

theatre project **MUTATION**

(Part 3/ concept/5-2002) **Global - a perspective**

"I am not teaching you about love of that which is close, but love of that which is far..."

F. Nietzsche

"Globalisation is an unidentified cultural object"

Nestor Garcia Canclini

The magic word, globalisation, describes an evolutionary power that has subsumed the fate of the contemporary world, determining the conditions of our future. To describe yourself as for or against globalisation is to mistake its absolute nature; it is a fact as much as an ideology, and will continue to occur regardless of opinion. It induces a colossal unification of the whole world, whilst at the same time revealing and multiplying its divisions. As yet we have no real idea what what unities or indeed fragmentation globalisation will engender in the future civilisations of the world.

"On the one hand, we veer towards a general equivalency (commercial value, digitized information, space, time, the urban...) which decrees an intensive homogenisation. On the other, we are referred back to binary oppositions: local/global, virtual/real, singular/universal, homogenous/endogenous, material/immaterial..."

Nadina Tazi, Fragments of Net-theory

It is no longer clear who in the future will be shovelling coal.

The way of life in which we so fervently and rapturously believed in the last decades of the twentieth century - regarding our priveleged position as utterly secure - is becoming less stable by the minute.

We have immured ourselves from the outside world, warding off all sight and sound of the world's ugly hostilities: but the cocoon is cracking up. It is as if we have been travelling on a large, beautiful white steam ship for some time now. To anyone with empathy with the lot of others it has been fairly obvious up until now who had a first class ticket, who had a second class ticket, who was travelling third class

on hard benches, who had to shovel coal, and who was chopping onions in the galley. However, during the next stage of the journey it will become less clear who belongs to which class, whether these classes are even valid, and who on the ship is going to be shovelling coal in the future.

Peter Sloterdijk suggests we all bail out onto smaller manoeuvrable ships.

The global network is not a twentieth century invention

Looking at world history it quickly becomes apparent that there is nothing new about globalisation: the discovery of sea routes between India and Europe, the conquering of the Americas, the colonialisation of the world by European powers - these are all part of the historical process of globalisation. The global network of transport and communication is in no way a twentieth century invention.

On the periphery - in the South - a laugh and slap my thigh, we receive our first email:

"We've never known anything else: we've always been locked out from the power base, both culturally and economically."

Lisbon was the first WORLD-CITY

Europe has been the driving force behind globalisation since the 14th century. The large maritime nations - Spain, France and Portugal - developed an outward-looking perspective, whilst other powerful nations, eg China, became ever more set on an inward perspective, which the outside world regarded as hostile and dangerous. Lisbon was the first WORLD-CITY.

Indeed this stolen gold and silver only came to rest in Spain's coffers for a short while before, in exchange for luxury goods, disappearing without trace along the silk routes to the Indian subcontinent and China.

Since the plundering of the 'new world', of the South American continent by the Spanish fleet, people in the old world - Europe (and later, North America) saw themselves as safely ensconced in an enchanted centre, a magnet for gold and silver streaming in from all over the world.

Globalisation becomes emancipated

It is only now, in the 21st century, that globalisation is becoming emancipated through a rapidly accelerating flow of goods, knowledge, symbols, people

and capital out of the former national and imperial powers and their territories. Globalisation is now gobbling up its parents and is making the theoretical and practical methods and knowledge with which they presided over the 18th and 19th centuries seem increasingly impotent and out of date. There is a new atmosphere, a new spirit, among agents of a new cognitive economy of networks, which is just as threatening towards the old order - driven by a commercial spirit - as the bourgeoisie of the 16th and 17th centuries were to the feudal and religious orders.

The European cocoon explodes

Up until now, the liberal consciousness of the West could be encapsulated in the geographically determined ordering of the world: here we are 'north', and there they are 'south'. Globalisation destroys this old geographic order; the south comes into its own against the north. Indeed even the current identification of geography with culture in the terms 'West' and 'East' is becoming increasingly invalid. The European cocoon - built out of the resources of others - must be exploded once and for all. Problems such as the disintegration of sections of the population are now becoming similarly virulent in Western countries. The late modern consciousness, which has discussed itself and everything else thoroughly, only to use right consciousness to implement wrong, is becoming utterly hollow, only coming up with stillborn ideas that verge on absurdity:

Recently, when asked, a proud politician from the city of Berlin, in public and before a respected audience, explained his vision for the city's future: if the people would only learn how to dress rather better, Berlin could lay a claim to being the grand hotel of Europe.

We receive a second email from our new friends on the periphery:

'How funny, how strange, that antipodean ambivalence is spreading in the old centres. Welcome to the rest of the world my metropolitan friends'.

The short circuiting of global and local.

With the liberation of globalisation from its former agents a kind of short-circuit takes place between the global and the local (glocal). This glocal short circuiting potentially makes globalisation an engine driving the deterritorialisation and fragmentation of the world and its systems. Extending to the furthest corners of the world, it attacks with a new strength all those cultures and life styles determined by tradition and religion. Even substitutes for the security of traditional living, such as the welfare state, are not spared. Globalisation is a merciless emptier of value/secure meaning and destroyer of the social- and community-orientated structure of institutions. In practice this means that whilst at one end of the world it is left to modern individuals to create their increasingly disparate identities themselves, at the other, renewed cultural and ethnic conflicts - ones we thought had been overcome long ago - rear up once again. At the same time, new hybrid forms of culture are taking root everywhere.

Under the title "Even Saudis love Billy shelves", the German daily broad sheet, the Tagesspiegel (27 April 2002), reported that Ikea produces a special edition of its catalogue in Arabic, which conforms to Islamic religious laws. There are no images of people - and the special section for 'singles' has been removed. Thus in Sweden they take two pictures of the Billy, Björn and Ångby suites, once with people in and once without.

Researching 'Heimatspiele' ('Home Games'), we came across an instance of a lifestyle not unusual for young, second generation Germans with Turkish backgrounds:

Traditionally the young man is married to a young Turkish girl from his parents' village. From the time of the marriage, she lives with his parents in Berlin. At the same time the young man also has his own flat which he shares with a blond German woman. Both relationships produce children. The young man's Turkish

family supposedly knows nothing of his other family.

*World=City
is the formula of globalisation*

The multifaceted nature of globalisation is demonstrated by the current worldwide evolution of city culture, which can be compared to wild mutations. Under globalisation, the world will transform itself into a network of cities: world-cities, megapolises, metropolises, cross-border cities, Edge cities... World = city: this is the basic formula that describes globalisation. At the beginning of the 20th century, ten percent of the world's population lived in cities. In the year two thousand and twenty, sixty-three per cent will live in cities that will be utterly unlike the city settlements we know today. In the next ten years fifty million people will move to cities in West Africa. In twenty-five years five billion will live in cities. The full force of the effect of glocal short circuiting will be felt in these cities: for better or for worse.

*How far can we Europeans free ourselves from our
inherited ways of thinking?*

The live interface between our theoretical discussion of globalisation and our practical theatre work is this: we are looking to discover how radically the artists taking part can free themselves - in their awareness and in their artistic practice - from the subtly effective fiction of the centrality of Europe and the mirroring of this notion in our cultural landscape. Let's not deceive ourselves, something very strong in us still leads to an anxious hope that all this change isn't happening. This hope, driven by fear, blocks us, and demands the old - and evidently self-deceiving - conviction that we are at the still point of the turning world. What do our friends email us by way of greeting us on our arrival at the periphery:

For the rest of us, this is just modernity as usual, opening and opening and opening. In the antipodes, wherever they are, it was always so. The antipodes, the other poles, the other foot, always defined by what it is peripheral to - always in a passing state between difference and identity, always being neither

here nor there. How funny, how strange, that antipodal ambivalence is spreading in the old centres.

MUTATION pursues the romantic idea of a theatrical experimental arrangement, whereby we - coming from the old centres to the periphery - find new ways of encountering delete others living under circumstances of similar fragmentation and deterritorialisation, driven by the globalisation machine. 'New', here describes the displacement of perspective - which could be described itself as a 'global shift'.

Dividuals *That's why I say there are no individuals, just dividuals - people are just particles or poles of spheres. All that exists is pairs and their extensions - what is thought of as an individual can usually be seen to be the defiant leftovers of a failed or hidden structure of pairings.*

Peter Sloterdijk, Sun and Death, 2001

Dirty realism Still, we are not naive enough to deny the very real conflicts and crises, inequalities and injustices in the world. On the contrary, we aim to lay ourselves open through our theatre work, to come at the issues from a new angle and to confront them. In this respect our work matches the vision of the architect, Rem Koolhaas, who, in his Project on the City, speaks out in favour of a dirty realism.

The subtext is that Koolhaas is the toughest kid on the block. While most of his fellow professionals wring their hands in horror about theme parks and urban sprawl, he looks the world in the eye and deals with it on his own terms.

Talking of the chaos of Lagos, Koolhaas says: 'What I thought would be depressing was powerful, inspiring and brutal'.

Deyan Sudjic, The Observer, 26.11.2000

A return to utopian ideals? Through our attempt to confront reality under these new - and 'tough' - conditions, we hope that there are new forms of solidarity to be discovered, which may even enable a return to utopian ideals.