

Ailleurs – Elsewhere

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In my imagination, a festival is not only a gathering of artistic voices and ideas, but always and above all a space of hospitality, carrying a gesture of invitation. It's a place that sets ideas, histories, people in motion, when welcoming audiences and artists from close and far, from here and elsewhere, in a temporary space of friendship: artist-friends, family-friends, friends of the heart, not yet found, temporary, unexpected, incidental, useful and recommended friends.

With this edition, far° festival des arts vivants extends this space of hospitality into a series of weekly gatherings in which, since the beginning of the year, a group of refugees shares time, space and ideas with artists, staff members and citizens from the Nyon-region. These encounters, however, seek to be more than a mere timely prolongation of an event, or an occasion to inscribe in the dynamic relation between arts, society, and the public by dedicating the festival's theme to the ailleurs. Rather, they put the very question of hospitality in the centre of our attention: What does it really mean to welcome a stranger, a foreigner? To open our houses and theatres, to spend time together, to enter, to move and to inhabit each other's artistic, personal, choreographic or social territories? Is our invitation really without conditions, or: do we expect the stranger to speak our language? And: do we really invite him or her to stay?¹

The question of hospitality is not an innocent idea or a safe terrain. Much more, in line with the question of contemporaneity – which is also the question of arts – it addresses the very protocols and politics of our being-together. It questions how we can participate, take part, be part of our time, how we can belong to it, belong to each other, how we can say 'we' – in and despite of and with all differences and singularities.

In this sense, the encounter with the stranger, with the foreigner, invites and forces us to look at the borders and boundaries that construct and structure our lives: visible and invisible, symbolic and material, felt, embodied and memorized ones. It puts us in touch with the experience of being an Other - always in translation, not seen, asymmetrical, waiting, as well. It also confronts us with our own responsibility, our own involvement and participation in maintaining and reproducing, in legitimizing and aestheticizing these mechanisms and processes of in- and exclusion.

At the same time, it provides us with an opportunity to learn to talk, to move, to laugh, to create images in another language. To speak with an accent. And I am thinking of how different bodies 'behave', how different they feel, when writing and speaking in another, in an Other's language: how breathing and taking breath changes, how our perception of proximity and distance is altered. This experience of being in another language is exactly not about squeezing what is unfamiliar into something that we already know, something that we recognize and understand, that we can read and classify and handle. It is not about undoing differences, and equalizing narratives and bodies.

On the contrary, I hope, the encounter with the stranger, with the foreigner - artists, audiences, and citizens – welcomes us to get in touch with the unknown part of ourselves. It reminds us of all the absent bodies that we carry with, that we carry in us, and that are mobilized and actualized in the moment of encounter; it offers us an urgently needed possibility to work together on a practice to be with, to be next to other bodies. Not to possess, to dominate or to comprehend them. But to think and move with, through, in proximity to, parallel to them. This is not about denying existing expectations, rules and obligations, or about romanticising the realities that these bodies witness. It is however about understanding that our bodies are not unshakeable and given, but that they always constructed, that they could always also be different ones. It is about not turning away from the consequences, and the violence of our individual and collective inscriptions.

I need the stranger, the foreigner, the one from 'elsewhere' - from another discipline and language, from another country or generation - his eyes and gestures and hands, his sensitivity and thoughts, his experience and his dreams in order to participate in this world, in order to be contemporary. In this sense, the space of hospitality that the festival sets off is not only an invitation but also a joyful obligation, a wish and a challenge, to think and to move and to see from more than one perspective. To go elsewhere – to ideas that we have not yet visited, to smells and tastes and sounds, that we can not yet describe, to a place that reminds us that in all differences, there is something we share - to the Other in us.

¹ See: Jacques Derrida: Of Hospitality, Stanford University Press 2000