

Humans are capable of the unique trick creating realities by first imagining them, by experiencing them in their minds. As soon as we sense a possibility of a more desirable world, we begin behaving differently. As though that world would start to come in to existence. As though in our mind's eye we are already there. The dream becomes an invisible force, which pulls us forward. By this process it becomes true. The active imagining somehow makes it real. And what is possible in the art becomes thinkable in life.

Brian Eno



## **Theatre Festivals - why?**

### **The results of a series of eight symposiums in eight European cities that hold theatre festivals, as part of the initiative "Theatre/Festivals in Transition" (FIT)**

Symposiums, podium discussions and roundtable discussions under the title "Theatre Festivals in Transition" (FIT) took place during eight festivals in eight countries from September 2005 until July 2006. Each festival held discussions on respective themes that were open to the general public; the discussions examined and pinpointed the present role and future potential of theatre festivals, casting a light on the festivals' cultural role in a Europe growing closer together. The FIT discussions frequently succeeded in bringing people together for the first time from very many different sectors: festival directors, politicians responsible for cultural policies, artists, journalists, scientists and other "stakeholders," such as sponsors, local partners in the festivals' programs, and directors of theatres. The goal of this exchange of ideas was to understand what each sector hoped to gain from their involvement in and support of the Festival and how they might best work together in delivering a vision at an artistic and civic level. The discussion also aimed to identify the best possible solutions to the challenges confronting festival organizers. In addition, the discussions set out to explore new models for cooperation on an international, national and local level.

What follows is a summary that highlights the key topics raised and issues discussed during the eight symposia..

The protocols and summaries of the eight rounds of discussions can be accessed on the Internet at [www.theatre-fit.org](http://www.theatre-fit.org), or they can be ordered in a print version by sending an email to [info@spielmotor.de](mailto:info@spielmotor.de).

## The inflated term "festival"

Against the backdrop of a flourishing festival industry and the resulting inflation of the term "festival" (from tourist-oriented folklore festivals to beer festivals and ultimately to theatre festivals), the goal was to focus on the work of the festival programs, their function, with particular emphasis on the lasting legacy of the festivals represented here. All of the participating festivals have artistic directors with individual program policies based on contemporary theatre in international constellations. They all share the concept of enriching their own respective cultural landscape by inviting theatre projects from other cultural backgrounds and opening up for discussion new approaches to the development and creation of artistic work. All of the festivals also prioritize working closely with artists, and their programs are dedicated to artistic innovation and development rather than the commerce of culture. This is also the reason why these festivals are largely dependent on public funding for their existence. As different the individual festivals may be in terms of their programs, size, duration, and financing, it was striking how the discussions revealed that to a large degree they have similar problems, outlooks and perspectives.

## Festivals: Strategy instead of fireworks

A problem for many theatre festival organizers is the deep-rooted prejudice that festivals are fireworks, astounding and amazing audiences with sensations and only to immediately disappear. An audience usually sees a festival only on the level of a presentation, often unaware that beneath the tip of this iceberg there is a broad palette of activities taking place, activities directed towards future artistic investment and in accordance with the Festival's strategies, aimed at long-term and far-reaching cultural and cultural-political results.

## The cultural functions of festivals

We live in a world that is changing rapidly. How can we make the tensions, conflicts and differences that are part of these rapid changes comprehensible, and learn to understand them? Art can play a big role here. Festivals connect the unknown with the known. They provide **keys to unknown languages and create new possibilities for communication.**

Festivals are special and **complex cultural performances**: The individual art projects do not take place isolated from one another, but rather they comment on each other, question one another and refer to one another through the design of the festival programs. The audience can perceive this performance process: it starts with the first performance and continues on until the last

event. The audience can view the festival as a whole and place the different events in relationship to one another.

From a perspective that also includes the artists, one can also talk about festivals as **centers of cultural transfers**. They bring foreign opinions, aesthetics and artistic potential into a city. They offer local artists the opportunity to perform in a national and international context, and thus the festivals can serve as a stepping stone for the artists' further development. The festivals transfer artists and art works of different genres into a new context. They network artistic experiences from a wide variety of sources by means of co-operations and co-productions, through competitions, workshops and discussions. And last but not least: They interlink the cultural potential of a city (co-organizers, partners, different performance venues, etc.) and provide the audience with new perspectives on their city through artistic events at unfamiliar venues.

Festivals and cultural institutions (such as local theatres) are often seen as being competitors. In fact, they compliment one another, whereby in a constantly changing art world theatre festivals have more the **function as a lighthouse** in opposite to the local theatre venues with their mandate to provide basic cultural supplies.

In their search for new content and forms, festivals can and must take risks, risks that large theatres in the city frequently cannot afford to take. Over time, festivals create their own cultural landscape and an environment that is open to art. They function as short-term experimentation zones for new artistic approaches, and they test these approaches in the social environment of the festival audience. Often these approaches, having been successfully tested out by the Festivals, are then adopted by the artistic institutions within the city,

### **The program policies of the festivals**

Increasingly festivals are not only inviting existing theatre productions (with all the attendant need to translate languages and "cultures"), they are also initiating new artistic projects: They invite artists to come and develop projects at specific locations in the city and to work with across in an interdisciplinary way across other art fields.

The collaboration between local and visiting artists plays an essential role for here. The focus cannot just be on the results; the creative processes are equally valued in terms of the artists' own development and exploration.

All of this means that festival organizers and their audiences must be willing to take greater risks, as the results cannot be foreseen. But it is easier for festivals to take these risks than it is for large theatre institutions. It is vital to create the proper context for these risks, to give the audience the chance to become part of the overall project. It is necessary here for the Festivals to know the characteristics and subtexts of their own city.

Over and over again, the question is posed whether festivals create something akin to their own festival aesthetic in an insulated "festival circus" by their choice of artists and by international collaborations. This viewpoint was consistently rejected by the program organizers and artists. Undeniably festivals are a basis for the creative work of many artists, and without these festivals the artists could barely continue to work, because they, for example, do not receive adequate funding in their home country, or they only find the appropriate working conditions within international, collaborative projects. This alliance of risks for festival organizers and artists frequently contains opportunities for new, extreme works which push forward the boundaries of performance and which otherwise would not be realized.

### **Festivals and artists**

Artists often see their own work in a completely new light when they perform in front of a foreign audience. The different reactions in different correlations can be very enriching. When a work is accepted by different audiences this is also seen as a measure of whether an artistic work has more of a general "value," or more of a local/national "value." However, artists need more time when working in other cultural contexts than when they work "at home." The opportunity to see other artists' works at a festival is important. Almost all of the artists complained that this was rarely possible, but to provide this opportunity would mean finding extra resources to finance longer stays for the artists at the respective locations.

Involving visiting artists in a more long-term process based work is seen as a task of the festivals. Tools and approaches including artist in residence opportunities, grants to work and stay in other cities, stipendiums which make it possible for visiting artists to get to know local artists. All of the festivals offer local artists a platform. On the other hand, it cannot be the duty of the festivals to ensure local artists have a livelihood.

### **Festivals and audiences**

The discussion concerning the role of the festival audience was only touched on. Overall, the participating festival directors emphasized several times how important it is to them to adequately estimate their actual and potential audience. This particular aspect is meant to be examined and illuminated more closely when the initiative continues in 2007.

It was unanimously established that the majority of festival visitors are not identical to classical theatre audiences, and that even directors and actors from repertoire theatre do not visit the festivals often. It appears that the festivals draw a completely different, young audience, a target group differing from classical theatre audiences in that it is interested in crossover

contemporary art. Although for the most part the festivals cannot complain about audiences' approval, experience shows that in comparison only a few theatre-goers have an immediate contact with a festival program. This group, however, which can be assigned to the so-called "young creative class" that is constantly growing in numbers everywhere, often has the effect of a large multiplier: Knowing what was performed at a festival, and/or having attended the festival, has a certain image value and is important for making a professional and social statement.

Contemporary theatre festivals demand a lot of their audiences: opening up new perspectives, looking at the unknown, new forms of expression, complex correlations. However, an audience that doesn't approach theatre as a consumer but as a participant can gain a lot here. What is interesting about this aspect is the perspectives the artists offer audiences and allow them to have. This can go so far that the audience is involved in the artistic process and even become performers themselves.

It is decisive that festival organizers know their audiences and take the audiences' expectations seriously. This does not have to mean the structure of the program must be oriented toward audiences' tastes, but that the festival organizers should know how to challenge and involve audiences. In this regard, issues of the context of a performance and a festival play a role, but also whether they succeed in transforming a lack of understanding into interest. Most festivals still are not aware of professional "audience development strategies," although there are encouraging examples. Here one cannot overlook that festivals do not have a stable audience. Over the course of time, festivals that have existed for a long time constantly recruit new audiences.

The discussion concerning the role of the festival audience was only touched on. Overall, the participating festival directors emphasized several times how important it is to them to adequately understand and estimate their actual and potential audience. It is intended that this particular question is further examined and illuminated more closely when the FIT initiative continues in 2007.

### **The festivals' strategies of cooperations**

More and more, festivals are moving toward working on an international level – for the most part in the form of co-productions, where the development costs are shared and the resulting productions are performed internationally at several festivals or theatres. In addition to co-productions, the tendency to work together in international networks is becoming increasingly important. This provides the opportunity to exchange concrete work experiences, to critically examine different approaches in program policy, and to search together for new approaches. Working together with local municipal cultural institutions (theatres, museums, universities, etc.) is also of significant importance when the goal is to create a recognizable cultural event in a city for

a short period. This makes it easier to use common resources and to create the effect of multipliers in the awareness of the general public.

### **Festivals and private businesses**

On the one hand, festivals – as events – have more chances than individual theaters of attracting corporate sponsorship. On the other hand, contemporary theatre – as a fleeting art form – is not as an attractive proposition to sponsors as, for example, exhibition and visual arts projects that are in a city for a longer period.

The innovative profile of Festivals together with their predominantly young audiences make them particularly suited to private financial backers who wish to promote their own innovative brand to a young demographic.. In addition, festivals are a good opportunity for corporate sponsors to invite their employees to cultural events. In doing so employees can engage with other worlds and ideas becoming , familiar with intercultural approaches which they can then take back with them into the workplace. Above all, Festivals also offer the opportunity for networking encounters, both official and informal, between, for example, departmental directors and local or national politicians who sponsor or represent the festivals.

In certain cases, companies such as BMW in Munich see their involvement in a contemporary theatre festival as an investment in the city where they are located. A vibrant international contemporary cultural provision is seen as an important advantage for their location, enhancing their company's ability to attract top level employees to the city and their organization. The two supporters of the SPIELART Festival in Munich, the City of Munich and BMW, formed a Public-Private Partnership in 1979, which compliments the private sector strategies of a global player and the local interests of municipal cultural policies in the best way.

However, short-term, one –off sponsorships are the rule. Therefore there were warnings that the emphasis on sponsorship for festivals could become too great. In extreme cases festivals could turn into "sponsoring agencies" and run the danger of orienting their program selection more towards marketing opportunities rather than artistic priorities.

### **Festivals and cultural politics**

Festivals are of great importance for local and regional cultural policies, even at a time when their value can sometimes be underestimated by the politicians responsible for cultural policies. In political evaluations they are often mistakenly seen as being in competition for financial support with the local, regional or national artists. People have a tendency to say, "Why should

domestic tax money be given to foreign artists?" In addition, at a time when the European community grows closer together the concept of a deep rooted national cultural identity is rising up the agenda. This concept of national identity frequently determines the establishment of priorities in cultural policies.

In this regard, the internationally-oriented festivals are vulnerable to being pushed into the background. It is frequently overlooked that the flexible and open instrument of a "festival" that places work within an international context is what makes the potential of local and national artists visible in the first place. The festivals are the ones who create a situation where state-of-the-art theatre pieces from somewhere else can be compared to the respective state-of-the-art local theatre pieces. Also theatre festivals, among other events, have the ability to create an international cultural "image" of a city and convey this image to the outside world.

The cultural-political evaluation and competency of planning for the festivals are very different in the various cities and countries. Ideally, they are part of the internationally-oriented cultural policies. However, they often lack an appropriate competency of planning, and in individuals cases, such as the Reminiscencje Festival in Krakow, the cultural-political interests are so unclear and the interim periods for budget decisions so short that this can only be compensated for by the employees or artists voluntarily allowing themselves to be exploited. This precarious financial situation also raises serious doubts as to the ability of the festival to provide productive results for the partners and financial backers.

It also cannot be overlooked that there is a danger that festivals, precisely because they are a mobile and flexible instrument of cultural policy, could become inappropriately burdened with tasks and functions in areas that local policies do not cover in the so-called "white spots". This means there is an increasing demand for festivals to fulfill social, educational and learning functions, which they do not necessarily have the capacity to deliver, because on the whole they are small units with limited human and financial resources.

## **Festivals and Europe**

National politicians like to argue that the European Union should be responsible for international cultural politics and the subsidy of international cultural work. This overlooks the fact that European cultural policies, aside from individual sponsorship programs of the European Union, do not de facto exist. The debate of the role of culture in the European has just started to rises up the agenda. "The EU has reached a state of its history where its cultural dimension can not longer be ignored" This statement was made by the President of the EU Commission, José Manuel Barroso, at the opening of the Berlin Conference "A Soul for Europe " This ongoing Berlin Conference brought together individuals from the cultural sector and politicians, representatives of the business world and other areas of society. It inspires them to initiate common

steps to strengthen the cultural component of European development. See [www.berlinerkonferenz.eu](http://www.berlinerkonferenz.eu).

The European Union's current sponsorship policy completely disregards the important role of international theatre festivals in the European cultural process by almost exclusively sponsoring international collaboration projects. These collaborations are often conceived merely for the purpose of obtain the funding – between individual participants, including at times festivals with their local cultural-political authentication, their involvement in community and social discussions, alongside their more long-term international cooperation strategies, frequently fulfill the prerequisites for a successful and enduring transnational conveyance of culture more decisively than short-term, individual initiatives.

Therefore the initiative "Theatre/Festivals in Transition" advocates a European cultural policy of the European Union that seriously acknowledges the transnational cultural achievements of international theatre festivals as "lighthouses" of the European cultural process and sponsors them in perspective appropriately.

## Munich, January 2007

### Tilmann Broszat

(in the name of all -co-organisers and partners of the FIT-network)

**FIT** is an initiative of the international theatre festivals *Homo Novus* (Riga, Latvia); *Divadelná Nitra* (Nitra, Slovakia); *Sirens* (Vilnius, Lithuania); *Spielart* (Munich, Germany); *Krakowskie Reminiscencje Teatralne* (Krakow, Poland); *4x4 Days in Motion* (Prague, Czech Republic); *Exodos* (Ljubljana, Slovenia); and *Baltoscandal* (Rakvere, Estonia).

**FIT** is sponsored by the "Culture 2000" program of the European Union; the Allianz Cultural Foundation; the Goethe Institute; the Cultural Office of the City of Munich; the Bavarian State Ministry of Science, Research and Art; and many other local and national institutions. FIT is organized by Spielmotor München e.V. – an initiative of the City of Munich and the BMW Group.



Kultur 2000



Bildung und Kultur

Allianz  
Kulturstiftung



GOETHE-INSTITUT



Eine Initiative der  
Stadt München und der  
BMW Group

## List of debates at the festivals of the FIT network

September 16 , 2005

### **"Festivals as a tool"**

Festival HOMO NOVUS, Riga (LV)

September 27, 2005

### **"Cultural landscape and the festivals"**

Divadelná Nitra (SK)

October 1, 2005

### **„Festivals as generators and circulators of new ideas, professional, laboratorial and community events"**

Festival SIRENOS, Vilnius (LT)

December 2 and 3, 2005

### **"Festivals – A luxury article or a generator for culture?"**

**Panel 1: "Festival and city"**

**Panel 2: "Artists and festival"**

**Panel 3: "Festivals and their national and European cultural prospective"**

Festival SPIELART, Munich (D)

April 7 , 2006

### **"Festival as an essential element of the cultural policy of the state and city"**

Krakow Reminiscencie Teatralne (PL)

May 27, 2006

### **"Home and abroad"**

Festival 4+4 Days in Motion, Prague (CZ)

May 29, 2006

### **"The place of the contemporary art related to festival offer at the beginning of the 21th century"**

Festival EXODOS, Ljubljana (SLO)

July 1, 2006

### **"Theatre/Festivals In Transition (FIT) - The Future of a young network"**

Festival Baltoscandal, Rakvere (EST)

## List of all speakers at the debates of the FIT network

Barbara Aribar (Festival Maska Ljubljana)  
Steve Austen (Fellow of the Felix Meritis Foundation, Member of the Initiative "A Soul for Europe", Amsterdam)  
Elona Bajorinienė (Artistic Director SIRENOS, Vilnius)  
Martin Berg (Goethe-Institute, Department Theatre/ Dance, Munich)  
Chantal Boron (Editor UBU European Stages, Paris)  
Jörg von Brinken (Theatre Studies, Munich University)  
Tilmann Broszat (Artistic and Festival Director SPIELART, initiator of FIT, Munich)  
Ivica Buljan (Stage and Festival Director, Zagreb)  
Romeo Castellucci (Artistic Director Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Cesena)  
Lolita Cauka (Director of the Baltic Contemporary Drama Festival VIEW, Riga)  
Ursula Cetinski (Program Director Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana)  
Tiago Bartolomeu Costa (Theatre Critic, Lisbon)  
Katarina Dudakova (International Management DIVADELNA NITRA)  
Rose Fenton (FIT Moderator, London)  
Lenka Flory (Deja Donne Company, Prague)  
Richard Gaul (Chief of the department Communication and Politics of the BMW Group, Head of the Board, Spielmotor München, Munich)  
Jurgis Giedrys (Cultural Attaché of the Embassy of Lithuania in Warsaw, Head of Arts Department of Ministry of Culture, Vilnius)  
Magda Grudzinska (Festival Director KRAKOWSKIE REMINISCENCJE TEATRALNE, Krakow)  
Johanna Hammarberg (DramAgora, BALTIC CIRCLE, Helsinki)  
Prof. Dr. Dr. Lydia Hartl (Director Cultural Department of the City of Munich)  
Gottfried Hattinger (Co-Festival Director SPIELART, Munich, Co-curator of SPIELART, Linz)  
Judith Huber (Actress, Performer, Munich)  
Sylvia Huszar (Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute, Budapest)  
Audronis Imbrasas (Director of the festival New Baltic Dance, Vilnius)  
Andrzej Jagodzinski (Director of the Visegrad Fund, Bratislava)  
Jerzy Jedlinski (Chairman Cultural Commission of the Sejmik of Malopolska, PL)  
Primoz Jesenko (FIT Deputy EXODOS, Ljubljana)  
Ieva Kalniņa (Head Cultural Policy at the Cultural Department of the City Council, Riga)  
Darina Karova (Festival Director DIVADELNA NITRA, Nitra)  
Jarosław Kisieliński (Department of Art/Ministry of Culture and Nat Heritage, PL)  
Dragan Klaić (Permanent Fellow, Felix Meritis Foundation, Amsterdam)  
Zane Kreicberga (Festival Director HOMO NOVUS, Riga)  
Dasha Krijanskaia (Roosevelt Academy Middelburg, NL)  
Gundega Laivina (Program Director HOMO NOVUS, Riga)  
Audronis Liuga (Director of the festival New Drama Action, Vilnius)  
Dietmar Lupfer (Director Muffathalle, Munich)  
Jadwiga Oleradzka (Director of the festival Kontakt, Torun)  
Daina Ostrovska (Manager of the Arts and Science in the British Council, Riga)  
Daniels Pavļuts (State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Riga)

Ojārs Pētersons (Board chairman of the Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia)  
Rūta Prusevičienė (Executive manager of Vilnius Festival, Vilnius)  
Michael Purucker (Choreographer, Munich)  
Michel Quere (Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM), Brussels)  
Priit Raud (Artistic Director BALTOCANDAL, Rakvere, EST)  
Mark Ravenhill (Playwright, London)  
Sanita Rozenšteina (Furniture salon Grīvas mēbeles, Sponsor of the Festival, Riga)  
Banuta Rubess (Director, Latvia)  
Indrek Saar (Executive Director of BALTOCANDAL, Rakvere, EST)  
Phillipp Schenker (Stage Code company, CZ)  
Toni Schmid (Bavarian State Ministry for Science, Research and the Arts, Munich)  
Werner Schmitz (Expert for Theatre and Festivals at the Cultural Department of the City of Munich)  
Christiane Schneider (Münchner Kammerspiele, Theatre Direction, Munich)  
Svetlana Slabsak (Philosopher, Professor of Theatre Studies, Ljubljana)  
Kristian Smeds (Playwright, Theatre Director, Kayani, Finland)  
Michael Stolhofer (Artistic Director SZENE SALZBURG)  
Pavel Storek (Artistic Director 4x4 DAYS IN MOTION, Prague)  
Miran Sustersic (Festival EXODOS, Ljubljana)  
Katarzina Szumska (FIT website, PL)  
Egbert Tholl (Moderation Theatre Critic, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Munich)  
Michael Thoss (Secretary of the Allianz Cultural Foundation, Munich)  
Ginta Tropa (Cultural Adviser of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia)  
Barbara Turlejska (Deputy Director of the Department of Culture and National Heritage of the City of Krakow, PL)  
Brigitte von Welser (Managing Director Cultural Centre Gasteig, Munich)  
Jörg Witte (Theatre Director, Munich)  
Natasa Zavolovsek (Program Director EXODOS, Ljubljana)  
Dzintars Zilgalvis (NOASS and BETANOVUS, Partner of the Festival HOMO NOVUS)  
Tomaš Žižka (mamapapa Organization, CZ)