

Atelier for Young Festival Managers Gwangju, 31 August - 6 September 2015

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Lecture at the Closing Ceremony of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers GWANGJU 2015
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Inge and may I take this opportunity in thanking you and your team, and local team in Gwangju – you have all done a great job.

Distinguished guests, Hugo and my fellow mentors, and participants in the Gwangju 2015 Atelier for Young Festival Managers.

Here we are, somewhat surprisingly, at the *end* of the Gwangju Atelier. As always at the start, we imagine there's all the time in the world, and the first days are tentative. We still feel we have plenty of time to discuss the most important things. Then suddenly there's a sense of urgency – what *are* the most important things? And then the week is at an end.

And what has happened in this week? Outside our tiny bubble, we hear news of rapid change in the world. A humanitarian crisis evolves- we learn of the desperation and death of people who are exiles. These are political exiles, fleeing barbarism in their own countries: their plight forces political leaders to make decisions and act. Germany and Austria opened its borders, and 10,000 people have crossed over during this week, and it is predicted that 800,000 will cross those borders this year. This is just *one* aspect of a world which has kept moving as we gathered to discuss festivals and the arts. During the week, I emphasized the importance of the arts to provide platforms for those artists wishing to respond to crisis. Even then, it's important not to forget that one of the roles of the arts is to inspire, to thrill, to excite curiosity. Sometimes this still can happen through non-narrative means- music, color, abstract visuals. And often we are not at the vanguard of social change, but we can inspire those that *are*. But bearing this essential function in mind, sometimes an art form, or a festival, is in a strong and healthy state, to create a pop-up or permanent platform for artists to respond to crisis.

Our conversation has barely touched on climate change, one of those things that has surely continued during this week but goes unnoticed by all but experts in the field. But in some of our countries, we have also already encountered these exiles of a different kind: people forced to flee their homeland because of the effects of climate change. In creating an open festival in Melbourne, I enabled a platform for such exiles to have a presence. Emeretta is from Tuvalu, Kiribati in the Pacific. She decided she wanted a presence in this festival at the heart of Melbourne, in order to establish a profile for herself and her children. She said that soon her children will have no country to return to, because it will be under water. Emerattea chose to make a ceremony called *Rising Up the Backbone* during which she lay in the middle of Federation Square, surrounded by family and friends, while a traditional tattoo was gently (but painfully) hammered down her backbone. After many hours, she rose up and was led to the campfire by a leader of the Indigenous community in Victoria, and she declared herself an elder in exile. This was a great example of a ceremony created largely by non-professionals. What is important in our discussion is that this small festival offered a platform for human response to an ongoing crisis.

Chiaki showed us an even more dramatic example of response to crisis as the Tokyo Festival responded quickly to the earthquake and circumstance of Fukushima and its environs. Not everyone's festival will feel the need to do this – but it's an interesting exercise to consider your festival's capacity: to ask yourself – if there were a major crisis, would we want our artists to respond, and do we have the capacity, and the welcome embrace to offer them the time and space to do so ? Another interesting question then becomes, is there already a crisis, and should we be already responding? What are we waiting for?

Time is also the essence of a festival. During this week we have talked about those things which make a festival different from a year round program. One of the most obvious differences is that a festival compresses time. An essential ingredient of any festival is the pressing of a lot of activity into a limited time-frame. This follows the model of ancient religious or seasonal festivals. The word 'pilgrimage' came up this week. I've just written an article for a new publication called *Focus on World Festivals* – and my chapter looks at festivals which require a pilgrimage, to festivals which are off the beaten track, to festivals which speak distinctly about their place and their people. But *time* is also vital. A festival forces you to experience *excess*, a surfeit of the things you love with a passion – food, wine, film, jazz, art. It leaves you exhausted, with a hangover, but also somehow changed. This is a real festival.

I think one of the powerful aspects of each Atelier is that both participants and mentors all leave with a feeling of impatience. We are inspired by many things that are said, frustrated by the things that are not said, or not said in enough depth (because one week is never enough), but we all leave determined to act, to try to put into place the ideas or practices which have been given to us, or which have occurred to us, during these days.

For all of us, this is a week away from the normal constraints and labors of our offices. It has given *me*, as much as any of you, a chance to step out of the thinking and work which I expect of myself in any week, into the stream of unexpectedness. This is a privilege – to be given the freedom to stray from our customary paths, and imagine how we might do things differently. It is a privilege of time and energy, to be able to spend a week in the presence of dynamic young arts professionals from twenty different countries. Surrounded by our questions and our collective sense of urgency and change, we find there are few solutions, as good questions normally beget more questions. We know this is challenging. And you ought not to imagine that sparkling new corporate-meeting planning methods alone will eliminate the challenges. When you negotiate within the international arena, you will be faced with many of the same challenges: your different languages will miss many of the subtleties; you will frequently miss the chance to discuss projects in depth. Many agendas will be hidden from you.

In working to bring artists together, especially for an international festival, you will frequently quiver with frustration and be suddenly filled with fear that you got something very wrong. You have to work hard to find pathways to clarity, and often have to be bold, but observe protocol at the same time. The *Atelier* is very much a microcosm of festival life: the discomfort of perpetual change and the pressure to change is something we all encounter.

During this week you have been offered great insights, in an intimate setting, into the narratives of creating festivals – Nele, Marie-Helene, Chiaki, Monique, Hugo and I have all created festivals. Marie-Helene said you must always question 'where you are' and 'who you are': we can add to this 'who are your artists?', and 'who are your audiences?'. These are some of the essentials of creating a new festival. Marie-Helene described this as invention. You invent.

But in a festival which you inherit, it's the process of *re-invention* which is essential. Things are changing so fast (our cities, new technologies and how artists use them, our audiences) that surely, you must *re-search* at least every few years, 'who you are, where you are, and what you are'. A festival which simply carries on with an old, unexamined model risks become irrelevant to its audience, its society, and the world into which it is linked.

Marie- Helene also said that festivals are the result of 'an irrepressible desire to open up to the world'. What we have observed this week is that many of us work in places which appear to be opened up. I have never attributed a nationalistic tendency to Nele Hertling, quite the opposite – she is a true internationalist. But it was wonderful to hear her say last night 'I feel somehow so proud of my country at this moment' – referring to this opening the borders to so many people in such dire circumstances. Thinking about it this morning, it seemed to me that there is possibly a connection between a capital, like Berlin, which has striven so hard to portray the arts as essential to the establishment and maintenance of a civil society, and this act of humanitarian kindness, a clear mark of a civil society.

But each of our worlds is changing rapidly: this tends to be the effect of a new century. Though the calendar is man-made (there is nothing natural except that the world revolves on itself and round the sun, creating day and night and our seasons.

Add to that context the birth, life and death of plants and animals, and you really have the sum of all of it). Yet human beings tend to change at the man-made mark of the end of a century. This is what we are experiencing now – turmoil of life as well as the arts which are responding to these changes. Let's hope that current conflicts do not develop as in former *fin de siècles*, into massive destructive world wars – or perhaps they too, are already with us. Perhaps we are just as unaware of the large movements already in place for such tragedy, as people were unaware one hundred years ago. And have festivals any role in creating awareness? I'm told that the arts offer us an alternative way to see the world – through the eyes of artists. Are our festivals providing the platform for those views? Clearly some of us here are working in places that have not yet opened up. There are attempts to open up, yet we have heard voices from India, Africa, Japan and Turkey where the arts are subject to pressures which are there to silence or quietness the dissident voice. And it is not just those countries. My country *appears* to be free and open, yet it is literally closed to many refugees (at this time when Europe opens its arms to embrace those who despair and are homeless) and still has to complete an opening up to and for the original Australians – the Indigenous peoples of our vast continent.

It is important to know that the steps taken to open up to Indigenous Australians and to 'new' Australians, those who have emigrated to Australia for a better life, have been overwhelmingly through the arts. The arts have provided platforms for creativity, for expressions of identity and struggle, and they have been effective, despite the fact that we still have a long way to go.

Subah made a claim for diversity, rightly pointing out that the overwhelmingly largest slice of the funding cake in any country still goes to the preservation of the western canon – wherever we are, Europe, Oceania, Asia, Africa, the Americas. Despite so many dictates around art for social outcomes, it's still the opera and the ballet and the large heritage collections that take the biggest slice of the cake. Personally, even though my own practice arose, through my father, from the world of entertainment, I don't want to see formal music ensembles disappear. Early music is a passion. Yet I am only too aware that for every mundane rendition of the ancient repertoire, every concert or opera given without care just to please the subscribers, is at the expense of new work which might press our aesthetic sensibility, our intelligence and curiosity further - might spur us to understand better that world we are living in, rather than just presenting some comfortable haven from the past. The aspect I love most about the concept of dialectic is not that of argument and reasoning for its own sake, but the idea that once you have reasoned the best you can, to come to a solution, it is only ever a solution for this immediate temporal and spatial context. It's the best solution to the problem today – and tomorrow or next week or in one year, you might have to reason again to find a new solution. You can't ever just rest on your laurels.

And we exist in a world of contradiction. Ricardo Bartis said without actors there is no theatre, yet this afternoon we saw theatre without actors. Josh disagreed with Hugo's statement that 'when you serve the artist, you serve the audience', yet it raises the problem that if you concentrate only on an audience, and only give an audience what it wants, we go nowhere. This is what entertainment does – analyses audience desire, and satisfies that desire. It is a matter of demand and supply. I think art

works differently – it takes people to places they have not been, which is precisely why some find it confusing and challenging.

In my own work on the Gold Coast right now, there's a fascinating challenge. The place has had few platforms for artists, and little recognition of what they do – as it is a beautiful coastline of pristine surf beaches, a green hinterland, high rise residential buildings, theme parks and everything designed for leisure. But it is also the sixth largest city in Australia and we are rapidly making changes. Artists are becoming more visible, more artists are coming to live there- we have strengthened the festival BLEACH, based on coastal life and arts – and started to professionalize artists and their processes. And this paradise-like place (the best known village is actually called Surfers Paradise) also has its challenges which the festival will be able to respond to – for instance, the profile of Indigenous Australians who have been in that land for tens of thousands of years ,and the matter of climate change. The city was inundated a few years ago – with widespread flooding attributed to rising seas. But at the level of daily life, people tend to live healthy outdoor lives – they rise early, go for a walk or a swim(there are always people out on the beach to walk at 5.30am), go about their daily work or school, come home for more walking, swimming , surfing, have their evening meal and go to bed early.

This has made me question my passionate advocacy of the arts very deeply. In broadening and deepening the cultural landscape of this place (way out my comfort zone – a place with little cultural infrastructure or activity up until two years ago when I started to contribute to the accelerated development of culture), it is surely not my job to shove these citizens into a darkened theatre after such an active day, to sit quietly and simply to be passive recipients of an artist's work. I believe I have to find ways, and encourage artists to find ways, and encourage the city's arts and culture unit to find ways, in which we can put the art where the people are, so they encounter it as part of their daily lives, and come to love it. As my colleague Stephen Armstrong said yesterday, it's not a crime not to love art. But of course, we who love the arts and have gained so much from the arts, simply wish to offer that joy and inspiration to those who have yet to experience it. But the way to do that will always come back to this question of 'who we are and what we are, who are our artists and who our audiences' are. It is a matter of constantly re-evaluating relevance, and then finding the best ways for artists to connect with new audiences.

The future is filled with both promise, and trepidation. For me, it is mainly about promise. I am an optimist, but of course that comes from someone who lives in a safe, if currently somewhat flawed, society, and I hope I have developed enough of a sense of empathy to understand the suffering of so many not as lucky as I am, and to do what I can, through the arts, to make that situation better. I am optimistic about the power of the arts, and the power of festivals as platforms for the arts, to invent, to imagine and to create new things in our world – works which can be both beautiful, and awe-inspiring, and at the same time can speak of the greatest challenges we face as human beings in the twenty-first century – challenges which can be of the most intimate human kind, or the grandest scale. I am optimistic, too, because each time I attend an Atelier, I observe a new generation of people like you, passionate about the arts and about the role of festivals, and hope that you will find the energy and the wisdom to allow artists to fulfill their potential and their audiences to benefit accordingly.

Talk about the future often involves a lot of talk about new technology – and it's true that we live in a remarkable era of technological advancement. The industrial revolution was one thing – the digital revolution is quite another. But we should remember that artists have always adopted new technologies the minute they arrive – the printing press transformed literature, electric light transformed theatre. These are mechanisms and tools. What will always be core is the content new technologies communicate. Your festival may deploy the smartest fastest newest shiniest technologies available, both inside and outside the theatre, but if they are not being used to communicate important ideas, concepts, situations and feelings expressed by serious artists (even when they are being funny and playful and highly entertaining), then you have to ask yourself 'why. Why ?

Keeping asking yourself that question – why are we doing what we're doing, and why through the medium of festivals? We do constantly have to be on the alert, and always ready and willing to be flexible, and to change or bring about change, according to the answer to that question. Prior to the turn of the century – 20th to 21st, the Italian writer Italo Calvino wrote *Six Memos for the Millennium* : they were published after his death. In the section on *Lightness*, he offered a vision for the future – and I leave it with you as a gesture of thanks for your participation during this week.

"Were I to choose an auspicious image for the new millennium, I would choose that one: the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing that with all his gravity he has the secret of lightness, and that what many consider to be the vitality of the times – noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring – belongs to the realm of death, like a cemetery for rusty old cars"

Italo Calvino ***Six memos for the New Millennium***

I also leave you with the following song, which was written by Bertolt Brecht and Hans Eisler, a late song by two ageing artists. It seems to have some relevance;

You who will come to the surface
Of the overwhelming deluge that covered us
Just think about our weakness of that dark time
Which all of you escaped
Yes we went as often changing countries as changing shoes
Through the wars of the classes, despairing
Each time we found an abuse
And no sense of outrage
Nonetheless we realize
Even hated of debasement can distort your features
Even anger at injustices can make your voice hoarse
Oh we who used to hope we'd created a basis for friendliness
Never could be friendly ourselves

You though when things are moving forward
So that man becomes a helper to other men
Look back on us with indulgence

Brecht/Eisler, trs John Willett

Thank you

C Robyn Archer, Gwangju, September 2015