IN A STRANGE CLUB OF THEATRE FREAKS



Alvis Hermanis in a discussion during the Baltic Circle 2000's

JAUNĀIS RĪGAS TEĀTRIS

is a regular state repertory theatre, with a small troupe of actors – only fifteen, explains *Alvis Hermanis*, director and artistic director of the theatre. – Being a state theatre company, we can afford to not care about the commercial side. We somehow manage to be inbetween the idea of a big theatre factory making a product called theatre or independent companies struggling to survive. We are more like a studio and can afford to rehearse a play for half or even one year, which is very exceptional in Latvia, admits Alvis and continues:

- Professional theatre in Europe is in a very unstable situation. It is so much part of consumer society. The question is; what role should theatre play in our world – is it elitarian or entertaining? As I see it – theatre will be the only form of art escaping electronic transformation and therefore staying ecological. Theatre needs real physical contact between artists and spectators. This makes the position of theatre very special.

- Do you think theatre is an inherently conservative form of art, asks Annika referring back to the discussion she took part in on the previous day (see: previous pages).

- Depends on. I would say that other forms of art are coming closer to theatre. Visual artists are looking for storytelling and physical presence in their work. Those are the two things that theatre always has been about, answers Alvis. - If, in the 20th century theatre was a very democratic form of art, in the 21st century when people are looking for entertainment, theatre is the last place to go. You don't look for ideologies in theatre, either. Theatre will obviously loose all impact on society. I never looked at theatre as a tool for improving the world. I think that theatre needs to be a pure art-form.

- Not a comment on society then, comments Annika.

- Let's face it. Art has lost all influence whatsoever on society. The majority of ordinary people in consumer society have other kind of performances: tv and football. Money for art is diminished in most countries, look at France or Germany and also Latvia. The tendency is the same all over.

- But there are quite a few structures supporting art, says Annika.

- Yes, but I predict that the more prosperous a

society becomes – the less it cares about art, comments Alvis

- You are just finishing a tour, what do you think about the locality of theatre?

- Theatre will always be local and should be rooted in a local context. There is something un-natural about theatre going abroad. It is good for exchange of information. But when we are preparing our performance, we communicate with people living in Riga. It is not always a bad thing to tour. But I really do not understand what goes on in the mind of the affluent audience at the Salzburg festival when they are looking at our Inspector General, that is made about the Sovietunion. But somehow they communicate with what they are seeing, says Alvis and pauses.

- I find festivals and guest performances double-edged. In a way it is fun, important and even pedagogical to see what is happening in different places, but it is also like a shopping expedition. I take a little from here and a little from there, ponders Annika.

- Exactly. Thinking about international networks, they remind me of a strange internet club of some theatre freaks. There are many festivals in Europe, but we are actually a group of very few people who know each other. This is the only way to survive in the future - to build small communities. Today - there is no difference of where you are living, everybody has access to exactly the same information.

Geography doesn't matter anymore, says Alvis.

- That means that the aesthetics are becoming more alike, answers Annika

- That is the flip side, the cost we are paying. It is like us here – we are talking something called English, but it is not English at all. But, more important than the language you are speaking is whether you have something to say. Then language doesn't matter, says Alvis.

Written by Annika Tudeer

JAUNĀIS RĪGAS TEĀTRIS is performing *The Story of Kaspar Hauser* 24.11 and *The Inspector General* 25.11 at 19.00, Aleksanteri teatteri

”A fight for survival is the flip side of the Baltic countries' liberalisation and nouveau-richeness...”

MORAL VACUUMS AND SOCIAL CONTRATS AT THE CENTRE OF NEW BALTIC DRAMA

The plays in Monday's (24th Nov) public reading come from a region geographically very close to Finland. Yet the worlds represented in Latvian *Inga Ābele's Dark Deer* (Tummat peurat) and *Iron Grass* (Rautaruoho) and Lithuanian *Marius Ivaskevicius' The Neighbour* (Naapuri) are very different to those usually seen on Finnish stages. Director *Janne Suutarinen* has directed excerpts from these plays for the Baltic Circle festival and says that they could all be performed successfully in Finnish theatres. All three depict a kind of moral vacuum resulting from huge structural changes in Baltic societies after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The trio takes a much more fresh approach to this familiar theme compared to many of the so-called "western" texts from past decades. Also in *Ābele's* plays the set up, that of a family tragedy, is very familiar to Finns, tells Suutarinen.

Fear of bankruptcy and drug addiction

Rigan writer Inga Ābele's (born in 1972) play *Dark Deer* (Tummat Peurat) gained international recognition in the Bonn Biennale of 2002. Her other play in this reading, *Iron Grass* (Rautaruoho), has had its Finnish premier in the Uusikaupunki Theatre this autumn. Her latest play is titled *Jasmine*. In addition to her playwright's career, Ābele has also published a book of stories *Akas māja* (The Well House) in 1999, a poetry book *Nakts pragmatīe* (Night Pragmatist) in 2000 and a collection of short stories called *Uguns nemodina* (Fire Will Not Wake You) in 2001.

In director Suutarinen's view Ābele's way of handling the dark and heavy themes in her plays is still hopeful. In *Dark Deer*, for instance, the whole set up of the play is almost comical

in a situation where everything possible is being done to avoid bankruptcy threatening an estate. In *Iron Grass* we face an unfortunately typical phenomenon of our age, that of drug abuse. A fight for survival is the flip side of the Baltic countries' liberalisation and nouveau-richeness, and that dark side is very well depicted in her plays says Suutarinen. Ābele manages to handle her themes without tying them too much to a closed Latvian context. The characters in her plays are also very interesting in their humane credibility, relationships and generation gaps, adds Suutarinen.

A spy or not a spy?

The third play in Monday's public reading is Lithuanian writer, *Marius Ivaskevicius'* (born 1973) *The Neighbour* (Naapuri) which, according to Suutarinen, is more absurd than its Latvian counterparts in the same reading. Suutarinen doesn't want to limit the play into the genre of comedy or tragedy as such, because he sees the play as symbolic drama where the themes can be interpreted in various ways. *The Neighbour*, which came out in 1998, is a play about the "spying on your neighbours"-mentality, also prevalent in Lithuania during Soviet times. Is the man next door a KGB informant or perhaps even an agent? In this play a kind of a counter-agent is sent to investigate the matter... *The Neighbour* found its way to the international arena through the Avignon Theatre Festival in France in 2001.

Written by Mikko-Oskari Koski
Translated by Maria Lyytinen



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BALTIC CIRCLE

THE BALTIC CIRCLE FESTIVAL NEWSLETTER #2

AIRPORT THEATRE
righteous brothers
FREAKS
& moral vacuums

