

kunstenpocket
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**(Re)framing
the International.**

*On new ways
of working
internationally
in the arts.*

Joris Janssens

INTERNATIONALISATION

(RE)FRAMING THE INTERNATIONAL. ON NEW WAYS OF WORKING
INTERNATIONALLY IN THE ARTS. — *Joris Janssens*

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INTRO – *For years, working internationally has been self-evident, taken for granted by musicians, visual and performing artists. Thanks to economic, technological, cultural and political developments, their practices have become highly internationalized. At the same time, there is mounting discomfort. Artists, performers, organizers, groups, curators, managers and producers are all indicating that they are having to work harder and harder to achieve the same results in a market that may indeed be growing, but is increasingly competitive. It is also becoming more difficult to explain to governments and other stakeholders why investing in the internationalization of the arts is so important.*

Moreover, when we travel, we are increasingly haunted by ethical and ecological concerns. As we build on international and even intercontinental successes, there is a gnawing awareness that there are ecological limits, and that we, when working internationally,

find ourselves caught up in bubbles of like-minded people, with no time left for truly meaningful exchanges. We are conscious that access to the international arts system is not equal. An artist from a European country can get a visa for almost any country in the world, but that is not true the other way around. Who is allowed to travel and who is not? What is that privilege based on?

In short, working internationally remains important, even essential, but it has lost something of its self-evidence and its innocence. For this reason, in late 2016, Flanders Arts Institute began (Re)framing the International, an intensive research and development project about the current state of working internationally in the arts. We wanted to better understand what is happening, both in the arts and in our societies at large. What trends are we seeing? What is the actual value and meaning of working at the international level? Are we realizing that potential? What frictions and contradictions have been

presenting themselves? What answers are being developed by and in the arts today? Are there alternatives? Can others learn from this? Can we develop a new vocabulary and a new narrative in order to talk about the value and the meaning of working at the international level, for artists and for any society? Are there arguments here for engaging in dialogue with stakeholders in a different way?

To help answer such questions as these, between December 2016 and September 2018, an interactive investigation was developed, a trajectory pursued together with professionals from the visual arts, performing arts and music. The intention was to chart meaningful trends and stimulate reflection and the exchange of knowledge about working internationally in the arts and its effects. Written contributions, symposia and workshops have been completed. The resulting identification of trends, testimonies and reflections were published online and compiled in print, in a series of three English-language pop-up magazines,

released between November 2017 and May 2018.

For those who have lost track, or who like things short and simple, there is great news. In four parts, this booklet has collected some insights and light bulb moments from throughout the whole project. Firstly, we take pause at the turbulent context in which this project began. There then follow the insights gained from the analysis of the data. The third section includes concerns raised by artists and art professionals in keynote speeches, statements, interviews, focus discussions and workshops. These are not people who sit still; they are actively working to find solutions. In part four, possible future paths to create a more durable international practice are considered. Perhaps we here see the budding of a new, future way of working at the international level?

The fact that Flanders Arts Institute has produced analyses about working internationally in the arts will not surprise anyone. It is who we are and what we do. Flanders Arts Institute is an organization established in order to stimulate developments in the professional arts from Flanders and Brussels, certainly also at an international level. How do we do that? We collect facts and information, we conduct field analyses, we organize meetings and (international) promotional activities for performers, artists, programmers, curators and other professionals. The intention is to develop and circulate knowledge and create connections. For us, it is fairly evident to chart the internationalization of the field and to aggregate and circulate knowledge about working internationally in the arts. Not only our own databases offer a treasure trove of material in order to chart 'how we do things' in different countries. In house, there is also a lot of hands-on knowledge about the internationalization of the arts field, via the expertise of our colleagues who work every day with performers, artists and performance groups in order to help make their practices more international. They have an infinite wealth of first-hand experience about international projects and developments in music, visual arts and performing arts.

At intervals, we collate this extensive, sometimes disparate material in analyses and overviews about working at the international level in the arts. The last time we did that was in 2011, when the institutes and funds supporting the different arts disciplines jointly published *Joining the Dots*.¹ This book reported on the conference of the same name and included, among other things, data analyses about internationalization in the visual arts, performing arts and

music, witness statements by artists and a 'building blocks plan' for an international cultural policy for the Flemish Community. Today, we have a similar kind of project in *(Re) framing the International*, but both the process and the results have proven to be very different. This is because, in the year 2018, we are living in a completely different world than that of a decade or so ago. What effects this has had on internationalization in the arts will be discussed shortly, but perhaps it is good to first sketch the story as we have always been telling it.

SMART GROWTH: A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

Today's circumstances often give us ammunition for boasting about 'Flemish' artistic successes in other countries: recognition in the form of international tours, awards, selections and important commissions. This has been true for some time. It seems to be indicative of a certain dynamic that is happening throughout the performing arts, visual arts and music. We attempt to reinforce that by way of our mission of international promotion. Indeed, our data analyses show that for some time now, internationalization has been a story of growth, indicative of the good reputation of the Flemish arts outside of Belgium. In particular, the international success of Flemish performing arts since the 1980s, the so-called *Vlaamse Golf* (Flemish Wave), has been widely described and documented.² Two years ago, when we began our *(Re)framing the International* quest, cracks were beginning to show in that success story about the internationalization of the arts in Flanders. In a number of respects, 2016 was a confusing year. I would like to give an indication here of how I experienced that year.

In late 2015, the Public Policy Exchange think tank invited me to contribute to a conference on 'Cultural and Creative Industries in Europe: Promoting Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth'. Although that invitation had something odd about it (it was from an organiza-

tion that also organized congresses about animal welfare, antiterrorism and national security), I accepted. I wanted to take advantage of that opportunity to update our data analyses on international tours and productions in the performing arts. I did that at the end of 2015 and must say that I was disconcerted by what the graphs and figures revealed.

At first glance, the updated information confirmed the story of growth in the internationalization of Flemish performing arts, which began with the *Vlaamse Golf* in the 1980s. The number of new productions had in fact remained stable.³ But we saw that those productions were more and more frequently reruns of existing productions, that there were more performances in countries outside Belgium and that people were more often working together with foreign partner organizations in the framework of co-productions. Flemish festivals and art centres were increasingly active in supporting foreign performance groups by way of contributions to co-productions. The data revealed that the number of foreign producers involved in maintaining the same level of production had quadrupled. In 2000-2001, Flemish organizations collaborated with 131 foreign organizations, but in 2014-2015, that figure was already at 545. Every 6.15 years, the number of co-producers was doubling.

Was that good news? It again confirms the strong international attraction of the Flemish performing arts, also in 2015. It is wonderful that the performing arts sector continues to succeed in mobilizing a broad international network. At the same time, it is also worrying. We namely saw that the internationalization (in terms of opportunities to perform and co-produce) continued to increase during the entire period we were researching, but the increase was particularly strong from 2010 on. This is striking. That was almost precisely the period in which many European countries, in the slipstream of the Lehman Brothers, were making deep cuts to their subsidies and grants to the arts. In 2010 and 2011, there were some minor cuts. Our analyses

showed that these had a negative impact on the purchasing power of Flemish performing companies.⁴ The fact that this was happening at precisely the same moment that internationalization was becoming more extensive was therefore an alarm signal. Was this in response to the economic crisis?

It seems paradoxical: just when policymakers were pulling back in so many countries, international collaboration was in full flight. Could increasing economic pressure be the driving force behind internationalization in organizations and institutes in times of crisis and slashed budgets? We had no figures on the sizes of the co-production budgets, but the increasing numbers of co-productions for each individual production was suggesting that these budgets were seriously declining. That means that co-producers had not been making sharp decisions in times of crisis. On the contrary, producing organizations, festivals and arts centres had cut up their declining budgets in order to try to satisfy the demand for support. This forced makers and companies to engage more and more partners, to the extent that the engagements themselves became ever lighter and flimsier. In short, the international performing arts network became larger, but more vulnerable.

At the 'Public Policy Exchange' conference, I applied those numbers in order to generate a discussion about the idea of 'smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'. How 'sustainable', 'smart' or 'inclusive' is the increasing internationalization of the arts sector? In mathematical terms, one could speak of exponential growth. Can that ever be sustainable?

According to Albert Bartlett (1923-2013), an American physicist who specializes in the study of the exponential function in mathematics and is at the same time also a specialist in population growth, that is impossible. He refers to the idea of 'sustainable growth' as a contradiction in terms, even if that growth is relatively limited. *'Smart growth' destroys the environment. 'Dumb growth' destroys the*

*environment. The only difference is that 'smart growth' does it with good taste. It's like booking passage on the Titanic. Whether you go first-class or steerage, the result is the same.*⁵

A GROWING DISCOMFORT

In the arts sector, Bartlett's insights resonated with an already growing sense of discomfort. This was perhaps not yet reflected in the figures, but the undercurrent was there. Producers and companies in the performing arts confirmed that huge efforts were being required just to maintain the same level of production and output. Also in visual arts and music, the economic pressure has increased.

In the visual arts, discomfort with developments in the marketplace also seemed to be increasing. On the surface, there are positive developments. Since 15 or 20 years, visual arts policy in Flanders and Brussels has received an impetus. Recent years have also seen numerous reports in the press about the explosive growth of the market in visual art, also noting the growth of Brussels as an international hotspot. Globalization of the arts market certainly plays a role here: in principle, it is possible to develop, produce and exhibit your work around the world, in a booming number of museums, presenting organizations, residencies and biennials. But there is a flipside to this coin. Since the financial crisis, project subsidies are under pressure. And the booming market does not compensate. A small number of galleries and museums have developed into mega-institutions with global reach, in the form of branches on other continents. This increase in scale creates an enormous growth that only benefits a limited number of artists. Their growth increases the gap with the majority of artists and with medium and smaller galleries and institutions. Brussels is surfing on that success as a new international hotspot. But under that success lies a growing tension and inequality: is the gap between the haves and the have nots

increasing in the visual arts? It is not because the market is growing, that there are more artists gaining from it. It is just the opposite: for smaller players it all seems to become harder. The socio-economic position of artists is a trending topic. 'Artists at the begging staff,' headlined the newspaper *De Morgen* in 2015.⁶

In music, the situation seemed to be completely different, and yet not so different. There has certainly been no explosive growth in the market. Following a drastic shrinking of global sales of recorded music since the new millennium, 2015-2016 did see new, if small, growth.⁷ That growth has to do with the rise of the digital market, which in the meantime has become responsible for more than half of global income. By then, 60% of that digital income was from streamlining platforms. Here too, one has to ask what advantage this has for the musicians themselves. Apparently, that can vary. In the media, sometimes impressive success stories (about DJs with private jets, for example) have been interspersed with rising attention to the vulnerable socio-economic position of musicians. In short, technological disruptions seem to be increasing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. For some, they have meant a breakthrough, but for most, it means that it is becoming more difficult to earn anything through music. Not only are incomes from streaming very limited, but the technological breakthroughs mean that competition has risen dramatically. Just as in the performing arts, music professionals tell us that they have to fight harder than ever before to achieve the same results, often entailing tedious negotiations about prices and budgets. Incomes are falling, even though the necessary investments are remaining the same. Subsidies or grants for international tours do not always cover actual travel costs. There is a great deal of competition in the international marketplace and it is a constant battle to get attention from the media and attract local audiences.

At the time we were formulating the questions to be investigated by *(Re)framing the International*, evolutions in the marketplace were not the only factors that were causing unrest. What was also worrying, if in a totally different way, was a series of events in international politics and geopolitical evolutions.

The refugee crisis has been dominating the media since 2015. We all saw the images of rows and rows of people trying to penetrate Fortress Europe, from boat refugees to the bodies of children washed up on beaches. We saw the growth and the demolition of The Jungle in Calais. At the same time, in different countries, both in and outside Europe, economic protectionism, conservatism and nationalist populism were on the rise. In 2015, Hungarians re-elected Viktor Orbán as Prime Minister. In Poland, the extreme right-wing Law and Justice party won an absolute majority. In June of 2016, Britons voted for Brexit. On 8 November of that same year, Donald Trump was elected the most powerful man on Earth, along with his promise to build a wall between the United States and Mexico.

For the arts sector, this is no far-from-my-bed story. Some of these regimes took whole series of steps that also affected our sector. Not only were there budget cuts to the arts, but these were sometimes drastic. At the same time, border controls were sharpened and protectionist economic measures taken that definitely have had a concrete effect on everyday professional practice. Consider, for example, the visa problems some Belgian bands had when trying to perform in the United States. Think of the cancellation of British cities as potential European Cultural Capitals as a premonition of the increasing difficulties of working together with the United Kingdom after Brexit. Consider the extreme reduction in subsidies for the Malta Festival in Poznań because they had worked with Oliver Frlić, a Croatian director who was supposed to have insulted

Catholicism. Or, in Belgium, remember the political raid on Globe Aroma, an arts centre working with refugees, in search of artists and others 'without papers'. At the same time, diverse artists and intellectuals from the Middle East and North Africa, despite invitations from Belgian arts institutes and organizations, were not allowed into the country, or were subject to severe restrictions.

International mobility in the arts is no longer what it used to be. The ideology or connection between all the disparate incidents or measures has never or has rarely been consistently made explicit, at least not by the politicians. Some observers would argue that this is precisely characteristic of the 'de-politicization' of politics: the fact that these kinds of measures are being presented as separate micro-management solutions, and not the manifestation of a broader ideological agenda. In the art world, just as in other 'soft' sectors, people looked on with bewilderment and concern at the sometimes shamelessly brutal mixture of hatred of the arts, protectionism and exclusive nationalism, which was by now affecting everyday professional practice. Some of the regimes referred to above are called 'illiberal democracies', precisely because a number of freedoms that are self-evident for the very development of the arts – such as freedom of expression, taking (international) mobility for granted, or the idea of an open society – are no longer guaranteed. Even in our own country, there is growing awareness that access to mobility is in fact a privilege. The raid on Globe Aroma was a particularly poignant wake-up call for the institutionalized arts sector in Flanders and Brussels.

The age of innocence is over concerning international mobility, even for us here in Europe, said Taru Elfving, the Finnish curator and author, at a symposium on international residencies (*Resonating Spaces*, LUCA, Brussels) in early 2017.⁸ Elfving first spoke about cultural policies, expressing her concern about the shifting sets of values with which

the European Union is linking its investments in international mobility. In the previous European Union Culture Programme (until 2013), mobility was still seen as a means of stimulating intercultural exchange. In the 'Creative Europe' programme that is in effect today, it is primarily about data-supported economic impact. Precisely because of turbulent societal shifts, according to Elfving, we perhaps need to reach back to some of the values adhered to in the earlier Culture Programme. Since then, there have already been some indications that European policy priorities have been shifting. But what concerns us here was Elfving's plea towards the arts sector to look critically in the mirror. It is one thing to refer to public and civic values in our advocacy for more European funding for the arts. Most of all, she urged us to look very critically from the perspective of that set of values at our own mobility in the arts. Rapidly shifting societal realities make this even more urgent:

*All modes of cultural exchange and artistic explorations are entangled in the complex mesh of geopolitical and economic power relations. They always have been, yet today it is not just naive but frankly irresponsible to ignore that. What does it mean to be mobile at a time of enforced migrations, reinforced borders, growing xenophobia, escalating climate crisis, and mass extinctions?*⁹

With this statement, Elfving was certainly not implying that we should stop working internationally, but that we need to come up with different and better explanations for why working internationally is important, and be critical towards the conditions within which we do it. We need to do this not only for the institutions that subsidize our work, but most of all in front of our own mirrors:

[We] need to reflect more closely on the terms of our travel today: Who has access to global circulation? How and what processes of value production does it take part in? Who and what do travel and, for example, 'networking'

*actually serve? What is the cost of being on the move – ecologically, socially, personally, intellectually? When and how can travel be considered sustainable?*¹⁰

As for that ‘innocence’ that Elfving referred to: we still had that in 2010, when we were working on *Joining the Dots* (2011), and on earlier reflections on internationalization. Why is working internationally important? What do artists, audiences or society gain from it? What makes working internationally so meaningful? That was not something that we had focused much attention on in the past, in our earlier investigations. The introduction to *Joining the Dots* in fact spoke volumes. The text, signed by five institutes supporting the arts (*kunstensteunpunten*) and two arts funds, began as follows:

*Working internationally in the arts should not be an issue. In a globalizing society, it has become unthinkable for artists, authors, organizations, curators, programmers or critics to build a career without regularly traveling to or working in a different country. It gives oxygen to creation, generates intercultural encounters and raises both the quality standards and the social engagement of the work. It is also a question of economic necessity. In order to guarantee continuity to the practices of artists and organizations, the biotope beneath the church steeples of Flanders is simply too small.*¹¹

Today, doesn’t this sound like a rather other-worldly echo from a bygone age? At the time, we were talking only very briefly about the value and meaning of working internationally. We raised it in introductions: that in the arts, working internationally was very important, for economic reasons, for exchanges with diverse audiences, and because of its ‘intrinsic’ importance. Precisely how that worked, intrinsically – and/or under which conditions we realized that objective – that was something that we did not feel the

ambition to describe more precisely, or to think critically about.¹²

The main point we wanted to stress back in 2011 was that our international démarches needed government support, and that clearly without the arts being instrumentalized for economic, diplomatic or touristic purposes. In this introduction to *Joining the Dots*, it only took four paragraphs before we requested the necessary financial support from the Flemish Community: *There will be few countries that can present the same data. At the same time, it is a very pertinent question just what the various levels in policy and in artistic practices can dynamize the international dimension of artistic practice.* A little farther along in the publication was an extensive 'building blocks plan' for an ambitious and sustainable international cultural policy.

POLICY HESITATIONS

What have the policy developments in Flanders entailed during recent years? One cannot say that nothing has happened in terms of policies over the last decade. In their respective policy statements, the three successive ministers of culture, Bert Anciaux (SP.A, 1999-2002 and 2004-2009), Joke Schauvliege (CD&V, 2009-2014) and Sven Gatz (Open VLD, 2014-2019) did indeed devote attention to internationalization in the arts, and in terms of a number of issues, they also took specific steps. Roughly described, for the last 20 years, the principal has been to 'follow the actor'. Arts policy in Flanders supports the sector in its ambitions to internationalize. For organizations with long-term funding, their international budgets are part of their general grants, and that makes these organizations very flexible in their international activities. This system of so-called 'envelope funding' is one specific asset which makes the Flemish Arts Parliament Act such an effective tool in supporting the internationalization of subsidized arts organizations.

There has also been a complementary set of supporting instruments that has been expanded over the last few years. Consequently, the most recent revision of the Arts Parliament Act (2013) included a few (export-oriented) innovations, for instance a once-in-a-lifetime grant to support the international 'breakthrough' of artists. And in 2016 and 2017, there was also a modest budget increase for the grants for foreign presentations, after 2010 and the years that followed saw such a strong backslide.¹³ Moreover, in recent years, we also see that other policy domains of the Flemish Community (Foreign Policy, Tourism) are once again looking at culture, but it does not always seem aligned to a generally coordinated Flemish strategy.

In general, what Guy Gypens (Kaaithheater) in 2006 referred to as 'policy hesitations': *Budgetary restrictions certainly play a role here, but I do not have the impression that in terms of policy, the importance of working internationally is being endorsed.*¹⁴ That is what it sounded like in 2006, and perhaps there has been something to that, right through to today. During the past legislative sessions, there have indeed been statements of policy at the beginning of each legislative period, and cautious steps taken, but it has been a long time since a minister of Culture – or by extension a Flemish government – has really chosen for internationalization of the arts as a strategic policy spearhead, and translated this into ambitious and concrete initiatives.

In short, over the last 15 years, policy has struggled with a rather cautious attitude towards international policy for the arts. How does this relate to the story the arts sector has been telling about itself? Has it become more difficult to explain to policymakers and other interested parties why investing in the internationalization of the arts is important or necessary? Our policy recommendations and sometimes dogmatic statements about the importance of working internationally have been unable to prevent the fact that there have been heavy budget cuts. At the same

time, discomfort has increased in the system. Various developments in society, both economic and geopolitical, are pressing for thorough self-reflection about the value and the meaning of working at the international level. These are all arguments that explain why, here in *(Re)framing the International*, we have tackled the issue differently than we did ten years ago. This time, we do not want to simply take the value and the meaning of working internationally for granted, passing it over in order to leap straight onto policy and budget recommendations. It has been necessary to take a step back. To begin, let us have a look at the figures.

LESSONS FROM THE STATISTICS

A SERIES OF DATA EXPLORATIONS

The debate about the arts and policymaking is seeing an increasing demand for 'figures' and facts. Underlying that demand are different objectives and desires. Policymakers say that they want to shape their political and ideological decisions around an objective framework. Advocates want to demonstrate to stakeholders that the work done by those they represent is valuable and has impact. For their parts, artists, professionals and organizations want to know where they can go with their work, or gain a better perspective of their place in a wider field (benchmarking).

As a supporting organization, we want to help this diversity of players to realize their ambitions and dreams. At the same time, we also want to use the data to stimulate self-reflection and generate dialogue amongst those players.¹⁵ In recent years, we at Flanders Arts Institute have done this in the context of a range of different topics. October 2018 saw the publication of *Cijferboek Kunsten 2018*, a reader containing data-based analyses about the socio-economic position of artists, about the geographical dissemination of what is on offer in Flanders and in Brussels, about financial and economic issues, and also about the international dimension of the arts in Flanders and Brussels. In the context of *(Re)framing the International*, over the last two years, Flanders Arts Institute has undertaken a series of data explorations about working internationally in the arts. We wanted to illuminate several different aspects: export and market effects, of course, but also import, co-production, residencies and the development of career trajectories.

What have we learned from this? At the start of the project, we quickly realized that there was in fact not that much empirical material available to be able to make pertinent statements about the internationalization of the arts from Flanders and Brussels. We did have some material concerning the performing arts, as mentioned above, but there were fewer figures on visual art and music. What analyses were available were mostly about export or government funding. Other, less visible aspects of working internationally (prospecting, residences or import, for example) were underexposed.

With *(Re)framing the International*, we wanted to fill in some of the lacuna. The 'we' I refer to are primarily our colleagues at Flanders Arts Institute, Tom Ruetten (head of information management) and Simon Leenknegt (researcher). With an admirable mix of earnestness and humour, with substantive and methodological expertise, with inspiration and with tenacity, they set up a series of innovative data experiments. Their mission was to flush out what could be learned from existing sets of data about the international dimension of artistic practices in Flanders and Brussels.

Although good analyses were lacking, there were nonetheless a number of data sets available, which had never been explored or researched. For these data explorations, Simon and Tom scoured our own databases (on performance art productions and the curricula vitae of visual artists), as well as the data resources of our partner organizations (Publiq's event database, or the data gathered by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media). Last but not least, a remarkable data experiment with Internet platforms (Facebook, Bandsintown, Songkick, Setlist.fm) led to a collation of data with information about live music by Belgian bands in other countries.¹⁶

These data explorations were just a first step in empirically underpinning a number of assumptions about 'how we are doing in other countries'. It is still difficult

to draw concrete conclusions about long-term evolutions, but a number of contours and relationships have indeed now been charted for the first time. This primarily concerned an initial mapping of the international market for music, the performing arts and visual arts, and how artists and organizations from Flanders and Brussels are orienting themselves in this market. Fully aware that these are only the first pieces of the puzzle of a much larger picture, I have drawn up a number of lessons that can be drawn from these sector analyses. What developments are we seeing in international practice? Where are our artists active? What diverse models of working can we distinguish? Do these figures indicate that we are witnessing increased pressure on the work of artists, theatre makers and musicians? And if so, how are they handling them?

THE ONLY WAY USED TO BE UP

Where the performing arts are concerned, the years 2000 to 2016 saw a remarkable shift in the area of international distribution and coproduction. The number of performances in other countries increased considerably. Where these performances took place also changed. Around the new millennium, the Netherlands were our most significant other country. At the beginning of the 2000-2001 season, half of the Flemish performances in other countries took place in the Netherlands. Today, that is just a quarter. The number of countries where performances take place has also seen significant expansion. In 2000-2001, there were Flemish performances in 28 different countries. Fifteen years later, there were twice as many.

We have already indicated that this stronger international distribution is related to the internationalization of co-productions. *The increased number of productions with at least one foreign partner is driving the growth in the number of performances in other countries and the greater diversity of countries in which this distribution is*

*being realized.*¹⁷ Underlying that internationalization and globalization were diverse ways of working. Once upon a time in the performing arts, the 'logic of the season' dominated: you created one production for each season and went on tour with that production. So a single production then toured in that particular season. If it was successful, it was difficult to perform it again, often because no account had been taken of that possibility in the planning. There are still groups that work this way. They primarily perform in our own country and sometimes in the Netherlands (but that has become difficult).

The figures revealed that groups and production houses that are focused on the international market operate according to a completely different working model. Forty percent of all productions in our database are international co-productions. At the same time, we also see that the duration of a production has sometimes been significantly extended. How does that work? As we indicated above, performing arts companies and production houses increasingly engage co-producing organizations in order to develop their stage productions. Festivals and art centres that 'co-produce' not only offer advance financial contributions to the production. They are also the circuit for an initial series of performances. That series is often short, but ideally they function as a showcase for other programmers who – if they like what they see – will book the production for the next season, or the season after that. In this way, successful productions can sometimes be seen for ten years or even longer. Productions that are less well received are of course destined for shorter lives. For internationally oriented companies, it is consequently a financial safety net to have a successful production in the repertoire: that limits the risk in case a new production fails to succeed, and there are always new places where you have not yet performed.¹⁸

In the introduction above, we indicated that this way of working is subject to increasing pressure. That was

an important point of focus during a round table discussion which we organized, where we shared the relevant data with the stage artists and organizations.¹⁹ One recurrent lament is that festivals and stage venues are increasingly hard negotiators, about virtually everything imaginable. Veerle Kerkhoven (Bronks) provided a list of absurd requests: *'Could you do three performances for the price of one?' Or: 'Couldn't you come and perform for free, because it is very beautiful here? See it as a holiday.'* Co-production fees are falling, even being referred to as 'ridiculously low'. Shows are booked optionally, and cancelled when the ticket sales are disappointing. This way, economic risks are placed with the artists. At the same time that more exclusivity is being demanded for geographic areas. Related activities, such as workshops and artist talks are also being required more and more. That is of course valuable for deepening the relationship with audiences, but it of course also has an impact on costs. There are several factors that decrease trust in international relations. Foreign partners pull out of engagements because of budget cuts, or programmer 'friends' are forced to leave their positions... This all makes it necessary to mobilize growing networks of potential partners. To an increasing degree, people are looking beyond Europe, but – as Quentin Legrand (Peeping Tom) indicated – there are once again very specific risks involved. In addition to the cultural barriers, you are working with partners whom you do not know as well, which carries risks of its own. Mutual trust is something that grows in time. Building this trust becomes certainly when distances, language barriers and cultural differences become greater.

As we began *(Re)framing the International*, we asked ourselves if the growth could in fact continue. Our updated figures from 2017 reveal to us that this is indeed no longer the case. Since the 2015-2016 season, the number of foreign partners involved with Flemish productions decreased. With that, so too did the new creations and the numbers

of performances. 'The only way is up' is no longer true. The continued growth in the international circuit for production and distribution, which began in the 1980s, appears to be behind us.

HAVE LOVE, WILL TRAVEL

Internationalization is of crucial importance for the music sector in Flanders and Brussels. Despite that, to date, there were major gaps in our knowledge about musicians working at the international level. There were figures covering recorded music, but no good analyses concerning the live circuit.²⁰ But in actual fact, there is plenty of information out there! Many bands, musicians, managers and stage venues promote themselves through their websites, where fans can find information about concerts in their areas by bands they like. Based on this information, our colleagues succeeded in setting up a data base from scratch, including 24,100 live concerts and DJ sets by Belgian artists (primarily pop and rock) in the period from 2013 to 2017. The result was 'Have Love, Will Travel', and that analysis has provided us with a number of insights.²¹

We now had a perspective into what the most important markets are for Belgian bands. Performances took place in no fewer than 109 countries (50 countries more than the performing arts). Eighty-four percent of those performances were in Europe, and 11% in North America. The countries that hosted the most performances were the Netherlands (5,147), France (4,851), Germany (3,481), the United States (2,177) and the United Kingdom (1,933). It was primarily electronic acts and DJs who performed outside Europe (no doubt in part because they often perform solo).

How many, and which musicians played in other countries? We saw that there were a great many Belgian bands playing in other countries, but most of these were incidental performances. Half of the Belgian bands appearing

in other countries played four foreign concerts over a period of four years. Three percent of the bands had more than 100 non-Belgian concerts to their credit. Is extensive touring a good thing? Our respondents also indicated that it is only partly an indicator of success. It depends on precisely where and when you are performing.

In particular, I found the top ten a real eye-opener. There, you could see not only the usual suspects, such as Dimitri Vegas & Like Mike, Selah Sue or Triggerfinger, but also niche acts, including Aborted and Evil Invaders. These were names that even many diehard music aficionados had never heard of (except maybe for the metalheads). Nonetheless, Aborted is one of the three Belgian bands that is most active in other countries, and that story has been ongoing ever since the 1990s.

There were a great many different narratives lurking behind the acts in the top ten. What then is the story behind successful music acts? In order to reveal what the figures were not explicitly saying, our music colleagues went to talk with managers and musicians. A number of case studies published on blog.kunsten.be revealed diverse working methods and brought some clarity to what the success factors are that make a difference in an international breakthrough.²²

Oscar and the Wolf, Balthazar and Selah Sue all have stories that read like prototypical growth stories, from 'zero to hero': more shows, larger venues, bigger audiences, larger crews, new markets (that means countries), often one at a time. What makes such a story possible? In addition to that proverbial artistic *je ne sais quoi*, there was decidedly the issue of personal sacrifice (a necessary condition) and a solid network of managers, labels and agents (connectors) who together create a certain kind of 'momentum'. Each and every step in that growth story requires a new investment. As manager Christian Pierre (Musickness) said, compared with the 1990s, for example, the industry

itself is investing considerably less.²³ What was repeatedly underscored was the importance of financial support.

With more mainstream and pop-oriented acts like these, breakthroughs take place from the inside out. You build up an audience in your own country, and then start thinking about the wider market, by way of an international breakthrough. Within specific niches, the local fan base is sometimes thin, but they nonetheless make up part of globally connected communities. We see this with metal acts such as Aborted, for example, but also in electronic niches and jazz, where personal connections between musicians are what primarily makes international mobility possible (alongside the above-mentioned inside-out approach).

THE VISUAL ARTIST AS TRAVELLER

'A Portrait of the Artist as a Traveller' charted the (international) distribution of solo presentations and residencies by and of several hundred visual artists from Flanders and Brussels. To compile it, we used figures from the cv database that Flanders Arts Institute publishes on its online *Who's Who*.²⁴ In the period from 2005 to 2016, about 60% of solo presentations took place in Belgium, a third in other European countries, primarily our neighbour countries of the Netherlands, France and Germany. Solo exhibitions outside of Europe were more limited, at 7 to 8%. In the last ten years, there have been no striking evolutions towards greater 'internationalization' or 'globalization'. The same thing is true for residencies. Indeed, throughout these years, relatively speaking, visual artists are reporting more residencies in their own country. Artist residencies in Flanders and Brussels have increased during this time. Could it be that working internationally has become less necessary? Maybe artists have been primarily in need of any residence location, and that does not necessarily have to be in a different country. This is something that the figures alone cannot answer.

The statistics do in fact embrace a different, interesting lead that can possibly say something about the shifting needs of visual artists. Working internationally (with solo exhibitions and residencies) turned out to be age related: people in their 30s worked more internationally than those in their 20s. That might mean that they are more ready for that at that point in their careers. But it could also mean that they only get the opportunity at that age, because it takes time to build up the necessary capital (constructing the networks and symbolic capital needed to generate the required means). Perhaps rising costs and subsidy cutbacks for individual artists and art institutes around the world are playing a role. Artists are increasingly expected to find their own financing, through grants or financial support from galleries or sponsors. This might be easier in a further stage of a career.

'De Vlaamse kunstmarkt: nationaal, internationaal en mondiaal' ('The Flemish Art Market: National, International and Worldwide') encompasses representation of artists from Flanders and Brussels through gallery promotions in Belgium and other countries.²⁵ It turns out that fully half of these artists are working without gallery representation at all, and that includes artists with international careers. This is sometimes a conscious choice not to work with a gallery, and sometimes their work is simply less saleable or market oriented. Of those artists who do have (one or more) galleries to promote them, half work with galleries based in Belgium, followed by galleries in Germany, the Netherlands, France and the United States, respectively. About 7% of those artists who do have them, their galleries are based in Asia, South America or Africa. A portion of those galleries have a 'worldwide' scope (participating in art fairs on different continents).

It is of course a positive thing that a portion of visual artists from Flanders are with galleries that have strong in-

ternational networks. But our international research also revealed the underside of recent developments in the art market: the growing power of a handful of mega-galleries that are driving up prices, from which only a tiny minority of artists can benefit. This makes it extremely difficult for the mid-sized and smaller galleries who represent the overwhelming majority of artists.

TRENDING COUNTRIES

'Trending Countries', finally, was a data experiment with a playful approach, but it came to a serious yet unexpected conclusion. Studies about internationalization are usually about export. But we also wanted to be able to say something about 'international' concerts, exhibitions or performances here at home, in Flanders and Brussels. To do this, we made use of the information provided by www.uit-invlaanderen.be, a large events database that publishes the whole range of cultural events in Flanders and Brussels for fans and followers.

Would it be possible to separate the international or non-Belgian offer from this? It turned out not to be so simple. The database obviously does not provide any 'international' label or category. It was not long before we were scratching our heads. It turned out to be impossible to separate artists or their work into 'national' boxes. What does one do with a collaboration between dancers from Kinshasa and a choreographer with Polish-Canadian roots who lives and works in Brussels, especially when that collaboration is made possible by a Flemish art house in Brussels? A Brussels-based band turns out to be made up of musicians from Mauritania, Ghana, France, Mali and Algeria. Their album referred to North African history, and they toured with an American group.

Artistic creations in various disciplines are often combined efforts by people and institutions with diverse (national) backgrounds. We consequently decided to take

another tack. Instead of trying to categorize exhibitions or concerts via mutually exclusive national categories, we decided to count which countries and cities were referred to in the respective introductory texts. In this way, we would perhaps not be charting 'import', but we would be able to say something about the international dimension or horizon of the diverse artistic input on offer here in Flanders and Brussels.

What have we learned? To begin with, we see that what we have to offer here equally tends to be oriented to our neighbouring countries. Most of the mentions referred to the Netherlands, France, Germany and the UK. The orientation is no doubt also partly global: in terms of concerts, performances and exhibitions, more than 150 different countries were involved or at least referred to. It was striking that Turkey was the country most commonly referred to in Ghent, that Morocco appeared most often in Antwerp, and Congo primarily in Brussels. Events tended to relate to the migrant backgrounds of local communities.

A final eye-opener concerned the connection between the mention of specific countries and specific genres. For concerts, performances and exhibitions, there was always a single genre in which non-Western countries were mentioned significantly more often. In the case of exhibitions, this was photography. With performances, it was dance, and for concerts, that genre was folk and world music. *Certainly this last is an indication of the latent danger of stereotyping: although it is a practical and widely-used label, what the events databank reveals is that it can also be a tenacious label stuck on to any non-Western music, and it gets in the way of identification with other genres – such as Brazilian bossa nova or jazz.*²⁶

THE FLAG VERSUS THE SUBSTANCE

In short, for each of the different sectors, we began to see the contours of our 'export'. We now know what the

most prevalent countries are (including Belgium itself), sometimes right down to the level of the different cities and municipalities. In all the disciplines covered, 'export' is still strongly aimed at our neighbouring countries. But there are nuances – there are in fact large differences, and not just between the disciplines, but also within the disciplines.

In all the sectors, we saw a diversity of possible working models and trajectories. We saw that the international dimension of careers could take place according to very different patterns. Some bands, companies or visual artists start out by developing a local base or a local practice, then take that step to another country. Think, for example, of the ambitions of many Belgian bands that Flanders Arts Institute takes with them to various showcases, or a breakthrough performance by a Flemish theatre maker that opens the doors to other countries. Consider Belgian artists represented at the major biennial exhibitions. There are also trajectories that do not follow these prototypes. Niche acts can go global without mainstream media attention in their own country, via extensive touring and digital communities. Sometimes the pattern even goes from the outside in. Amenra is a good example of a band that has for years been making its way outside Belgium, but has only recently broken through for larger audiences, beyond the post-metal niche, in their own country.²⁷ That also seems to be the case for contemporary dance in Flanders since the 1980s, whose recognition at home was also fueled by success in other countries.

In this way, our stereotyped thinking about internationalization was seriously put to the test as we worked on these figures. Our hypotheses were still strongly based on the idea that Flemish or Belgian artists wanted to go to other countries. And that is of course true for many of them. But for other practices, 'breaking out of your home country' is a kind of metaphor that is not very relevant. Many creators first build a reputation in a foreign country, to later

(or maybe never) break through at home. Moreover, much work is difficult to categorize in terms of national identity. Exactly how 'Flemish' are stage productions in which artists of various nationalities take part? Or how 'Flemish' are our music ensembles, whose members are of different nationalities? How 'Flemish' are stage productions in which both the artists and the co-producers sometimes come from ten different countries? Indeed, how many artists of foreign or mixed origin are active here in Flanders and Brussels?

Does the national flag still cover the substance? This might give us reason enough to take a critical look at our use of language and the categories that we employ. 'International' exchange, you might say, is about exchange between 'countries', about import and export. But the relationships that we are talking about are far more complex. The 'Trending Countries' research project made that very clear: we really tried, but we were no longer able to put makers into national boxes.

At the same time, we continue to compile databases based on nationality. Does that still make sense? To give another example, we even wanted to chart Flemish-Dutch exchange during an encounter between Flemish and Dutch performing arts programmers during the 2016 Theatre Festival. To do that, we compared our data with that of our Dutch partner and equivalent organization, DutchCulture. For 10%, our respective sets of data overlap. That means that there were rather a lot of makers whom we considered Flemish, but whom they considered Dutch. What did the theatre makers themselves think or identify with? We never ask, but it might as well be both, or neither.

Perhaps we have to have the courage to accept that transnational complexity and even embrace it. Maybe we should sooner speak of a 'transnational space' for the production and presentation of music, visual and performing arts. In artistic processes, the importance of national borders is generally relative. For a co-production within that

space, it makes no difference what country someone comes from. What matters is what you produce. In a creative process, what counts is what you have to offer in terms of skills and perspectives. 'It's not where you're from, it's where you're at.'

Despite that, in practice, national structures and frameworks are sometimes very present factors. Borders can involve serious administrative worries. It has still sometimes proved necessary to justify government interventions and grants. We need only think of the name and the mission of our own organization ('Flanders Arts Institute'), or of comparable institutes and export agencies in other countries. In any case, national identity is less than ever before a basis for saying something about who artists are or what their work means.

We can deal with this pragmatically. We know artists who have been promoted or supported by Flemish, French-speaking and Dutch national institutes (as if they were one of them). But for a significant number of artists, this national framing of policy produces decidedly concrete problems.

SIX FRICTIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The figures are interesting because they give an empirical basis for our reflections about working internationally in the arts. At the same time, they are only a single piece in a larger puzzle. The figures do suggest that working internationally is important in professional practice in music, visual and performing arts. But it is difficult to capture that importance in figures or statistics. It is not only what we export that comes into view. Moreover, it proved impossible to quantify the value of working internationally. 'More' is not necessarily always 'better'. This was confirmed by diverse musicians and managers. It is not about how much you play, but where you play, for whom and at what moment. From the figures concerning the performing arts, we once again learned that growth can be a symptom of increased negative pressure.

Where value and meaning are concerned, as well as the increasing pressure, we learned a lot from the interviews and text assignments for the three issues of our magazine, as well as from the focus groups, workshops and symposia that we have organized since December of 2016. Most of all, we learned from all the conversations that Flanders Arts Institute staff had on an everyday basis with people throughout the sector. Certain aspects kept cropping up. Obviously, these concerned economic and organizational issues. But it was also often about inspiration and the enrichment that working at an international level brings with it. It was about the interaction with audiences and with local scenes, about the human side of the business, about its ecological impact and how we should be dealing with that. For every one of these concerns, working internationally proved to bring meaningful profit and advantage.

At the same time, all of these factors added to the pressures. Working at an international level is encompassed by a number of frictions and contradictions.

INEQUALITY IN A GROWING MARKET

Our research confirms that the financial aspect is very important where working internationally in the arts is concerned. For some, it might even be a financial goal, and there are very few artists or musicians who become rich through their work. We sometimes see newspaper articles about a DJ who scours the seas in a private jet, or a singer-songwriter with a villa in Venice Beach, but for most, not only their achievements, but also their values lie elsewhere. Money is not the objective, but a means of making something else possible. You create something and you want it to be seen or heard.

However that may be, you inevitably arrive at the conclusion that working internationally requires financial investment. The fact that a market is growing does not necessarily mean that more artists are getting opportunities. That reality presents itself in the performance arts, in the visual arts, and in music. In music, in recent years the numbers of sales of recorded music have increased. In principle, technological developments should open possibilities for reaching a global market. But for the artists, it actually means that their incomes are under threat and competition is on the increase. In a changing market like this, a small grant or subsidy can make all the difference. Our own data tells us that government support for musicians to tour in other countries has radically decreased since 2006, and has only been jacked back up in the last few years.²⁸ All of this means that it is inevitably the artists themselves, or their friends and families, who are making that investment.

In the visual arts, behind the would-be optimism of a booming art market, there looms a huge gap 'between a relatively small number of mega-galleries and top artists

who work with an increasing group of (super-rich) collectors around the world, and the overwhelming majority of artists and medium or small galleries that do work internationally, but are struggling financially'.²⁹ In the performing arts as well, we see a similar phenomenon. Here, a 'transnational system' has evolved for the production and presentation of theatre, music theatre and dance. Within that system, the position of the artists is extremely fragile.

FREEDOM AND FRENZY

What effect does all this have on the artists? In 'Freedom and Frenzy', his keynote speech at the inaugural (Re)framing conference, curator Ash Bulayev used examples from artists with whom he has worked, including Maria Hassabi en Trajal Harral:

*Maria Hassabi and Trajal Harrell are both artists who up until recently were based in New York City, both working within contemporary dance practice. In the past few years, both have chosen to leave New York and relocate to Europe. It was a decision that was not taken lightly, for in Maria's case, New York had been her home and community for over 20 years. Right now, both Maria and Trajal are essentially art nomads, calling Belgium, France, Greece and the US their temporary bases. Both artists are objectively successful in their field, with major commissions and presentations all over the world. Neither has any structural funding from any of the above countries, nor any institutional association. They are not attached or supported by any theatre or production house for any extended period of time, and their production model is spread across multiple continents, with a patchwork (a very successful one indeed) of co-productions, commissions, residencies, and private and public funding. If described to an outsider, their professional lives and tempo seem truly manic, illustrating a freelance artist's lifestyle.*³⁰

Working as a freelance artist requires personal sacrifices. The work pressure can be overwhelming, and connections with family and social environments become looser. There is a real risk of 'burning up'. We heard stories of occupational burnout and broken marriages. From 'Does Passion Pay Off?', a survey about the socio-economic position of artists, we learned that many are considering stopping.³¹ We mentioned above that the metal band Aborted has already been working for 20 years and 'suddenly' emerged as one of Belgium's most successful bands in other countries. In truth, there was only one member of the band, frontman Sven de Caluwé, who was there during all that time. During those 20 years, 25 others had come and gone. On average, one band member rotated every year.

'If you are not incredibly motivated, don't even try.' That was what one music manager told us during an interview.³² That is true not just for the have-nots, but also for the have-a-lots. As the well-known DJ duo Dimitri Vegas and Like Mike phrased it on the front page of the *De Morgen* newspaper, from the private jet that was flying them to four different European cities on a festive Saturday night: *We can't keep this up another ten years.*³³

What in fact does this transnational system for production and distribution demand of the artists? In an interview for the second issue of the *re/framing* magazine, artist Sarah Vanhee used a striking metaphor of the artist as a 'cut-out figure', a paper doll:

I am convinced that artists have fobbed off their pioneering, leadership role into what I would call negative internationalization. You are presumed to be exceedingly flexible, preferably young, always ready to travel, with no family and not too many commitments. In short, you have to cultivate the illusion that you can cut all your connections, that at any moment you can cut yourself off and become a totally cut-out figurine. It is being sold as an

attitude of boundless freedom, but what is behind it is an ideologically motivated demand for ultimate flexibility, one that makes your existence especially vulnerable and precarious. (...)

*I think it makes us incredibly weaker, because it turns us into a kind of pulled-apart, detached cosmopolitans. Our travelling is not so very different from that of an economic migrant who is forced to travel out of necessity, in our case the economic need to be someplace. It makes everything very fleeting and temporary. It detaches us from our own environment, given that it is difficult to maintain friendships and relationships in the places where we live. And that is also not possible in those other places we travel to. Internationalization does allow for the expansion of relationships, for making friends and sharing a discourse across borders, but at the same time, it conceals a great danger for the political dimension of art and of being an artists.'*³⁴

INSPIRATION AND THE GRIND

Aside from the economic aspect, for artists, it is simply good to travel, to be invited, to see new places, meet new people and create works together – in short, build experiences that enrich you both personally and professionally. It brings prestige and recognition as an artist, which have a highly motivational effect and reinforce your position in the marketplace. Travel is important for artistic development, research and prospecting. It feeds and nourishes the work and provides inspiration. As Jeroen Peeters and Taru Elfving indicated in their respective contributions to *(Re) framing the International*, working internationally inherently carries the promise of transformation 'beyond tourism and the fleeting consumption of new experiences.'

³⁵

But that bright coin has its dark side. It is the specific way that the market is organized today that imposes the increasing pressures on the artists. In the beginning, travel-

ling is attractive and fun, but at a given moment, and certainly under these conditions, that novelty is worn off and it becomes a grind. Life on the road... The time and space that are essential for enrichment, depth and transformation are often simply not there. Instead, there are hectic and exhausting tour schedules, from the van to the venue, and nowhere in between. In the visual arts as well, too little time is left for the production processes that underlie exhibitions, both in terms of research and development and evaluating the resulting work.

Production processes have put the promise of personal and professional development that should be inherent to professional travel under threat. But there are also issues, related to the formats or methods of working that are directly aimed towards artistic and professional development. As Jeroen Peeters phrases it:

*Some contexts focus on exchange, or research (festivals, congresses, laboratories, workshops, summer academies, etc.), but here too, there is the issue of the conditions. Is there enough time and space, tranquillity and openness at hand to allow true encounters (intended or otherwise)? The suspicion inherent here does not go well with the speed of travel today and the philosophy of efficiency that have taken hold in the art world.*³⁶

In addition, strictly speaking, in order to achieve what residencies are meant to accomplish, which is the possibility of temporarily withdrawing in order to work without worry or too many distractions, it should not necessarily be essential to travel to different countries. *In practice, producing in residencies regularly serves as an economic safety net for artists who work in precarious circumstances.*³⁷

GEOGRAPHY OR DEMOGRAPHY?

What Sarah Vanhee was suggesting above went further than the pressure on artists. She indicated that

the hyper-mobility in the arts also touched the 'political dimension' of being an artist. In part, that has to do with their relationships to their audiences, to the public. *I have discovered that my work can take place within the phenomena of arts centres and theatres that are internationally interconnected. But that also means that I can be on stage in Brussels, then Timisoara, and Tallinn, and that every time, I am standing before a kind of same, predominantly 'bobo' audience. The geographical location does not make much difference. It is not about geography, but about demographics, about the question of which population groups you can or cannot appeal to. In that sense, I find that the dimension of the 'international' is always filled in too generically.*³⁸ Sarah Vanhee points out that participation goes far deeper than audience numbers. It is also about diversity. That is extremely important for working internationally, and for its effects. Unlike what is often being claimed, travelling does not automatically mean that you reach different audiences.

At this point, the intentions on the parts of artists and institutes are generally benign. Compared with the past, requests for artist talks, workshops, participation in debates and lectures, and for other formats that frame artistic presentations and expand relations with audiences, continue to increase. Artists and groups indicate that working together with initiatives of this kind is expected, but there is often no budget for it. The perverse aspect of this sort of request or even demand is that it sometimes constitutes part of the financial negotiations.

Taking the time and space for meaningful exchange, whereby artists are not only travelling around the world with their work, but are also able to learn from the environments into which they arrive: for this as well, in the way the system works today, there is very little of that time and that space available. In the words of artist Hans Bryssinck:

*I often ask myself what in fact is the relevance of art from Flanders for all those places where we are all travelling to? Just thinking about what we want to say in those places is not enough. What is in fact the interaction if you set up a presentation, perform, tear it down and then leave? If you really want to engage in meaningful connections with the places you are travelling to, long-term residencies are fundamental. These days, I will not be an artist in residence for a period of less than three months.*³⁹

Truly engaging with the diversity of a local community means slowing down and becoming more deeply involved. This is the only way that one can achieve meaningful reciprocity with a local environment.

MOBILITY AND PRIVILEGE, ISOLATION AND EXOTICISM

Much of the mobility in the arts today is economically driven. The system forces artists to work internationally. This image of hyper-mobility today describes the situation of many artists in Western Europe. For many other artists, from around the entire globe, the reality is very different. Access to that 'transnational space' for production and presentation in the arts is extremely unequal. Artists do not have equal access to mobility, and this is certainly not only a question of artistic talent. Where someone comes from plays a decisive role.

In April of 2017, audiences were able to follow a debate at the general meeting of IETM (International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts, Munich) in Bucharest, about the possibilities and barriers for international mobility. The line-up of participants included artists from different countries. In addition to Romania, the host country, there were also artists from Moldova, Kazakhstan and Indonesia. That debate did not discuss forced hyper-mobility, but it instead revealed the feeling of isolation that all of these artists shared. They talked about the lack of

financial possibilities, as well as administrative troubles. In the first place, they discussed the loss of identity and the exoticism with which they are confronted whenever they try to work in foreign countries. The artists had the feeling that, in order to gain ground in this primarily 'Western' art system, they had to adapt to stereotyped expectations. As one female theatre maker from Romania reported, the journey becomes a very difficult one unless you are prepared to discuss sex trafficking. She had the feeling that an 'identity' was not something that you 'had', or that you could acquire on your own. It was something that had been imposed on you by an external system of production and presentation, within which you as an artist had to satisfy exotic and stereotypical expectations.

This isolation is consequently not just about economic protectionism or political populism. It also has to do with what is sometimes almost invisible mechanisms of exclusion in everyday practice. In this, geopolitical power relationships, historically evolved inequality, and violent histories all play a role. In June of 2017, the researcher Joachim Ben Yakoub gave a keynote speech about the pitfalls and possibilities in international collaborations between actors from Belgium and the Middle East and North Africa. He argued for an 'extremely urgent update to our understanding of international collaboration'. We sometimes think about the Arab world in stereotypes, but the frontier between 'here' and 'there' can no longer be so easily drawn:

Local and global movements are becoming increasingly interwoven and fundamentally challenge our current understanding of artistic work and international cooperation. World conflicts intensify and break into the safe surroundings of the arts centre and raise questions about the autonomy and responsibility of the arts. How should the arts deal with this rapidly changing conflictual political reality? What at first seems to be none of our business appears under closer inspection to be unfolding on

*our doorstep. Conflicts in this context are not imported, but are reproduced again and again on a local scale all around the world.*⁴⁰

THE GAP BETWEEN THINKING AND DOING

Then there is the ecological issue. Here, there is a disconnect between thinking and doing. On the one hand, there is growing ecological awareness in society. On the other hand, it remains difficult for the arts sector to translate that into ecologically responsible behaviour. This conflict between an increasingly gnawing awareness and being able to translate that into everyday practice kept popping up. 'Although we know that it is not good for the environment, in the end, you go anyway', someone said. How could it be done differently? During a debate about international mobility and music, the moderator apologized for bringing up the question of ecological impact, after a musician and a manager intern had asked how it could possibly be done differently if you were ultimately in the international touring business. Travelling differently and travelling less would quickly result in losses at other levels. This is not only about financial consequences, but also about all the other values and promises that are inherent to working internationally. It is therefore not just about business models. This touches the unspoken core of the artistic system: the 'autonomy' of the artist. Jeroen Peeters tried to unravel this tangled knot:

If we want to limit the warming of the Earth, we need to do things very differently, and do them less, because technological miracle solutions for international mobility are decidedly not close at hand. For today's art sector, this leads to conflict, because research, production and distribution are all tuned to an international marketplace. Moreover, international mobility is supposedly an important driving force for the acquisition of symbolic capital, and this is intimately intertwined with a certain conception of freedom, which holds efficiency, flexibility,

*accessibility and availability in high esteem. The traveling “autonomous” artist is not simply an abstract mascot of this image of mankind. No, international mobility is about ourselves, about the values and experiences that have made us who we are. Saying goodbye to these – as individuals, as artists or as cultural professionals, as a sector, or indeed as a society – is consequently anything but self-evident. In our search for a different, more sustainable practice of international mobility in the arts, how can we think about and engage with the moral conflicts and identity crises that the climate issue imposes on us?*⁴¹

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

A BALANCING EXERCISE

The data, discussions and reflections all shed light on the international space in which the performing arts, music and visual art are being created today. The value and meaning of working internationally in the arts turned out to be multifaceted. It was, but not exclusively, about economic questions and entrepreneurship. Working internationally nourishes artistic and personal development and brings recognition for artists. It leads to meaningful exchanges with audiences, as artists offer new perspectives to societies and communities in different places. Unfortunately, this potential and added value are not always being realized. In music, the performing arts, and the visual arts as well, increasing economic pressure is a serious issue, one that is mortgaging off precisely those seemingly inherent promises.

Working internationally today is surrounded by paradoxes, frictions and contradictions. Economic growth is also bringing greater inequality. A highly competitive system puts people in vulnerable positions and leads to uncertainty, routine and isolation. Even the social added value that is promised by working internationally is not always achieved. Time and space are becoming scarce commodities, which means that it is not easy to come out of the proverbial 'bubble' of the typical art audience. Access to mobility is unfairly distributed. Last but not least is that gnawing of a developing ecological consciousness. If working internationally is economically, intellectually, humanly and/or socially interesting, then it automatically still brings an ecological footprint, and travelling less or travelling differently can mean losses on several different levels: artistic, social and economic.

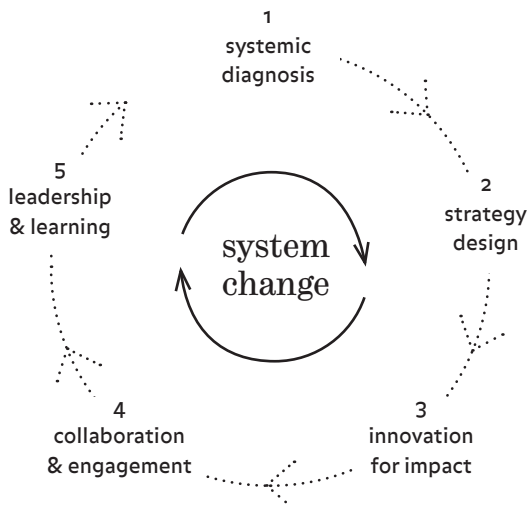
So what can be done? During *(Re)framing the International*, we not only came up with a diagnosis of the problems. We also charted the answers that artists and professionals have been developing to address these problems. We did this during three 'inspiration sessions' in music, visual art and performing arts, respectively, in which people shared their practical experiences. This ultimately led to a series of statements by artists, curators and programmers, published in the third issue of *re/framing the International* magazine. What lines of thought and action can we distinguish from these practices?

Answers from artists and art professionals turned out to be diverse. Dealing with all the various tensions is a complex balancing act that everyone has to figure out for themselves. Some approach them in a very pragmatic way. They have developed survival mechanisms in order to create visibility and opportunities within that competitive international environment. Others undertake more fundamental attempts to bring the various aspects of working internationally into better balance. These pioneers often encounter impenetrable brick walls. Changing ourselves is difficult, but 'upscaling' your personal engagement to the level demanded by your organization or your sector is even more difficult.

Many of our discussion partners still dream of a radical change of paradigm, of a completely new, better balanced and more durable system for international exchange. 'Band-aid solutions might be short-sighted,' said curator Ash Bulayev in response to the precarious circumstances of several successful performance artists with whom he works. 'It is time for a radical re-imagination of the system.' But how do we do that? How indeed can we bring about a paradigm change? What should that other, more balanced ecology for music, visual and performing arts look like? Who should draw that up? And how do you get people to agree?

A WICKED PROBLEM

'Working internationally in the arts is a wicked problem,' sighed moderator and artist Philippine Hoegen en route to the train station after one of our three 'inspiration sessions'. That sigh nonetheless entailed a new perspective, because it is not only in the arts that people are thinking about these wicked problems and how to approach them. Underlying the concept of 'wicked problems' is a broad range of contemporary thought, for which a series of methods has already been developed. Personally, I found the step-by-step plan proposed by The School of System Change a very inspiring example. That model serves as a guide for individuals and organizations that want to develop processes of change for a more sustainable future. The sketch looks like this:



From The School for System Change,
www.forumforthefuture.org/school-system-change

How does one change a system? The first step is to make a system diagnosis. You unravel the system in its entirety. A good diagnosis is not yet enough. The next step, after having reviewed a series of options, is to develop a strategy. Tackling everything all at once never works. An integral approach is desirable, but has a crippling effect. The advice is therefore to decide on a well-considered and specific approach, and then work incrementally. Next comes innovation, designing new practices and new working models. Wicked problems do not simply require the application of existing, technological solutions: they also require change at the values level. Call it a cultural turnaround.

As a fourth step, working together and perseverance are important. You cannot resolve a systematic problem on your own. The turnaround can only ultimately be achieved when there is a diversity of approaches to tackle a difficult problem. And personal resilience is needed: as a pioneer for change, you are in the vanguard, and then you work together with like-minded people who can reinforce you. Finally, what you have learned also has to take on a broader life. Leadership and learning processes are necessary in order to 'upscale' marginal experiments, in order to assume critical mass and truly have an impact on the 'system' in music, in visual art or in the performing arts.

25 TRACKS FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE INTERNATIONAL ARTS PRACTICE

Does looking through this lens have something to offer the new international practice in the arts? It does seem that we have already taken a few relevant steps, but we have not reached that objective of a cultural turnaround. We have completed at least part of the 'system diagnosis' (step 1). And it does indeed prove to be wicked... Our data exercises revealed that even our language and the categories we use get in our way. But there is hope. Artists, experts, observers and theorists have not only revealed the

frictions and contradictions. They have also brought interesting strategic frameworks to the table (step 2). Joachim Ben Yakoub, for example, defined the contours of a 'dream collaboration' with the Middle East and North Africa, beyond all the pitfalls. Taru Elfving spoke of the 'eco-sensitivity' that artists-in-residence can bring to everyone's attention. Sarah Vanhee talked about 'cosmopolitan citizenship'. Jeroen Peeters wrote about 'transition exercises towards a more sustainable mobility'. Pieter de Buysser argued on behalf of an 'emancipated internationalism', while Hilde Teuchies voiced her plea for a 'European commons'. All of that was not just at the level of strategic thinking: these are all frameworks that give sense and direction to a wide range of alternative practical experiments happening today (step 3).

So is that paradigm change already taking place? The bullet lists with relevant practical examples that we compiled at Flanders Arts Institute during the last year and a half is in every sense already a long one. Will the sum total of these attempts ultimately lead to a system change in music and the visual and performing arts? I have no idea. We are not yet ready for steps four and five in the model proposed by the School of System Change. Many experiments are not yet mature. They are widely spread out, as yet unconnected and not yet visible to the broader sector, to policy or to society at large. Three inspiration sessions and three magazines do not yet entail the collective learning environment that is needed to reinforce and upscale the experiments. As a result, for Flanders Arts Institute, there are certainly ample possibilities for a *(Re)framing the International, Part Two*, hopefully in collaboration with like-minded institutions abroad, in order to have more impact. After all, by definition we are dealing with transnational issues here, and many of these responses are connecting the local with the international.

In the meantime, it can be useful to take a closer look at those attempts and experiments that we came across *en cours de route*. To what questions do they provide answers? What is it that the initiators hope to achieve? What can others learn from them? Here below, we have collected a number of the examples that we came across. We have clustered them according to five forms of value or meaning from which we discovered that they can be the results of international practices. What can you do in order to expand these values, or to put it differently, these forms of capital? For each of these forms of substantive capital, we give five examples. In this way, we can already provide 25 possible tracks for a more sustainable international practice in music and in the visual and performing arts.

ECONOMIC CAPITAL

Working internationally requires investment and means. In turn, for many artists and organizations, working internationally is also a necessary precondition in order to develop a practice or a career at all. But the market is becoming more competitive and governments are pulling back, resulting in precariousness and socio-economic vulnerability. Under such difficult circumstances, how can you still create sustainable economic conditions for artistic practices in order to work internationally, and as a result of working internationally?

1 – *Let Yourself Be Guided.* Reliable professional support is what we would wish for all artists. Earlier research showed that this is a 'critical success factor' for long-term organizational or career development.⁴² The importance of this was repeatedly referred to during the *(Re)framing* trajectory. This is of course not a new perspective, but it seems more than worthwhile to repeat it.

2 – *United We Stand*. Precisely because many cannot find professional support on their own, sharing is relevant. Recent years have seen the rise of a number of artist-run experiments with collective organization models, including L'Amicale de Production, SPIN, Manyone, Jubilee and others. Organizations like these are interesting for a variety of reasons. They are not only mechanisms for economic solidarity, but contacts are shared, and they also stimulate critical reflections about diverse subjects, including sustainable international practice.

3 – *Technological Head Start*. Especially in the music interviews, some managers indicated that they are approaching big data in a creative way, by looking to see where their bands generate lots of clicks and streams, and then focusing on those reactions (Oscar and the Wolf). Based on the data that we gleaned from various web platforms, Flanders Arts Institute published www.havelovewilltravel.be, an Internet tool where musicians and managers can get an overview of where the possibilities are for their type of music.

4 – *Solidarity Beyond Borders*. In the year 2018, subsidies and grants for the arts are still primarily from national sources. But some initiatives are transnational. Depending on where they are based, artists or institutes have more or less access to public support. Al Mawred / The Culture Resource is a transnational fund that redistributes grants given by various public and private foundations in the Mediterranean region, so that Arabic artists have a better chance of using them. September of 2008 saw the start of RESHAPE, a Creative Europe project in which diverse new working models are being investigated, including a European transnational fund for artists and artist initiatives.

5 – *From 'Projects' to 'Trajectories'*. In February of 2017, Flanders Arts Institute organized a meeting of experts on

'International (Co)Productions in Visual Art'. The conversation moved from the more technical subject of '(co)production' to the heart of the matter: the concern for sustainable art careers and fair practices, indeed from a long-term perspective.⁴³ For the performing arts as well, as I noted in a blog, the switch from 'project' to 'trajectory' also seemed a useful approach.⁴⁴ This artist-oriented attitude was verbalized by gallery owner Simon Delobel (Trampoline): *A commercial success story does not immediately interest me. I would sooner create the right conditions in order to realize new projects by inspiring artists.*⁴⁵

HUMAN CAPITAL

In an increasingly competitive system, musicians, visual artists and theatre and dance makers find themselves in increasingly vulnerable positions. This moreover applies not only to the artists, but also to those who support their practices. Is it not true that the promise of personal achievement and recognition as an artist, which working internationally is supposed to bring about, is often missing? Many artists speak about the chasm between their personal value frameworks and the contexts within which they are compelled to work, and the occupational burnout that sometimes results. Which practices have answers to this dilemma? How can the human foundation that is essential for the (international) work, and for travelling, be better acknowledged and fostered?

6 – *Define the contours.* How can we fill in the gap between the way in which 'the system' functions and the values of the artists? While some in the music branch underscore the importance of professional management, Colin H. Van Eeckhout (of the Amenra metal band) swore by the do-it-yourself approach: *No one understands where Amenra is heading better than we do.*⁴⁶ Benjamin Verdonck also said that the way in which you organize yourself has to be

an extension of your artistic démarche: *I know very few artists who do things just like that. That makes me think that it surely can't be impossible to expand that to the way in which you organize your work? And to indicate the contours within which you want to make your work? And then there are also arrangements that you should be able to make with your organization? The strength of an art work lies by extension also in the practice, the way in which the art work comes into being and exists.*⁴⁷

7 – *Artists Are also Human Beings.* We came across a number of initiatives that took into account, or required special attention for the fact that the balance between life and work for artists who work internationally is not simple. In our own country, for a time, FOAM, the Brussels-based working space for the arts, had a 'Family-in-Residence' programme. In the United States, there is the Sustainable Arts Foundation, which extends grants to artists who are also parents: 'We offer unrestricted cash awards to artists and writers with children.'

8 – *Kill Your Darlings.* After a premier, a long tour and then a major exhibition in a foreign country, A Two Dogs Company insisted on taking a break for a couple of months in order to together rethink how things could be done differently in the future. Kris Verdonck: *How do you find a healthy balance between taking part in the international circuit, to be visible and stay informed, and on the other hand, maintain a healthy team and a responsible ecological footprint?*⁴⁸ 'Learning to say no' appeared to be part of this.

9 – *Equal Access to Mobility.* There have been and still are many initiatives that want to increase mobility for artists with little access to mobility. We here highlight two recent international initiatives. Keychange Project is a response to gender inequality in music, with grants for, among others,

more participation in showcases, network development and investments. Artists, writers, curators, critics and researchers who are subject to political threat and persecution can apply to the Artists at Risk Platform, which can help them get out of their country of origin and also help them get in touch with participating residency opportunities.

10 – *Connecting People*. Diverse initiatives are aimed at strengthening the peer space – spaces where artists meet one another and can share without that having to produce concrete results. Think, for example, of the Performing Arts Forum (PAF) residency initiated by Jan Ritsema, or locally established artists' networks, including State of the Arts in Brussels. These are environments that have an empowering effect on artists, because experiences are exchanged between similarly minded people in comparable situations or circumstances.

INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC CAPITAL

Intellectual and artistic capital is all about an individual's, an organization's or even a community's knowledge. It is about perspectives on geopolitical developments, international relations or sustainability that artists touch on in their work, or venues and art spaces in their programming. This in turn has a knock-on effect on audiences, when (international) work offers new perspectives and impacts how they see the world, themselves, their knowledge and their convictions. Intellectual capital is also the knowledge that artists and those who work with art build up in order to create and develop their work. That knowledge is developed through prospecting, (artistic) research, education, the development of professional skills and so on. How can artists and art professionals acquire the knowledge and skills needed to work internationally in the longer term? How can working internationally generate meaningful exchanges and a truly critical reflection within a community?

11 — *Work Local, Share Global.* Rósa Ómarsdóttir's *Second-Hand Knowledge* project was a way of allowing knowledge, experiences and the concerns that are alive in dance communities in the 'peripheral' areas to circulate, along with potential answers to these issues.⁴⁹ Einat Tuchman, who switched from the international dance circuit to a more local practice, still has a real need of international exchange and knowledge sharing about artists' urban initiatives.⁵⁰ Connecting locally anchored practices in a European framework can not only reinforce those specific practices. It can also contribute to the development of a broader movement, with an impact on government policy. This was the plea brought by Hilde Teuchies in her three-part essay, 'Reclaiming the European Commons': *Many initiatives are true laboratories where people test out how a different society might appear. Precisely that totality of micro-initiatives could be the breeding ground from which real change can evolve: a rhizome that can grow across all of Europe.*⁵¹

12 — *Call Things by Their Name.* *Anyone who thinks the Arts can do something efficiently is being as ridiculous as a chicken that flies over the soup in which she will be cooked. But nevertheless, what the Arts can do is to call things by their name. Not the way they are, the way they should be. And by giving them a new name, we are giving them a new world.* This was how Pieter de Buysser opened the initial conference of *(Re)framing the International*. And indeed, for many artists, their work is precisely a place to do research on and feed the public discourse about geopolitical developments and international collaboration. Their art is not only a space for critical thinking, but also for imaginative speculation. Think, for example, of the work of Thomas Bellinck. In his fictitious museum of European history, *Domo de Europea Historia en ekzilo* (kvs, Brussels City Theatre), it was possible to look at perspectives that could

not be seen in any real museum of European history. With some artists, their work is precisely about the very conditions under which the work evolves. Consider Caveat!!! by Vermeir & Heiremans (about artists' working contracts), or Kobe Matthys/Agentschap (about the legal contexts in which art is made and disseminated).⁵²

13 – *The Artist As an Intruder, or a Fool.* Performance artists Hans Bryssinck and Pieter de Buysser pointed out that an artist, as an outsider, is able to say things in a local community that no one else can say. Both indicated that taking the time and space in order to make a local context your own is a necessary condition.⁵³ De Buysser used the metaphor of the fool, while Bryssinck referred to that of the intruder, referring to a book by Jean-Luc Nancy).

14 – *Art as an Intercultural Laboratory.* For violinist Wouter Vandenabeele, making music is a way of creating bonds with people with whom you would never otherwise come into contact.⁵⁴ For Bára Sigfúsdóttir, travelling is not a way of being far away, but rather a way of connecting different places to each other. As a choreographer, her work investigates whether the bodies of dancers can be a means of achieving this.⁵⁵

15 – *Dig Deeper.* Ils Huygens was very enthusiastic about how the Z33 arts centre employs a shift from a rapid succession of themed exhibitions to a more long-term approach. They now engage in longer trajectories with partners from different sectors, with many presentations along the way. *In terms of working method, the process is much more sustainable and longer-lasting, because partners, artists and the public can more fully develop their vision and/or participate in different, thematically related projects, in different phases and at different times, all within a larger research theme.*⁵⁶

Encounters with new, different and diverse audiences is another promise that is inherent to working internationally. In practice, that added value is not always there, because even though you are in a different country, you always seem to be performing for similar kinds of audiences, or because hectic tour schedules and the pressure to produce do not allow it. Often, the time and space (and budget) that are essential to meaningful exchange between artists and diverse audiences are lacking. How can working internationally in the arts truly create added value within local communities? How can working internationally contribute to a democratic public space?

16 – *Revalue the Local.* After she intentionally stepped away from the international dance circuit, Einat Tuchman went to look for what she as an artist might mean for the poor, multicultural Brussels neighbourhood she lived in. With *Espacetous*, she uses scenographic and dramaturgical interventions to stimulate exchanges of skills in a neighbourhood in Molenbeek.⁵⁷ Phillip Van den Bossche of Mu.ZEE wants to start out more from the immediate environment ('hyper-localities') and use the collections of the museum in order to test its own prejudiced perspective against the diversity of local perspectives.⁵⁸ 'A different country is just a different country,' as soprano Lore Binon said. For his part, Benjamin Verdonck is planning a world tour in Antwerp for 2019.⁵⁹

17 – *Break Out of the Bubble.* Sarah Vanhee called our attention to the fact that when you are aiming to reach 'new audiences', demography is more important than geography. Her *Lecture for Everyone* project is a handsome example of how you can break out of the bubble of the art institutions, while at the same time still function 'inside the system': an art house could only book the project if it also

at the same time scheduled a series of unexpected lectures extra muros (for example, at business locations or in local auditoriums).⁶⁰

18 – *Flip the Table*. Working at the international level takes place in an unequal playing field that is sometimes implicitly permeated by geopolitical concerns and even violent histories. How can the arts deal with these tensions? Questions about international artistic collaboration are becoming more complicated in every way. A good example is the special issue of the magazine Rekto:Verso about decolonization, which also includes tips on how ‘white’ institutions can ‘Congolize’ and decolonialize their activities.⁶¹ Organizations need to be aware of their blind spots. ‘Flip the table, take a seat on the other side,’ was the advice of artist Nedjma Hadj at a round table discussion about collaborations between artists and curators from Belgium and the Middle East and Arab regions. There several inspiring practical examples were discussed, including the Masarat Festival (held at the Halles in Schaarbeek), the Moussem urban cycle, actions taken by a former team from KVS in Ramallah, S.M.A.K., MET-X, Espace Magh, and the various editions of Meeting Points, Young Arab Theatre Fund’s transnational festival of the arts and all the projects of Mophradat, its successor.⁶²

19 – *The New Programming*. Both Wim Wabbes (Handelsbeurs) and Kurt Overbergh (AB) ‘indicated that programming an international (less known) band in Brussels or Ghent can mean that you can draw a new audience to your concert hall. That does require adapting your communication, so that especially engaging the local community is experienced as efficient.’⁶³ What is stimulating is the increasing sensitivity to the use of genre labels when promoting the work that bands do.

20 – *Taking Time, Making Place.* Of all the non-financial forms of capital, 'time' is an especially valuable resource. So too are building up social capital and networks. In our first issue of the *re/framing* magazine, Tom van Imschoot interviewed the inseparable artist duo Selma and Sofiane Ouissi about this subject. As the artists who produce and organize the Dream City festival in the Tunis Medina, the interweaving of arts in society and its social impact is crucial. This leads them to alternative ways of developing their work: *It is true that promotional dissemination of our work does not concern us. We do not have a website of our own. That has nothing to do with any rejection of modern communications media. On the contrary, Skype is one of our artistic tools. But we prefer to remain in the margins, and to work from immediate physical contact. We have no interest in the economic system of an art market that revolves around marketing and consumerism. We first have to get to know people and the art centres they work in, in order to see whether we can really work with them. The distribution of our work is through stories told mouth-to-mouth, and even then it can happen that a theatre or a person who invites us does not appeal to us, for example, because they deal with time differently. We are not a product. We seek a dialogue that can carry on through time.*⁶⁴ Mutatis mutandis, we see this attitude with many musicians and visual artists in specific and/or underground niches.

NATURAL CAPITAL

Natural (or ecological) capital concerns the natural aids and resources that are required to be able to work, nationally or internationally. To work internationally, we need materials and energy. International artistic work relies heavily on these kinds of natural resources, which are sometimes renewable and sometimes not, and can consequently have an unavoidable ecological impact. How can

we better recognize and protect the natural resources required for international working practices? What processes can artists and organizations develop in order to limit the negative impact? Is it possible to produce in an ecologically responsible way? What are the possible strategies for limiting the negative ecological impact of the distribution of our work? Is it even possible to have a positive ecological impact, while making art?

21 – *The Flexitarian Ethos*. Develop a framework for making decisions about travelling differently and less: when is international travel truly meaningful? Is travelling by air self-evident and unavoidable? If you ask yourself these questions, then you can deal with invitations in a critical way. Jeroen Peeters wrote about his own experience: *For me, travelling less and differently means always considering whether or not an overseas or out-of-country trip is worth the effort, actively refusing invitations, and in principle taking the train for international journeys and flying only as an exception to the rule. In addition, I seek out ways of 'fattening out' an engagement, in order to remain in a given place for longer and to be able to undertake different interactions (performance, post-performance discussions, workshops, being able to experience a city and so on), or expanding a tour with different performance venues. Peeters believes that a principled attitude like this does indeed make a real difference. International experiences still make up a part of my practice and my horizon, but the ecological footprint of my travels has systematically become smaller, and is today only a quarter of what it was ten years ago.* Kris Verdonck also proposed a list of criteria for a framework for making decisions. It included the ecological footprint, the human effort on the parts of the artist and his/her team, the nature of a contract (long-term or one-shot deal), the inspiring feedback of the audience, the international recognition that it produces,

*economic aspects such as income, and the chance of a performance generating new professional contacts.*⁶⁵

22 – Work on Your Footprint. There are a great many tools to help achieve a more sustainable mobility in the cultural sector. For Flanders, many of these have been collected on www.cultuurzaam.be⁶⁶. On that same site, you will also find ways of calculating your footprint, as well as links to other websites that indicate how you can compensate for the CO₂ emissions you generate. Internationally, resources and tools are aggregated for instance by Julie's Bicycle (www.juliesbicycle.com), including the *Green Mobility Guide* (2011) developed together with On the Move, the online resource for arts mobility in Europe.

23 – Design Global, Manufacture Local. Can this adage also be applied to the arts, where physical experience is so important? Is it possible to produce differently, lighter, and more locally? Benjamin Verdonck made the change from large-scale to more small-scale projects, for which he could travel by train and bicycle.

24 – Quality Time. The decision to travel by train led Wim Wabbes (Handelsbeurs) to think differently about time. *In the quest for sustainable mobility, slowness is a crucial concept. Slowness is the equivalent of time as an added quality. Taking the train as an alternative for driving or flying has everything to do with both sustainability and quality. Although the train is not as fast, it offers more quality time, as well as less interrupted or unusable time... Travelling by train means frequent long, restful trajectories, with a rhythm of their own, comfort in which to work, read, sleep, stretch your legs, eat and drink.*⁶⁷

25 – Make a Good Example. How can you sensitize people within an organization, within the sector, and facing an

audience? In more and more organizations, conversations are happening about choices and behaviours of this kind. Organizations are talking about it amongst themselves. In-house, and with their partner organizations, SPIN is discussing how to approach touring differently, and are publishing their thoughts and efforts about sustainable mobility on the Internet (including with Flanders Arts Institute).

AND THEN: JUST DO IT – *During the last several years, the internationalization of artistic practices has expanded by leaps and bounds. This has opened up possibilities, but at the same time, it has opened up a can of worms, exposing frictions and contradictions. The chasm between what artists want to do in terms of substance and all the things that are necessary in order to ‘make it’ is expanding. So what can be done? A large number of artists, art professionals and observers are hoping for a paradigm shift, a radically new system in which artistic practices can be made more sustainable. It sounds very complicated. It is a tangled knot of problems and everything depends on everything else. No one can resolve it alone.*

But there is also good news. As one performance artist stated during one of our round table discussions: you can think about it all for a long time, but you can also just get started. Those who are looking for examples of artists and organizations who want to approach it differently do not need to look far. During

(Re)framing the International, a considerable number of those practices came to light, revealing what 'new ways of working internationally in the arts' might be. They are all humble examples, but that is precisely what makes them so inspiring. These were not the hollow words of self-declared do-gooders who are going to throw over the system. These concern small, yet very precise interventions in the work of artists and those who support them, who, after what were sometimes very incisive analyses, developed concrete and innovative answers to complex problems.

Someone noticed that these experiments are actually 'not even new', 'they are just alternatives'. Can the sum of experiments like these eventually make a real systemic difference and bring about a paradigm shift? Can this also be translated into policy? How can practices that evolve from the bottom up create a more extensive movement, step by step, so that other artists and organizations, and in time, policy as well, can also be involved? For

the time being, such a shift in the system is not yet in the cards. But the signals are definitely there, even if they are weak. What is needed most is time for the buds to generate and ripen, for the fruits they bear to become more visible, creating bridges between those engaged on behalf of change, especially internationally. The above reflections are primarily based on Flanders and Brussels, but just as the frictions and contradictions took place in transnational settings, potential answers will only take shape through a 'rhizomatic' interconnection between local practices and transnational practices.

The future will show whether (Re)framing the International will have been able to provide a small link in this process, by identifying and naming what is taking place, divesting existing frameworks of their self-evidence, making relevant experiments visible and trying to better understand them, bringing people together and offering incentives for a new structural framework, a new language and a new story.

- 1 *Joining the Dots. Bouwstenen voor een duurzaam internationaal kunstenbeleid. Courant nr. 96* (February-April 2011) was published by BAM (Institute for Visual, Audiovisual and Media Art), Muziekcentrum Vlaanderen, Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, Vlaams Architectuurinstituut, Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren and the Vlaams Theater Instituut.
- 2 See, for example, *Toneelstof III: The Wonder Years*, a themed issue of *Documenta* magazine (year 27, nrs. 2-3) and Joris Janssens, 'History and Science Fiction of Performing Arts Networking (1981-2068), lecture for the Producers Network Meeting and Forum (West Kowloon Cultural District, Hong Kong, May 2016)', blog.kunsten.be, 13 April 2017.
- 3 Joris Janssens, 'After the Growth? Trends in the International Production and Distribution of Performing Arts', www.kunsten.be, 21 January 2016.
- 4 Joris Janssens, 'Het ecosysteem van de podiumkunsten, na de beslissingen', www.rektoverso.be, 4 August 2016.
- 5 See Albert A. Bartlett, *The Essential Exponential: For the Future of Our Planet*. Lincoln, NE, USA, Center for Science, Mathematics & Computer Education, 2004.
- 6 See also Dirk De Wit, 'Dagen van gras, dagen van stro. Remedies tegen de precariteit van kunstenaars en de groeiende kloof in de kunstmarkt.' www.kunsten.be, June 2018.
- 7 The figures are from a study by IFPI (*Global Music Rapport*, 2017, consulted at www.ifpi.org/facts-and-stats.php).
- 8 See Taru Elfving, 'Residencies & Future Cosmopolitics', in *reframing the International # 1*, November 2017, p. 22.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 BAM, MCV, VAF, VAI, VFL and VTi, 'Introduction', in *Joining the Dots. Bouwstenen voor een duurzaam internationaal kunstenbeleid. Courant nr. 96* (February-April 2011), p. 6.
- 12 In *Joining the Dots*, this self-criticism was limited to contributions by writer David van Reybrouck and Jan Goossens, then director of KVS.
- 13 See Delphine Hesters, Joris Janssens and Simon Leenknegt, 'De projectenparadox. De evolutie van projectsubsidies en beurzen via het Kunstendecreet (2006-2017)', in Joris Janssens, Simon Leenknegt and Tom Ruetten (eds.), *Cijferboek Kunsten 2018*. Kunstenpunt, Brussels, 2018.
- 14 Guy Gypens, 'Internationale podiumkunstenpraktijk: relativeren of dynamiseren', Vlaams Theater Instituut, Brussels, 2006.
- 15 Joris Janssens, Simon Leenknegt, Tom Ruetten, 'Fragmenten uit een onbekende puzzel'

- (Introduction), in *Cijferboek Kunsten 2018*, Kunstenpunt, Brussels, 2018.
- 16 Tom Ruette, *Online databank voor internationale concerten*, in *Boekman 116*, p. 48-64.
 - 17 Simon Leenknecht, 'The Only Way Is Up? Quantitative Analysis of the Internationalisation of the production and distribution of Flemish Performing Arts (2000-2016)', in *re/framing the International # 1*, November 2017, p. 42.
 - 18 Joris Janssens and Delphine Hesters, 'Productie en spreiding. Een bodemonderzoek'. www.kunsten.be, April 2016.
 - 19 Marijke de Moor, 'Verslag werktafels internationale spreiding en coproductie', www.kunsten.be, 18 April 2017, p. 2.
 - 20 See IFPI, *Global Music Rapport, 2017*, consulted at www.ifpi.org/facts-and-stats.php.
 - 21 Simon Leenknecht, 'Have Love, Will Travel. Quantitative Analysis of International Concerts by Belgian Music Bands (2013-2017)', in *re/framing the International # 1*, November 2017, p. 8-11.
 - 22 Seven contributions about breaking through internationally in music can be found at blog.kunsten.be: Lobke Aelbrecht, 'Beren gieren ook buiten de landsgrenzen. De internationale carrière van een jazzband onder de loep' (31 August 2017); Nico Kennes, 'Touring Abroad: Episode 1: Oscar and the Wolf' (11 October 2017); Nico Kennes, 'Touring Abroad: Episode 2: Selah Sue' (13 November 2017); Simon Leenknecht: 'Touring Abroad. Episode 3: Aborted' (17 November 2017); Wouter Degraeve, 'Balthazar: Kings of The Road' (17 January 2018). Joris Janssens, 'Internationaal doorbreken for dummies (part 1: 'Volgens het boekje') (11 July 2017) and Joris Janssens, 'Internationaal doorbreken for dummies (part 2: 'Leren van de ondergrond') (13 July 2017) are two posts based on the culture management thesis of Valerie Ansoms.
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* *The images in this pocket book are the work of the artist Annabella Schwagten. She was asked by Flanders Arts Institute to create a series of collages as illustrations for the research project.*

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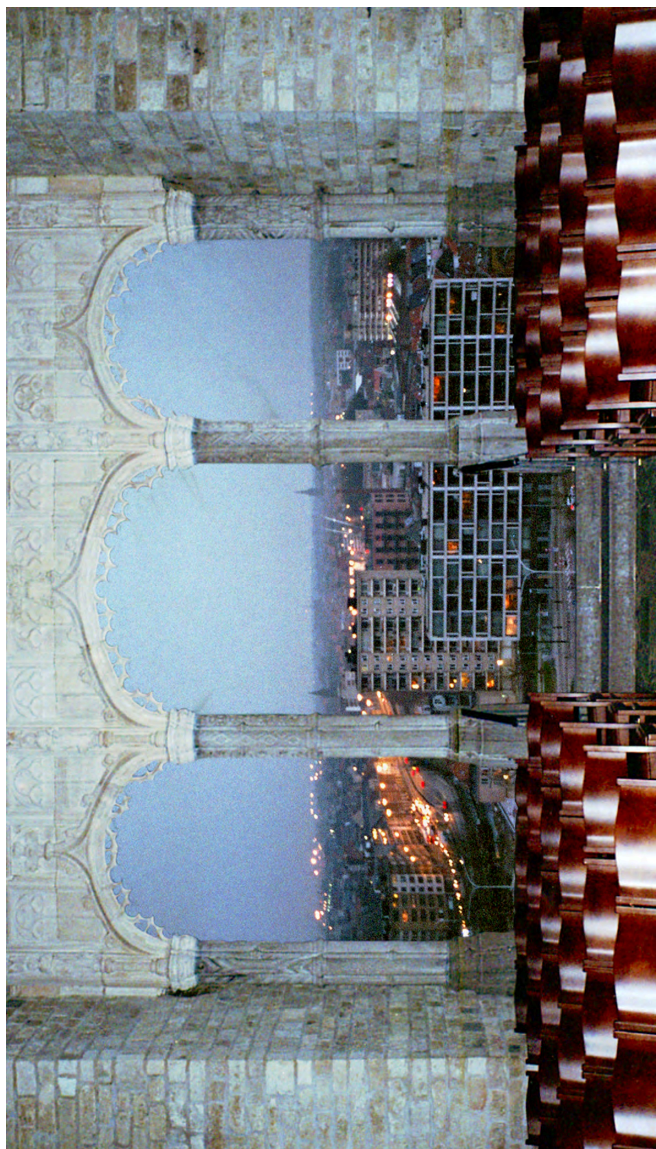


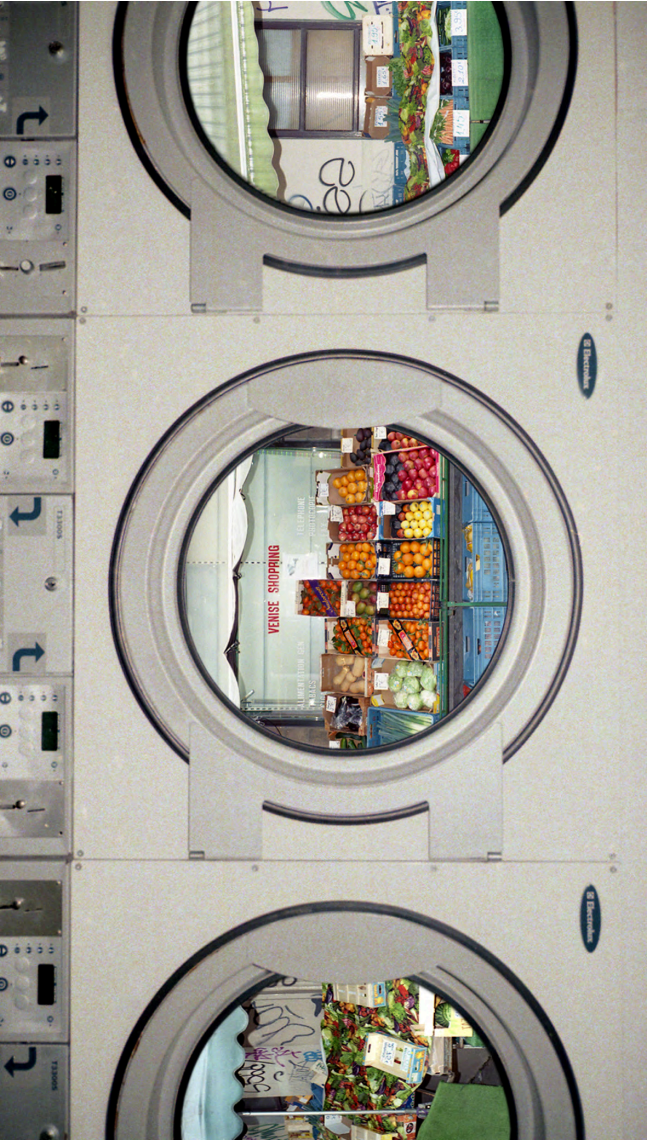












About (Re)framing the International. On new ways of working internationally in the arts.

(Re)framing the International is a research and development project developed by Flanders Arts Institute about the international dimension of artistic practice in a rapidly changing society. Between December 2016 and September 2018 an interactive process was set up with people from the visual arts, performing arts and music active in Flanders, Brussels and beyond. Figures, testimonials and inspiring stories, presented and collected during a series of sector events, were published online and collected in a series of three pop-up magazines. In this pocket book Joris Janssens, Head of Research and Development at Flanders Arts Institute, summarizes a number of light bulb moments from the process.

The text is therefore the work of many. It brings together the experiences, insights, ambitions and reflections of many who contributed through interviews, debates, text assignments, focus groups, sector events and sometimes informal discussions with Flanders Arts Institute employees. A sincere thanks to everybody who contributed: this essay is the result of their generous input.

Anyone who would like to provide additional insights, feedback, comments, nuances or corrections or who would like to join future initiatives concerning new ways working internationally, is very welcome to contact joris@kunsten.be.

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In this pocket publication
Flanders Arts Institute examines new ways
of working internationally in the arts.
Joris Janssens collects insights and
light bulb moments from the
research & development trajectory
(Re)framing the International.

For many years, working
internationally has been
self-evident in music, visual
arts and performing arts. But
discomfort is growing. With the
economic pressure, inequality
and precarity are increasing.
Geopolitical turbulences and
ecological concerns strip our
assumptions of their innocence. ¶ How to
understand these trends?
What is the actual value
and significance of working
internationally in the arts,
in a shifting societal context?
Which frictions and contra-
dictions occur? Which answers
or alternatives are being
developed? How can we
imagine new ways of
working internationally?

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January 2018

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INTERNATIONALISATION