

Like many other Flemish arts organizations, VTI applied for a multi-annual grant in the framework of the Arts Decree. Plug in & Play introduces the plans of VTI in the period 2010-2013. It shows how VTI's core missions – documenting, research and interaction about the Flemish performing arts in its international context – will develop into multi-annual journeys on different themes: a thorough field analysis, individualization, history and digitization, the international dimension of the performing arts, intercultural dialogue, the development of a new artistic language, art and children, touring, and ecology.

For updates, keep track of www.vti.be, with an overview of all VTI's activities and documents. In addition, the site contains a mass of useful information on the performing arts sector: the ins and outs of subsidies, a list of first nights, the latest job vacancies, etc. An ingenious search engine also provides you with a huge amount of online information from the database.

In English: <http://en.vti.be>

In French: <http://fr.vti.be>

PLUG IN & PLAY

POLICY PLAN FOR 2010-2013

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PLUG IN POLICY PLAN FOR 2010-2013 & PLAY

VTi (Vlaams Theater Instituut)
Supporting the performing arts
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Introduction

VTi, the documentation and research centre dedicated to the performing arts in Flanders, owes its existence to makers', organisers' and critics' conviction of the need of permanent reflection on the Flemish performing arts in its international context. Throughout its existence, VTi has supplied contexts, repeating and re-writing the story of the performing arts. The prior concern for all of its initiatives and activities has always been innovation, the creation and advocacy of reflection through open dialogue, and the desire to respond to the constantly changing reality of a dynamic landscape.

Throughout the past couple of decades, the performing arts in Flanders have changed considerably. This was the main conclusion of VTi's field analysis *Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993* and of the subsequent discussions with the sector and the policy makers about its results. The performing arts diversified into a rich and varied landscape open to theatre, dance, music theatre and crossovers to other artistic disciplines. The organizational framework of the internationalizing practice changed profoundly. Partly inspired by recent developments in the arts centres, quite some theatre companies transformed into flexible and interdisciplinary production centres that maintain more casual relationships with freelance artists. Fewer organisations are conceived as a structure around an individual artist or a regular ensemble of performing artists. A lot of artists no longer present themselves as a member of a company, but as individual performers in a trans-national network environment.

In *Metamorphoses* and subsequent projects, seminars and in-depth articles and discussions in VTi's periodical *Courant*, we did a lot of thinking about how these changes will affect the field players: the policy makers, the performing arts organizations and individual

operators. At the same time, the changes in the landscape induced VTi to self-reflection. What will be the impact of these changes on the role and position of the institute? How should we address that growth, individualization, internationalization, hybridization and the development of a horizontal network model in which individual players take new and more autonomous positions?

After the field analysis results were published, VTi eagerly took up these challenges, exploring the themes in depth, experimenting with new formats for debate, developing new networks and forms of cooperation. VTi took the lead in the debate about the increasing needs and challenges connected to digitization of documentation. This text is a translated adaptation of VTi's subsidy application for 2010-2013, in the framework of the Flemish Arts Decree (which grants subventions to support centres in the various artistic disciplines). As such, this policy plan will take VTi's reflection process one more step further. Its team questioned itself openly and considered the consequences of these changes in the landscape for the future functioning of the institute.

The various phases of this process are reflected in the structure of this document. In a first phase, we considered the significance of the 'metamorphoses' in a wider social perspective. The working methods in the performing arts changed, but not all practical and ethical consequences of the new network model have been thoroughly considered. As far as the performing arts are concerned, how should we approach issues such as the influx and efflux of organizations and the position with respect to the non-subsidized circuit? Where does the individual artist stand in the new network model? Which impact will all this have on arts policy and how will it affect all those involved in the performing arts practice?

The chapter 'Plug in and Play' is a report of this field and environment analysis and is intended as a preliminary note to the introduction to VTi's plans for 2010-2013. Seven chapters will indicate how VTi's core missions – documenting, research and in-

teraction – will be accomplished through short and long-range projects including a new edition of the field analysis and working on various themes such as individualization, history and digitalization, the international dimension of the performing arts, cultural diversity, the development of a new artistic language, art and children, distribution and touring, art criticism and ecology.

The document is supplemented by a text written in collaboration with the art institutes for the other arts sectors (music, visual and audiovisual arts, architecture and design) which will focus on the interaction between the performing arts and the other artistic disciplines, the position of the performing arts in the global artistic landscape and the development of a common position regarding a series of transversal issues including cultural diversity, digitization, art education and internationalization.

VTi's main focus of attention for 2010-2013 will be the search for a balance between continuity and innovation in a rapidly changing landscape. VTi hopes to establish this balance by going deeper into a number of themes formerly initiated. We will prepare a new and advanced edition of the field analysis – capitalizing on VTi's rich collection of material as a basis for establishing innovative and interactive strategies to involve both practitioners and policy makers in the research process. There will be a continued attention to cultural diversity and international aspects of the performing arts. With various projects we intend to stimulate the discussion about new artistic developments. Art and children, the distribution/touring of performing arts productions, alternative financing models for the performing arts and ecology: these themes will become increasingly important in the near future and will be given special attention.

In the years to come, the individualization of the performing arts will require adjustments of the institute's present functioning.

During the eighties VTi positioned itself as a player in a network of *institutions*. As a result, the impact of individualization on the institute will be profound. Our standard procedures are no longer sufficient to reach the growing army of (internationally operating) freelancers. What will we need to do to maintain our position as the contact centre for the entire sector of the performing arts and at the same time to stay connected with the daily artistic practice of this growing number of individuals? One of VTi's strategies will be to involve individual artists as partners in VTi's projects and operations more than we used to. The field analysis has made it clear how essential it has become nowadays to hear the voice of the artists themselves in discussions on cultural policy.

Plug in and play: the performing arts in a changing world

Metamorphoses

Throughout the past couple of decades, the Flemish performing arts have changed profoundly. In *Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993* (2007, available for download at <http://en.vti.be>), VTi mapped a series of tendencies. The period that was analyzed – the nineties and beyond – is characterized by a considerable increase in production, but from the perspective of the subsidy system, this expansion was not unbridled. The increase is slowed down by various factors: the labour intensive nature of the performing arts, for one thing, the limits of public funding and the laws of supply and demand. Consequently, the growth is mainly taking place outside the subsidized circuit. There is a growing 'commercial' circuit, with some major and a large number of minor players. Theatres count less and less exclusively on subsidies; alternative sources of financing are constantly explored. There are informal communities (such as the dance community) in which the increase of production is huge thanks to the fact that a lot of people are willing (sometimes out of necessity) to work on a shoestring.

The production increase is less strong in theatre, probably as a result of the fact that since the eighties, a number of new practices emerged *outside* this sector. The Performing Arts Decree (1993-2005) and subsequently the Arts Decree (2006-) have supplied a legal framework allowing dance and music theatre to develop and flourish. At the same time, an increasing number of crossovers between the various artistic disciplines could

be noted. There is no longer such a thing as a clearly defined 'performing arts sector' with clear-cut parameters and dividing lines. However, 'hybridization' goes hand in hand with 'specialization'. Reflection about genre-related issues (dance, children's and youngsters arts) has become topical and necessary – as was revealed by *Canaries in the Coalmine*, the master plan for dance which VTi presented in December 2007 [also available for download on our English website <http://en.vti.be>].

Following the evolution in dance during the eighties, the production modes in the entire sector of the performing arts have changed. There is an increasing degree of networking and interdependency between organizations. Producers seem to work less and less in a vacuum. 'Connect and collaborate' – in an international network environment – appears to be the catchphrase. Subsidies are no longer exclusively mobilized to make and distribute productions. They are increasingly considered as a tool in the search for – domestic and/or foreign – partners and co-producers.

The performing arts have not only increasingly become internationalized, the internationalization itself has also changed in nature. It is no longer exclusively restricted to organizations: the individual artist has become increasingly mobile. Individual artists are increasingly present in this horizontal and trans-national model of creation. The field analysis revealed that artists handle things differently from a decade ago: they consider themselves less a member of an organization than an individual in a freelance circuit that is no longer exclusively restricted to subsidized performing arts environments. Hybrid careers have become the standard: a lot of makers and players no longer commit themselves exclusively to the (subsidized) performing arts, combining their stage work with other disciplines and sectors.

Globalization 3.0: internationalization, individualization and interdependency

The transformations we described have, of course, not only taken place in Flanders. They have occurred within a wider social perspective and runs parallel to more fundamental changes in global economy. In his book *The World is Flat*, Thomas L. Friedman, foreign affairs columnist at *The New York Times*, mentions similar developments. Friedman discusses various globalization processes as they have been occurring at the beginning of the 21st century. His main argument is that an unexpected interaction between social, political and technological developments has caused world economy to change increasingly into a 'flat playground'. And this also applies to the transformations we discussed. According to Friedman, the link between individualization, internationalization and mutual dependency will essentially determine the shape the new market will take. In general terms, he speaks about the transition from a vertical into a horizontal production model, from 'command and control' into 'connect and collaborate'. Increasing digital opportunities have made it easier than ever before to cooperate on a global scale, and this does not only apply to nations and corporations, but also to individual players.

According to Friedman, the most typical characteristic of the globalization of the beginning of this century is individualization. In that respect, he distinguishes a new phase in an age old process in which the world is gradually becoming smaller. 'Globalization 1.0' was the phase that occurred between 1492 and 1800 and that involved nations, the first players to manifest themselves on a global scale. Since 1800, corporations – mainly European and American – manifested themselves as international players. Friedman calls this 'Globalization 2.0'. All over the world, multinationals went in search of manpower and a market, a search

that had become possible thanks to new hardware: at first the decreasing cost of transportation during the industrial revolution, and later the decreasing cost of telecommunication, telegraph and telephone until the very first versions of the worldwide web. The globe shrunk from medium size to small. Whereas the first phases were characterized by the global manifestations of nations and corporations, 'Globalization 3.0' – which began to emerge since the end of the nineties – is taking place on a much more individual level, defined by Friedman as the 'empowerment of individuals to act globally'.

Apart from a number of political developments (the collapse of the Berlin Wall, for instance), ICT-developments have been the major driving force behind this process of 'flattening'. Personal computers, the internet, the standardization of data exchange, the ever increasing accessibility of information (Google), uploading, online communities, Web 2.0, next to what Friedman calls 'ICT-steroids' – faster connections, increased storage capacity, wireless networks, Skype... – are all important elements. In brief: the hardware of 'Globalization 2.0' has now become accessible to individual users who are, in cyberspace, no longer mere consumers, but also producers. At the same time, we have witnessed the development of software that made cooperation and competition on a global scale possible. The globe continues to shrink, from large to small to very small. And the globe is also flattening: contrary to versions 1.0 and 2.0., 'Globalization 3.0.' is no longer a process exclusively driven by the West:

Globalization 3.0 is going to be more and more driven not only by individuals but also by a much more diverse – non-Western, non-white – group of individuals. Individuals from every part of the world are being empowered. Globalization 3.0 makes it possible for so many more people to plug in and play, and you are going to see every colour of the rainbow. (Friedman, p. 11)

'The Great Sorting Out'

In *The World is Flat* Friedman describes this process of 'flattening' and considers the consequences for governments, organisations and individuals arguing that the ethical and practical implications of these fundamental changes at the beginning of the 21st century still remain to be clarified. Not all the rules of the game in this flattened playground have been clearly defined. Friedman talks about 'the great sorting out' that is ahead of us. The 'flattening' of the globe is a recent, and far-reaching evolution that does not only affect the way corporations do business, but also how individuals, communities, associations and governments define and organize themselves.

Friedman himself is optimistic. First of all, he emphasizes the empowerment opportunities for individuals and small scale organizations, who are now capable of taking initiatives and play a part on a global level, provided of course they have adopted proper attitudes and competences (including a combination of mathematical insight, artistic creativity, entrepreneurship, a readiness to lifelong learning, ...) and the required strategic competences, because the competition in the flat playground – literally involving billions of new players – will increase likewise. This will surely influence the education agenda which should focus more on developing the competences required to meet global competition. Herein lies an unexpected element in the advocacy of art and culture education: creativity and innovation are basic competences for individual players who want to make the difference in a hyper-competitive world market.

Whereas Friedman focuses mainly on the opportunities offered by the new flattened playground, Richard Sennett, professor sociology at the MIT and the London School of Economics, manifests himself as a vehement critic of the so-called 'enthusiasts of the fresh page'. In *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2006), he

raises questions regarding the individual's position in the 'cutting edge economy', that, in his opinion, has not really become freer. On the other hand, Sennett agrees with the theory that corporate structures have been evolving from vertical (pyramidal) and bureaucratic into horizontal and flexible models for cooperation – from the rigid 'pyramid' or 'iron cage' to the flexibility of the MP3-player. Much like the iPod, the flexible organization is not doomed to restrict itself to endlessly repeat the same standard procedures; it is possible to choose from a wide range of possibilities at any time and to realise them in whatever sequence: 'linear development is replaced by a willingness to jump around.' (Sennett, p.48)

For the individual, this abolition of bureaucracy has not produced the promised liberty, Sennett argues, but more uncertainty instead. On an institutional level he identifies some three social shortcomings. Individuals do not care much about loyalty towards the flexible organizations and vice versa. There is little informal confidence among colleagues because people do no longer work together long enough to build confidence. In the old days, employees – even those in the lower echelons of an organization – acquired much more institutional knowledge than is now customary. Nowadays, that knowledge has vanished – along with the employees, for that matter.

Employees are no longer capable to capitalize on formerly acquired experience; their career consists of a series of casual projects for which they have had to re-invent themselves time and again. Unlike Friedman, Sennett focuses on competences and expertises that have become obsolete in the cutting edge model: craftsmanship, experience, long-term perspective. And lots of people drop out, Sennett argues. He believes that the empowerment Friedman has in mind will be the privilege of a small elite of people who are willing and able to give up the experience they have acquired and to re-invent themselves constantly in an ever

changing environment. In the cutting edge economy, lots of people will be left out in the cold. *Plug in and play?* Only if you have the proper wiring, compatible software and a strong processor!

'Sorting out' in the world of the stage

Can analyses such as these be applied to the world of the stage? Is the world of art an equally 'flattened playground' – to use Friedman's phrase? Are the performing arts one of the advanced, or 'cutting edge' economies Sennett discusses? Not quite, but there are striking similarities. The performing arts have definitely moved away from the autonomous and hierarchic iron cages and pyramids towards a horizontal and trans-national model for creation with organizations that have strongly diversified their operations (with theatre and dance, and extending operations in the area of social-artistic activity and a multimedia offer for children and youngsters). This evolution creates new opportunities for individual players, but also increases their responsibilities. With Friedman we wonder whether this new working method has proved profitable in the recent past and what this system will have in store for the artistic practice of the future. With Sennett, however, we will also have to consider what kind of art and artist this system will require.

The performing arts in Flanders equally saw the transition from the rigid 'iron cages' into more flexible MP3-players. When in the early eighties a new and highly talented generation of artists emerged, they had to get to work outside the traditional framework. The existing theatres kept their doors closed to young theatre makers. But the tide turned. The Flemish performing arts developed into a relatively open system. The work of individual artists is produced by a wide range of institutions: from casual small-scale forms of cooperation to the established theatres, that ceased to be the closed bastions they used to be in the

eighties. In *Pigment. Current Trends in the Flemish Performing Arts*, VTi/Ludion, 2003), sociologist Rudi Laermans discussed the 'anti-institutionalism' of the Flemish stage system, calling the absence of a generation gap typical. A lot of organizations actively assume a responsibility towards the rejuvenation of the landscape and the influx and circulation of individual makers.

This proved very fruitful, indeed. As far as the Flemish performing arts are concerned, there has been a significant growth and prosperity, both on a quantitative and qualitative level. A striking example of this is contemporary dance in Flanders. For lack of a coherent policy during the eighties, it was only thanks to intensive international networking that production became possible at all. Moreover, co-productions made large-scale productions possible. Increasing opportunities for international connections, for that matter, made Flanders/Brussels an interesting and useful hub in the trans-national production environment, much to the benefit of the performing arts in that region.

Still, a number of issues will need to be 'sorted out'. How do the performing arts relate to the evolutions described above, which no doubt fundamentally affect worldwide economic and cultural relations? What will be the impact of economic developments on artistic and cultural diversity? What about the artistic and social limitations of the new production modes in the performing arts?

Questions for policy and practice

A first series of questions concern the relationship between the new performing arts practices and cultural policy. Are (national) policies properly adapted to the trans-national production environment? For the artistic practice, it is becoming increasingly difficult to relate to frameworks that define cultural identity basically in terms of national identity and ethnic-cultural ori-

gin. Nevertheless, the cultural policy in European countries is still organized on a national or even regional level. The policy makers' expectations often still merely refer to national frameworks, whereas daily practice takes place within entirely different frames of reference. This tension could already be felt during the first implementation of the Arts Decree (2006) and it is not likely to be solved in the years to come. On the other hand there are problems involving international mobility of artists because the (social and legal) rules are not attuned to the European rules. There is a growing tension between national policies and trans-national practice. Some knots remain to be untied here.

Equally pressing are the questions for the sector itself. With Sennett we may wonder what will be the 'culture' (in the sense of 'organization culture') of the newly developed stage production practice. Which type of makers will this model require? Which type of artistic practice will this model produce? 'Only a certain kind of human being can prosper in unstable, fragmentary social conditions,' Sennett says, considering that in such a 'culture', craftsmanship and acquired experience are less important than the capacity to tune in on immediate and short term opportunities. *Mutatis mutandis* this could lead to a thinking exercise about the social and artistic consequences in stage practice.

To what extent is art production free from this 'new capitalism'? To begin with, this question has a social implication: how do we, in the performing arts, cope with, for instance, growing older? How can makers practice lifelong learning and continue to refine and improve their competences with new knowledge and insights? What about the transmission of acquired expertise? How can a staff policy that takes age into account be combined with a healthy influx of new talent? Is efflux socially and financially feasible?

Within the artistic context, the question may be which guarantees the horizontal freelance practice will have to offer for long term artistic thinking. In the same *Pigment*-essay, Rudi Laermans called the generation of the nineties a 'generation without a body of work':

Project, concept, idea – performance after piece after production, most of the Nineties generation have no interest at all in developing a more general vision. They elaborate ideas, often in a highly consistent and rigorous yet context-sensitive way. Not surprisingly, they are not concerned with the formulation of a theatre or dance idiom of their own, a personal vocabulary or an individual approach to theatre or dance. 'Essayism' is perhaps the most appropriate word to characterize the artistic practice of the quintessential member of the Nineties generation.

In the light of the changing production conditions – the disappearance of organizations moulded to the practice of one single individual artist, the rise of a freelance market – the question is to what extent this 'essayism without body of work' was the result of these artists of the nineties' free choice, rather than that they had no other choice but to adopt the production opportunities that were available. Is developing a body of work as such still possible at all, or are artists in their personal career doomed to re-define themselves time and again in a series of consecutive site-specific projects?

In the wake of the field analysis, VTi published an research article called 'Survival in the Stage Jungle', that zooms in on the career development of performers in the Flemish performing arts (www.vti.be/survival). The study confirms that the type of artist that thrives in a freelance network environment is becoming increasingly prominent. Whoever is good at networking

and whoever is flexible stands more chances of survival in the performing arts, that is: the artist who is flexible enough as to re-invent himself in every consecutive project and adapt to ever changing contexts. The question, of course, is how that will relate to artistic quality criteria. To what extent is this need for flexible networkers an exclusion mechanism?

The 'freelancification' of the artistic practice will, after all, have various consequences, also in the debate about touring possibilities for companies and audience participation. The fact is that producers, in their turn, are experiencing the backside of working with freelance artists: organizing a tour, for instance, has become an endless exercise in planning, because players are involved in various projects simultaneously. A freelancer has to bet on more than one horse and cannot afford blank periods in his working schedule. As a consequence, extra presentations of successful productions, or even reprises, become virtually impossible, leaving chances to reach wider audiences unused.

In brief

Even though the Flemish performing arts are going through a period of affluence, the discourse about anti-institutionalism possibly conceals the real balance of power rather than dislodging it. The assumed openness of the system requires attention and surveillance. Where are the political and economical motives of the horizontal creation model and of this trans-national nomadism? What is the artist's share in this altered landscape? Was the individualization introduced upon the request of artists who wished to emancipate and who no longer wished to commit themselves to one single house? Or was it introduced by the institutions, which have to economize on their resources and which intend to get rid of the artistic and economic restraints imposed by larger ensembles? Which are the social and artistic limita-

tions of the latest production modes in the performing arts? How 'free' in fact is the individual artist in the new freelance network model? In other words, will the loose career generate artistic empowerment and development? These are questions that will become increasingly urgent and that also affect the position and operations of VTi.

Ever since it was founded in 1987, VTi has revealed itself as an open house that holds close bonds with artistic practice and policy making. At its basis was the audience's, professionals', politicians', students', critics' and scientists' need of proper and competent information about performing artists and their work, about cultural policy and stage affairs, about evolutions in the world of the stage, about working internationally and interculturality. VTi wants to supply all this information in a wide range of useful instruments.

VTi wants to contribute to the continuous development of the performing arts and help build a favourable climate for artistic creation. To make this ambition come true, it focuses on three main fields of operation: *documentation, research and interaction*. In the following pages, we will discuss how these three core missions are interrelated. The drawing on the pages 22-23 shows how they take shape in concrete projects, which are, at the same time, stages in long-range courses.

The diagram has a triangular shape, with the core missions on each angle, operating as 'magnets' that determine the positions of the various projects in the diagram. Each project – for instance, a workshop or a digitizing project – will, to a larger or smaller extent, belong to one of the three core missions. Handling yearbook data, for instance, rather belongs to 'documenting'. Organizing an information session for artists, on the other hand, will belong to 'interaction', organizing a seminar within the framework of the field analysis will be in the centre of the diagram, as it involves all three core missions of our organization.

The coloured lines mark the connections between the various projects. They indicate the themes that will colour VTi's opera-

tions during the next couple of years: the field analysis discussed above, will be a long-range project in various stages. The same applies to themes such as individualization of the performing arts, history and digitization, the international dimension of the performing arts, the development of a new artistic language, cultural diversification, art and children, distribution and touring, art criticism and ecology.

1. RESEARCH AND FIELD ANALYSIS

No need to explain that research will remain one of VTi's main occupations. VTi's research is always 'applied research', i.e. focused on the needs of policy makers and the field. The issues at stake are always treated within the perspective of the institute's intermediate position between the arts policy and the performing arts practice, making VTi's research a catalyst for debate and awareness raising. The sector and the government are not merely recipients but are actively involved parties and sometimes even co-authors. Often VTi's database for the performing arts productions operates as a useful instrument to give discussion about – sometimes controversial – issues solid ground.

During the next couple of years, the continuation of the field analysis will be a cornerstone for VTi's research activities. As of 2009, we will launch a new project that will be comparable to the purpose and concept of the process that resulted in *Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993* (2007). The second edition will be the continuation of this study, aiming to take a step forward on some crucial issues.

The new field analysis will basically remain an inquiry into the daily practice of the performing arts. We intend to map relevant policy-related tendencies and to put actual issues in a historic perspective. Analysis in figures on the basis of VTi's database and of materials collected throughout the years, will be complement-

ed by qualitative in-depth excursions and contributions by guest writers. The research will be conducted as a process, including close and extensive dialogue with both sector and policy makers. By and by analyses will be published in *Courant* and during seminars. To involve the professionals as much as possible in the process, we will continue to experiment new formats for consultation and presentation of data and research.

Deepening the 'Metamorphoses' with new data

Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993 presented an analysis of Flemish stage production during the period 1993-2005. The new edition will cover a much longer period. By the end of 2010, we will not only possess production data from the first period of the Arts Decree, i.e. 2006-2009, but we will also go back in time a bit further. The data compiled in the yearbooks 1975-1993 are currently being digitized. That will enable us to investigate the era of the Theatre Decree, the first Flemish decree on the performing arts (1975-1992). This will allow us to map tendencies in production for a period of more than a quarter of a century (1975-2009), making the institute's collection an indispensable instrument for the historiography of practice and policy in the Flemish performing arts.

Similar to *Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993* we will analyse political decisions from an actual and a historical perspective, focusing on the second term of the Arts Decree (2010-2013). The analysis of political decisions' focus of attention will be the relationship between individual artists and organizations, the success of some features the Arts Decree introduced: the possibility of bi-annual subventions for organisation and the system of working with subsidy envelopes for all the activities of one organisation. During a recent parliamentary debate about amendments to the Arts Decree (May 2008) a more thor-

ough evaluation was called for after the first two terms. With its field analysis, VTi intends to contribute to this thinking exercise.

We will also continue to work on the themes set out in *Metamorphoses*. As far as individualization is concerned, we intend to zoom in on career evolution of individual actors/operators in the performing arts. Hybridization, discontinuity and the international nature of careers will receive full attention. By making connections with foreign databases, such as the databases of TIN (the Dutch Theatre Institute in Amsterdam) and of CND (the Centre National de la Danse, Paris), we expect to get a clearer picture in figures of the supra-national dimension of individual careers.

As to hybridization, we expect to collect useful data figures from the online analysis system *Kwarts.be*, a cooperative project with other Flemish arts institutes and representatives of the various artistic disciplines (cf. the supplement about the cooperation between the arts institutes). *Kwarts.be* is a website on which organizations in the various artistic disciplines fill out identical query sheets, allowing us not only to compare tendencies in the various sectors, but also to identify or reveal trans-sectorial parallels or similarities.

New themes: touring and alternative financing

In the next field analysis new themes will appear on the map. More than in the first edition, we want to zoom in on the relations between the subsidized and the non-subsidized circuit in Flanders, and on the touring/distribution of stage performances. We will consider to what extent the import of data from the Cultuur-databank (a database inventory of the cultural supply in Flanders) and *Kwarts.be* will provide useful material to treat these issues on the basis of figures. The data supplied by the Cultuur-databank will allow us to zoom in on both touring and the relationship between the subsidized and the 'commercial' circuit.

We also hope that our qualitative approach will stimulate the debate about cultural entrepreneurship and alternative sources of finance. During our thorough evaluation of the Arts Decree we also intend to take a closer look at and evaluate complementary sets of policy instruments, such as the 'CultuurInvest' programme aimed at supporting cultural industries. A wider reflection on innovative forms of joint public-private cooperation will be made against an international background – the EU-discussions on the occasion of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation (2009) and the important debate about cultural exceptions in the WTO agreements – and with explicit attention to what perspective this will have to offer for the individual artist.

2. INDIVIDUALIZATION AND INTERACTION

As mentioned above, the individualization of the labour relations in the performing arts calls for a reflection on VTi's position in the landscape. VTi was founded during the eighties as a member organization for arts centres and theatre companies and has, ever since, been part of a network of organizations, a network that has, in the meantime, become much more informal and – literally – less 'institutionalized': there are much more individual players who maintain rather casual relations with organizations. In the old days, the companies and arts centres operated more or less automatically as interface in the contact and communication with the artists. But as a result of the 'freelancification' VTi's information flow to individual artists is no longer guaranteed. The supply of information to organizations no longer reaches all freelance collaborators automatically.

VTi therefore wants to involve individual artists in its operations more than it used to: by imparting research and debate to them, by responding better to their needs and expectations and by arming them in the harshly competitive international network

environment. As a result of the fundamental changes in the performing arts network structures, the entire functioning of our institute will require thorough adjustment, especially in the area of communication and services.

On the basis of good relations and daily contact with the community, we collect documentation, which serves as our main breeding ground for research, the results of which is our return to the sector. The exchange that takes place during conferences, workshops, seminars and presentations generates new insights and new approaches, which affect our research agenda and the way we collect data.

This implies a lot of intense interaction with the field. In order to stimulate consultation, exchange and debate, VTi has developed a broad spectrum of interactive formulas and formats that richly vary in scale, openness and purpose. What they have in common, however, is that they are instances at which we present material that stimulates qualitative encounters between performing arts professionals. And in turn, these encounters, as in a continuing *loop*, feed VTi's functioning and trigger off new research.

As a core mission, interaction is the dominating element in projects on top of the diagram. Individualization is a point of interest that interconnects various projects, such as discussions about government decisions on subsidies or research done within the framework of the field analysis, as well as a series of initiatives taken to improve the interaction with the growing number of young artists, freelancers and foreign artists.

Seminars and formulas for debate

In the Flemish performing arts community, VTi is known and renowned for its solid seminars: by and by debate, presentations of the results of the field analysis, the master plan for contemporary dance, or the annual colloquium with which we tradition-

ally kick off the season during the Theatre Festival in September. These activities are open to everyone, though sometimes they are meant for specific target groups in the performing arts community. They are usually organized in cooperation with arts centres, theatre companies or festivals and are meant to offer a platform where the sector can engage in a debate with internal and external parties. In many cases, VTi's own research material triggers off debate, thus creating a wider framework allowing individuals and organizations to position themselves, and in turn fuelling and nourishing VTi's operations and projects.

These encounters are very different in shape and size. They illustrate the necessity to keep structures of debate as flexible as possible, and to be on the permanent lookout for innovative and challenging formats that invite participants to engage and exchange on an individual level.

Long-range projects

In the background of VTi's operations is a series of long-range meeting, consultation and/or research projects. During the meetings of the *Performing Arts Platform* (Platform Podiumkunsten), arts centre and workspace programmers meet colleagues from the cultural centres and discuss the distribution and touring of performing arts productions. *Tracks*, on the other hand, is a meeting platform for performing arts organizations and artists of non-Western origin. There also used to be a working party with dance professionals, which resulted in the presentation of *Canaries in the Coalmine*, the master plan for dance, in 2007 (<http://en.vti.be/booklet.masterplandance.pdf>).

These meetings are not open to the entire sector, but address a limited group of people on the basis of their expertise or background. This format is highly appreciated by all parties involved. As a partner and often co-writer in drafting policy propositions

and recommendations, the sector highly values VTi's objectifying and coordinating function and is in favour of maintaining this format. Similar long term courses for art and children, ecology and art criticism will be discussed below.

One-to-one service

VTi receives phone calls and e-mails for detailed information on a daily basis. For some of the questions, a ready-made answer is available, but more often, they require answers made to measure, for instance, make a selection from the collections, look up specific information or make contact or reference lists. Visitors increasingly call upon VTi for help or advice on business or artistic aspects of the application for government subsidy.

This one-to-one service is highly appreciated, because there is the personal contact with a staff member, who always takes the question seriously, collecting the relevant material from VTi's extensive body of documentation, and because the tendency towards individualization in the sector requires VTi's enhanced commitment to this direct form of contact and transfer of knowledge. In order to meet the increase of individual needs, VTi will have to re-organize itself by re-arranging the infrastructure and by developing formats for one-to-one meetings and transfer of expertise.

VTi's extensive library traditionally operates as the main vehicle to make information accessible and available on an individual basis. However, because the library is on the third floor and the office and meeting space on the fourth, opportunities for better exchange of information were left unused. Therefore, both floors will, from now on, be open to the public. VTi will become an open office in a two-storey library. Staff members whose expertise and knowledge is connected to a specific part of the collection will have an office in the immediate vicinity of these documents.

They will be able to offer assistance and advice whenever needed. There will also be meeting rooms and workstations for visitors on both floors. Professionals will be able to come to VTi to meet in the immediate vicinity of documentation that may be relevant or useful for their meetings.

Network development

By seeking alliances with training and supporting initiatives for new makers, whatever their provenance, but fully aware that addressing people of non-western origin may sometimes require a somewhat different approach, VTi wants to update and refresh its contact network. In that respect, we intend to develop formulas that optimize the circulation of expertise throughout the entire sector in all its segments, on all possible aspects of the artistic practice. The *speed dates* organized during First Aid in O, a two-day meeting event in Ostend aimed at emerging artists, were a first start. We invited experts from the performing arts to share their expertise with younger and less experienced (aspiring) colleagues. In combination with provocative statements, an animated relay discussion and a personal approach towards workshops sparked off a lot of energy and caused expertise to circulate more fluently and networks to extend themselves more widely.

We intend to organize similar meetings on a regular basis, made to measure of individual makers. For the spring of 2010 we have planned a session in Ostend, aimed at Dutch speaking individual makers. In the autumn, a session will be scheduled in Brussels, aimed at non-native and non-western artists. This sequence of sessions, called 'E40' (i.e. the motorway that connects Brussels to Ostend), will be a joint venture with other organisations who support emerging artists: Bâtard Festival, Theater aan Zee, Vrijstaat O. and deBuren, Kunstenloket and the Flemish Ministry of Culture (the 'Arts and Heritage' agency).

Communication: personalization and ‘open content’

The increasing importance of the individual approach, next to the institutional, will require more pro-active, diversified and individual forms of communication. Consequently, apart from our emphasis on direct person-to-person meetings during events, we extend the idea of network development towards a digital communication strategy. Considering the urgency, the performing arts productions database and www.vti.be will be thoroughly revised in 2009.

To meet the individualization and increasing diversity, we open up the authorship of the website. Individual players will be enabled to make personal profiles and to enter data themselves, thus becoming co-writers of the website, which will increase their commitment. The website www.vti.be will be thoroughly renovated to meet the new communication needs to a maximum (Skype, sms, online network communities, ...)

The new database will be more easily accessible for external users to recycle information. Apart from mobilizing open technologies, VTi will opt for *open content*: all publications will be given an explicit Creative Commons licence, unless one of the authors objects. At present, the Corpus Art Criticism (www.vti.be/kunstkritiek) is already making use of Creative Commons licensing. Soon it will be extended to *Courant*, the entire website and (whenever possible) all new books. Not only will the contents of the performing arts database, with all information about productions, persons, organizations, a Creative Commons licence, the new database will also introduce the latest techniques with regard to ‘semantic web’, which will make it easier for external users to (re)use/recycle information.

3. DOCUMENTATION, DIGITIZATION, HISTORY

One of VTi’s initial core missions was providing documentation: a professional performing arts practice relies on easily accessible information about the performing arts, about organizations and artists, their careers and their work, about the changing practice in an international and social context. At the basis of VTi’s initial operations was the awareness that concentrating this activity would be beneficial for the entire sector: sharing knowledge and information depends not only on efficiency but also on documentation that is managed with dedication and commitment. VTi wishes to keep fulfilling this intermediary mission. After recent years’ goal-oriented digitizing actions, the next couple of years will bring a digital revolution in the nature of documenting itself: from collecting and classifying material, into digital interaction with information and documentation. VTi’s concern is not preserving and conserving paper, but the intrinsic value of the collected material and the made to measure database.

Documentation Flanders

At the heart of the documenting activity is the registration of all Flemish productions in the database: producers and co-producers, cast, date and place of premiere and tours abroad. This database is updated on a daily basis with new and additional information that automatically flows through to the website. At each premiere, the documentation is thoroughly checked and reviewed once more at the end of the season. Thus we obtain a result that is as complete and accurate as possible, making the database a reliable source of information for VTi’s research activity.

The database has evolved with our needs ever since it was initiated during the nineties, and it will be given a thorough update in 2008 and 2009. As of 2010, external researchers will be given

access to the database's full potential through a special internet application.

But documenting is more than filling databases: the flyers, brochures, posters and other printed materials we receive are processed and made to remain accessible in the library. At each premiere, companies are invited to supply the stage text, the video, the press kit, the poster, the photos and other relevant documents. Twenty years later, these series (however incomplete) have become valuable collections in their own right. They are no longer consulted for actual information, but for the sake of their value as historic source material. The documentation that was thus collected is complemented by specific collections that were donated to VTi, such as documentation maps of critics. VTi will, to a limited extent, accept this type of additional donations. VTi is not an archive and preservation of the archives of organizations is neither one of VTi's missions, nor ambitions. Theatre companies and houses can, however, call upon VTi for help and advice about how they can preserve and manage their own archive, or where and how they can find a suitable depository.

Digitization

In 2003 VTi began to digitize endangered materials, mostly in its video collection. Video preservation is a very complex technological matter about which there still is little expertise in Flanders. Video recordings of performances have a unique added value: they are the only *time-based* documents capable of combining image and sound in a way that no theatre text nor photo sequence could achieve. For that reason, VTi has invested considerably in the acquisition of knowledge about digitization and digital preservation – knowledge that was passed on during public lectures and demonstrations. VTi also took a leading part in research projects *PoKuMOn* (IBBT, Instituut voor Breedbandtechnologie –

Institute for Broadband Technology) and *BOM-vl* (IWT, Instituut voor Aanmoediging van Innovatie door Wetenschap en Technologie in Vlaanderen – Institute for the Encouragement of Science and Technology in Flanders).

In *PokuMOn* the entire chain, from artist to video archive, is investigated: which techniques and best practices can be used to preserve audio or video recordings of rehearsals and performances and make them accessible? Which arrangements must be made with regard to copyright? Which standards and formats are to be preferred? How can you distribute these recordings on the internet or on digital channels?

BOM-vl is a practical feasibility study, conducted by broadcasters, universities and cultural institutes, of a collective Flemish digital depository infrastructure for high-grade audio and video. The needs and demands of radio and television professionals are coordinated with those of the arts and cultural heritage with respect to efficient long term preservation and access.

In 2009 both projects are expected to produce results that should make it easier for organizations to handle their digital archive.

As of 2010, digitization will be an integrated part of daily operations in performing arts documenting: the days of experimenting are over. We will continue to digitize the video collection, including less endangered materials. Within the framework of the field analysis, performance credits compiled in the theatre year-books 1975 to 1993 will be digitized in 2010. In 2011 all photos (some 8,000) will be scanned in high resolution and the original prints will be wrapped acid-free. Newspaper articles from the period 1984-1993 will be scanned in full and made searchable. A collaborative project with Schrijverspodium Vlaanderen (*Writer's Platform Flanders*) will digitize a selection of stage plays,... By professionally digitizing a sufficient amount and variety of documentation materials, and by integrating them into the database,

VTi hopes to secure the documentation of the performing arts in Flanders for present and future users.

In the surging information wave, VTi resolutely opts for a decentralized approach, with VTi operating as a hub for knowhow and metadata, rather than as a terminal for cardboard boxes or digital streams. To that purpose, VTi's IT infrastructure and the database will be developed further towards open technologies and standards that will optimize re-use of collected data.

The library

In the VTi library visitors can consult books, periodicals, cuttings and documentation free of charge and without enrolment. It includes:

- Documentation on organisations in Flanders
- Books on the performing arts, cultural management, policy, art education, etc.
- At least 10,000 plays, in both published and manuscript form
- current subscriptions to over 100 professional journals
- Cuttings archives of relevant information from newspapers and periodicals
- A video library with over 5,000 hours of tapes

VTi's library has, throughout the years, become a reference, thanks to the optimal accessibility of documents on the Internet via the Aquabrowser technology, and thanks to its acquisition policy for books and periodicals. VTi's added value is basically the support it offers with the books and periodicals, especially the guidance and support of individual makers and researchers.

History

Critics association Thersites' has run a three year cultural heritage project *Toneelstof*, executed together with the academic periodical *Documenta*, the Theatre Festival and VTi. These partners have made audiovisual source material for the theatre of the sixties, seventies available and accessible and will, sometime next year, extend the collection to the eighties. The project links the search for remaining video source materials to audiovisual testimonies by key figures from these periods. During one of the Theatre Festival's ever well-attended events, this source material was presented and discussed. As of 2010, VTi wants to take over the job for the nineties, because that is the period when VTi took up the mission of documenting the sector and because *Toneelstof* is a formula that also generates wide public interest in theatre history.

4. HYBRIDIZATION AND SPECIALIZATION: A NEW ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

In *Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993* we described the transition from a classic theatrical landscape into a more diversified performing arts landscape, especially with the rise, in the eighties and nineties, of contemporary dance and music theatre. The field analysis also revealed that not only the division walls within the performing arts, but especially those with other artistic disciplines (visual and audiovisual arts, new media) are becoming increasingly osmotic. Along with the increasing hybridization, however, there is a growing want of recognition of the specialism of some specific sub-sectors. 'Internationalization' for example tends to be slightly different in music or visual arts than in the performing arts. And in dance, it evokes yet another set of questions than in theatre or music theatre... In other

words, in a time when boundaries seem to fade, it is necessary to draw attention every now and then to the singularities of working in certain sub-disciplines, for certain target groups or within certain contexts. In spite of the hybridization, the specifics of production, distribution and communication may considerably differ from discipline to discipline, or from target group to target group. During the most recent subsidy term, these sensitivities became strongly apparent during the development of a master plan for contemporary dance and of a master plan for children's arts.

VTi wants to draw a number of consequences from these evolutions. First of all, the tension between hybridization and specialization will demand greater flexibility and versatility from VTi and its staff. VTi needs to have a broad and general view on things and considers performing arts in their broader cultural-political and social context. At the same time it has to be ready at all times, whenever topical – to dive into the deep, with an eye for (sub)sector-specific issues. To develop sustained versatility, suitable partnerships are of vital importance. For that reason, collective long-range projects on transversal themes will be launched by the arts institutes during the next subsidy term (cf. the supplement), as well as specific long-range projects with representatives of a number of (sub)sectors.

Moreover, hybridization and specialization present a number of artistic challenges, both to operators in the field and to policy makers, both of which will have very specific needs. For artistic creation itself, this will be no real problem. Artists are, by nature, constantly in search of a new artistic language and they usually do not care much about traditional boundaries between artistic disciplines. The institutional aspect of crossovers and hybrids, however, is a lot more complex. During the next couple of years, VTi will, therefore, devote itself to supporting policy making and practice.

Quality assessment with an eye for hybridization and specialization

In *Metamorphoses* we already pointed out that the increasing hybridization will, in the long run, require adjustments of the policy framework. What to do with the Arts Decree's final partitions? One of the main themes of the next thorough evaluation of the decree will be the tension between transversality and specialization, especially in the area of assessment procedures.

Still, it is obvious that assessment procedures will always have to keep an eye on (sub)sector-specific issues and VTi will, as in the development of the master plans for contemporary dance and children's arts, continue to pay attention to that.

Development of a new artistic language: landscape description, res/ref and art criticism

Even if artists do not care much about the boundaries of artistic disciplines, for organizations it is a complex issue they have to cope with as mediator between artist and audience. And for 'less recognizable' work, that is not an easy matter. Clearly there is a need of a new vocabulary to discuss new practices in the (performing) arts. VTi intends to contribute to the development of such a new vocabulary by various means. On the one hand we will go in search of a different, more 'hybrid' angle for our online landscape descriptions in which we survey actual tendencies in the artistic practice. So far, these texts are still written from the perspective of the sub-sectors as determined by decree (theatre, music theatre, dance). In the future, however, we intend to do justice to both the hybridization of the arts practice and to sector-specific concerns.

We will also continue the so-called 'res/ref' group as a laboratory for new forms of art discourse. The past couple of years, VTi and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts invited a number of artists, giving them the opportunity to observe the festival very closely. Young artists from all parts of the world spent ten days in the theatre and/or in the exhibition rooms and afterwards took their observations, comments and complaints with them to the discussion table to engage in a debate with a couple of Belgian counterparts. With this project, VTi and Kunstenfestivaldesarts hope to create a room where different frames of reference, political convictions, ethic considerations, aesthetic predilections are confronted with each other. This project will be developed into a long-range project that, we hope, will operate as a breeding ground for the development of discourse on present tendencies in the performing arts. This will be accomplished by tuning the 'res/ref' discussions to the exchange between artists and art critics, and by spanning a bridge with Corpus Art Criticism, the long-range project that will be discussed below.

5. INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

Internationalization has been one of the most striking tendencies of the past twenty years. Quite some companies regularly perform abroad and an increasing number of stages show international programmes. A lot of productions are no longer exclusively 'Flemish', but are international co-productions instead. The artistic community in Flanders and Brussels has become a multi-national community. Flanders and Brussels are highly attractive to theatre makers from all over the globe, and they find their way – whether or not via schooling or training – to a variety of companies with an international cast, or develop their own artistic track in local studios or arts centres.

VTi has always deliberately developed itself in an international context. The international dimension has been an inherent part of all aspects of our daily operations: building up collections, doing research, servicing, international cooperation. VTi is an active member of various international networks, including IETM, ERI-Carts, CultureActionEurope, Enicpa, CIRCLE and others, using these (and other) channels to inform international professionals of the developments in the Flemish landscape and to pass on information from other countries and the EU which could be relevant for Flanders.

For budget reasons VTi had to concentrate its international mission mainly on *information and research*. The website was expanded with an English and a French portal site and with information files on subsidized arts organizations and a number of individual artists. Furthermore, a number of landscape descriptions were written, the results of which were made available in English language *booklets*. The field analysis paid extra attention to the internationalization of the performing arts. In April 2008 VTi – in collaboration with IETM – organized an international seminar on the problems involving the circulation and distribution of productions in Europe.

These efforts will be continued and refined in the near future (cf. infra). The internationalization and individualization of the sector described in *Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993* will require VTi's more pro-active attitude in the international field, an attitude that offers opportunities to new (individual) players to be international in scope, that draws attention to less well-known regions or countries, and that stimulates, or even initiates, new forms of cooperation.

In the wake of these tendencies, VTi wants to develop its international operations on three levels:

- invest in sustained development of international cooperation and exchange,
- collect and analyze international reference material,
- act as an information reservoir for the benefit of domestic and foreign professionals.

Sustained development of international cooperation and exchange

The success and effectiveness of international cooperation depends on enduring relations. During its pioneering phase VTI had a staff member 'international cooperation' in charge of networking, who attended numerous international festivals and events. VTI was, among other things, an active partner in organizing exchange projects (whether or not in cooperation with the government), such as, for example, presentations in Moscow, Paris, Ljubljana, Budapest, Montreal. During the next couple of years, VTI wants to pick up the thread again in response to the needs and requirements of the present and new generations of artists. We intend to accomplish this

- a) by annually organizing at least one visitor's programme for foreign professionals,
- b) by prospecting interesting stages/festivals/networks,
- c) by developing exchange programmes for the benefit of individual artists, and
- d) by creating specific incentive programmes inside (Central and Eastern Europe) and outside Europe (Morocco, Turkey, China, South-Africa).

VTi also intends to strengthen the bonds with our neighbours. With *Maison du Spectacle la Bellone*, for instance, we will launch two visitor's programmes, enabling Flemish professionals to visit

their French counterparts and vice versa. These exchange programmes are meant to create mutual understanding of each other's artistic practice, not only on the level of producing, but also on the level of infrastructure, working methods, audience management, policy making etc. These visitor's programmes are also intended as a leg up towards more elaborate and comprehensive cooperation programmes.

Considering the numerous common grounds with the Netherlands, VTI wants to plot a number of courses in a joint initiative with the Dutch Theatre Institute (Theater Instituut Nederland - TIN). The first steps have been taken in 2008: TIN and VTI are joint partners in the residence and mentorship programme *Theatre in Motion* in Beijing. Apart from that, we are currently discussing joint activities in South-Africa in 2009-2010.

Collecting and analyzing international reference material

The internationalization of the performing arts calls for continuous adjustments of international cultural policies. As one of its core missions, VTI wants to contribute to testing the current policies against the increasingly international reality of the sector and to formulate proposals in favour of a coherent intercultural and international cultural policy on the basis of data-based research and in conjunction with other arts institutes and foreign partners, to establish an analysis and evaluation of (international [performing] arts policies, both on a Flemish and on a EU level. During the next term, VTI will put lots of work in collecting more exact and comparable data about international cooperation and mobility in the performing arts, together with a number of foreign colleagues.

The proper vehicle for this plan is SPACE (Supporting Performing Arts Circulation in Europe), a new European network founded by VTI (Flanders), TIN (Netherlands), ETI (Italy), British

Council, Pro Helvetia (Switzerland), ONDA (France), Red House Centre for Culture and Debate (Sofia), Arts and Theatre Institute (Czech Republic), NTIL (Latvia). In September 2008 SPACE applied for European subsidies and a recognition as a project to promote 'networking of existing structures supporting mobility in different cultural sectors'. Within the framework of SPACE, VTi operates as pacer of a pilot project on the development of standards for data exchange on international mobility of performing arts presentations. SPACE also focuses on training modules for, among others, tour managers, critics and (national) cultural institute employees.

With the material thus generated and building on the expertise gathered from the publication of the translated booklets as well as from the joint international VTi-IETM seminar 'Home And Away: Comparing National Policies for Live Arts Touring', we will develop user-friendly instruments and contexts to give this information a maximum distribution.

As far as the development of visions on international cultural policy is concerned, VTi will focus less exclusively on national policy bodies in the future. After all, during the past couple of decades, international cultural policy has become less and less a privilege of nations. Cities and regions increasingly work across the border (with the French-Flemish-Walloon region in a pioneering role). The EU responds strongly to this trend by means of programmes promoting international exchange in border regions. Given the increasing importance of such forms of cooperation, VTi intends to take a closer look at the debate about the opportunities and limitations of various inter-regional cooperation formulas. Which programmes are there, and what are their assets and limitations? What is the position of arts and culture in these programmes? How can governments on different levels cooperate more efficiently? How can a global cultural policy help them tune in better on the existing opportunities? What will be

the added value of such projects for the regions in question? And for organizations, artists and the public?

On the occasion of the presentation of *Canaries in the Coal-mine*, the master plan for dance, VTi invited a series of international colleagues who had similar plans in their country/region (Bruges, December 2007). These encounters resulted in an informal network that will take joint initiatives with regard to developments in the international dance landscape and the relevant policy. In 2008 there will be a meeting in Zürich about what will be the preferable political translation of the respective dance plans; in 2009 a meeting about dance and education is planned in Hamburg and in 2010-11 there will be yet another meeting in Brussels that will be part of a SPACE colloquium, about data collection and exchange.

Information reservoir for domestic and foreign professionals

VTi will continue to profile itself as the contact desk for foreign delegations, organizations, artists, curators and programmers interested in Flemish performing arts. We mobilize various instruments to inform these international professionals adequately. For the benefit of the performing arts in Flanders, we closely follow major international trends and tendencies, which is reflected in the collection, the website, landscape descriptions, English language publications and translation of studies and research reports. Together with the other arts institutes we have launched an international newsletter and a promotion box (*Arts Flanders*, cf. infra). To the extent VTi is able to launch incentives abroad, it will make information about the performing practices in these countries available to the performing arts sector in Flanders.

6. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In 2007 *Tracks. Artistic practice in a Diverse Society*, a joint initiative by VTi, the other arts institutes and Demos was published (<http://en.vti.be/booklet.tracks.pdf>). This publication was meant to provide easily accessible information about inter-cultural experiments in artistic practice. VTi launched this research project as an incentive to get to work, which it actually did by taking first steps to improve the circulation of information and the establishment of networks of artists of non-Western origin and Flemish performing artists during the past couple of years. During the next term, VTi will continue its efforts by developing more integrated and durable structures.

Research

Tracks was the result of the conviction that a lot of intercultural experience has been acquired in the arts. The book wanted to make this expertise, which is all too often neglected, visible in order to encourage others to take the intercultural plunge. The individual track of some twenty artists and organizations led to more general insights about the pitfalls and challenges of intercultural artistic practice. The success of this publication – with the entire print run of 1,250 copies expired in less than a year – was the best illustration that this initiative was useful and responding to a need. For that reason, VTi – along with the other arts institutes – will update *Tracks* with new experiences and a number of new case studies.

Information sessions

VTi organized one or two information sessions for non-western artists. Our intention for the future is to involve this group actively in the planned First Aid in O sessions (cf. supra). Non-western artists will, therefore, no longer be parked in a separate programme but will be actively recruited for sessions open to any new maker. First experiments indicated that this will require some extra efforts: searching for new partnerships and new ways to communicate will, for instance, require awareness that the target group is non-native.

Networking

With *Tracks* VTi extended research into diversity to practical experiment. In 2007, VTi started a long-range project involving artists and personnel of non-western origin in the contemporary performing arts practice in Flanders. *Tracks* is intended to encourage encounters between artists and personnel of different cultural backgrounds and Flemish arts organizations and arts policy. Only few artists of non-western origin find the way to the existing subsidy channels. Therefore, the project does more than merely providing information. The idea is to encourage encounters and to improve the connections between existing networks. A number of steps have already been taken, some with changing, others with a number of regular partners.

In order to stimulate the artistic debate, the development of networks is not only stimulated by means of information sessions, but also by working visits to Flemish arts institutions (studios, arts centres, companies) where people can get acquainted. In order to break down barriers and make the institutions more accessible, VTi wants to give the artists/personnel the chance to get to know these houses and their personnel better.

In the spring of 2010 VTi will launch a new formula that combines previous steps. Co-organized with Zinnema, 'Tracks on Thursday' will be VTi's monthly meeting place for and with artists, where non-western artists are given the chance to have informal talks and discussions with Flemish/western counterparts. Furthermore, VTi will organize group visits to performances, followed by in-depth discussion. Artists will be given the chance to present their own work and discuss it with colleagues and interesting (foreign) guest speakers will be invited. VTi thus wants to create an informal and diversified platform for artists (western and non-western) where artistic work and practice can be discussed.

Residences and apprenticeship

In a third phase (as of 2011) VTi and some cultural partners will investigate how artists/personnel of non-western origin can be engaged and/or involved in their work for a limited period and at a charge. This could be done in the form of apprenticeships, residences or actual employment.

Developing visions

With the new research project and the planned activities in the area of network development as a breeding ground, VTi also wants to continue to contribute to the development of new visions and raising awareness on cultural diversity. That is also why VTi is a member of a number of working and reflection groups in Flanders and abroad.

7. ART AND CHILDREN, TOURING, ART CRITICISM, ECOLOGY

For *Canaries in the Coalmine*, the master plan for dance, and the action plan for art and children (to be presented Spring 2009) VTi recently developed a new and fruitful working formula. For each topic, a working group consisting of various professionals got together to brainstorm openly and freely about obstacles, opportunities and long term perspectives for their practice. The format is highly appreciated by all participants: being a party involved and even co-author of actual proposals, the professionals show a high sense of commitment and VTi receives approval for its intermediary and coordinating role. That is the reason why we decided to delineate long term plans for these and some new themes. The reflection group on art and children will be continued. On the other hand, a new working group on climate change and sustained development will be started. Finally, the 'Performing Arts Platform' and 'Corpus Art Criticism', closed consultation platforms of a different nature and with an entirely different output, will be continued.

Art and children

At a number of youth theatres' request, VTi started a reflection group in January 2008, with key players who work with and for children and youngsters. The immediate cause was the concern about the artistic practice's relation to the rapidly changing living environment of children and youngsters, and the wish to develop a common action plan. The intensity of the discussions in this working group made us decide to make working with and for children and youngsters an important point of interest during the forthcoming subsidy term. By making this explicit choice, VTi will not only continue the activities of this working group, but also develop activities that will support and develop the practices of

organizations and artists. In March 2009 we will begin with the presentation of an action plan for art and children (by analogy with the master plan for dance) containing concrete proposals in the area of production, audience management and education, distribution and international activity. This action plan will also serve as an important guideline for VTi to give shape to specific activities on art and children.

Corpus Art Criticism

Art criticism is becoming increasingly marginal in media and press. Still, VTi is fully aware of the importance of criticism as a vital link between a work of art and its audience, between artist and society – but also as a memory of artistic practice and as a laboratory for a new discourse about artistic developments. In joint venture with the online culture magazine *Urbanmag*, the Theatre Festival and the Flemish-Dutch culture house deBuren – and with the support of various companies and arts centres – VTi started an alternative platform for art criticism in 2007. ‘Corpus Art Criticism’ sets out a course for an entire season for a group of art critics. Each participant will be given the opportunity to write ten reviews about stage performances throughout the season. This effort will be continued during forthcoming subsidy term, because we believe that continuity in the Corpus Art Criticism will produce a consistent archive of a large quantity of interesting texts documenting actual developments in the performing arts.

Performing Arts Platform

The circulation of stage productions in the circuit of cultural centres does not always go without a hitch. During the season 2007-2008 VTi and Cultuur Lokaal (the Flemish institute for local cultural policy) organized the Performing Arts Platform, a se-

ries of informal meetings with programmers of cultural centres and arts centres. Beyond the often artificial border between arts and local cultural policy, the programmers often have the same needs: the need to meet people, the need for mutual consultation, new challenges and reflection ... The Performing Arts Platform responds to those needs by a wide range of themes and lines of approach: the circulation of young talent, the hybridization in the arts, the exchange of prospectation and experiences...

During forthcoming subsidy term, VTi will fuel and stir up the debate about touring in Flanders. The distribution and spreading of stage performances will be analyzed in figures in the new field analysis. The Platform will remain a useful meeting place but aims at a stronger ambition. The programmers are elaborating a programming circuit to establish wider distribution of new work by organizing tours at cultural centres.

The ecological footprint of the performing arts

There is a growing awareness at VTi of the ecological footprint of the performing arts. What is the impact of the performing arts on climate change? Long tours, impressive lighting, warm venues with huge parking lots – will they remain as obvious in the future as they seem nowadays? A first and quick inquiry in the sector revealed that today hardly any performing arts organization or artist in Flanders and Brussels pays any attention to CO₂-emission and global warming. The next couple of years, we will go in search of good practices at home and abroad and start a long-range project to raise awareness in the sector, with exchange of knowledge and expertise and consultations about future actions in the light of new European directives on environment.

VTi in connection with other art forms

In Flanders a series of institutes act as supporting platforms for the various artistic disciplines: *VTi (Vlaams Theater Instituut)* supports the performing arts, *'Muziekcentrum Vlaanderen'* music, *BAM (Beeldende, Audiovisuele en Media Kunsten)* the visual, audiovisual and media arts and *VAi (Vlaams Architectuurinstituut)* architecture and design. These institutes have been cooperating in various joint initiatives on general issues in the arts.

It is the institutes' intention to continue to work together on a number of transversal issues: *international cooperation, e-culture, cultural heritage, art and culture education, diversity and data analysis*. Each of these issues will be briefly discussed here below, with a special emphasis on international cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The best possible environment for the arts to thrive is an international environment. That is the conviction that is at the basis of each of the institutes' international operations. Each within the limits of the available resources and opportunities, they have developed various instruments to promote and encourage international cooperation, made to measure of the subsequent artistic (sub)disciplines. Apart from sector-specific international relations and events, the institutes acknowledge the added value of joint operations, especially in the following areas:

1. Information reservoirs

The institutes act as contact desks and hosts for foreign delegations, organizers and programmers interested in getting acquainted with the Flemish arts in general or with specific art disciplines in particular.

- Each of the institutes has a comprehensive website, offering updated information in Dutch, English (and French) for foreign users.
- As of 2007 the joint institutes have been distributing a collective multilingual e-newsletter: *Arts Flanders*, which appears five times per year for the benefit of foreign readers, informing them of recent developments in the Flemish artistic landscape, of new creations, international tours, festivals, exhibitions and events. As of 2009 they will be joined by *FARO* (cultural heritage institute) and the *VFL* (Flemish Literature Fund) as partners of *Arts Flanders* to provide news from the world of Flemish literature and Flemish cultural heritage.
- In 2008 the joint institutes, supported by the Flemish government, produced an attractive box promoting the Flemish arts. The publication mainly focuses on selections of artists who have not yet found their way to the international scene. The box contains text, image and sound material as well as a brief survey of the recent historical development of the landscape and introduces work by Flemish artists, all nicely contained in five booklets (music, visual arts, architecture, performing arts, audiovisual arts) that can be distributed collectively or separately, allowing each institute to do its own promotion work. For forthcoming four year term, at least one updating is planned.

During forthcoming subsidy term (2010-2013) the institutes plan a joint conference on international cultural policy on the occasion

of the Belgian EU-presidency (2010), with an updated version of the promotion box and a collective website that will serve as the international portal site for the arts in Flanders.

2. Sustained development

The success and effectiveness of international cooperation depends largely on durable relationships, mutual respect and curiosity. Organizing large scale events abroad is pointless if it is not supported by partners that cooperate on a permanent basis and that have acquired and developed expertise in public management for the benefit of Flemish arts.

The institutes have, by nature, developed a strong international network. Apart from participating themselves, they encourage arts organizations to become part of international networks. And for the artists and arts organizations it is also vital to meet foreign colleagues and establish durable working relations. Often it is in the context of these network meetings that the first seeds of cooperation are sown. On the other hand, it is obvious that a vast amount of paths remains untrodden.

Apart from the work done by each institute separately, joining forces will enable them to generate more international attention for the increasing interdisciplinary practice in Flanders. To achieve this, two types of initiatives will be launched:

- Visitors programmes for foreign professionals in the area of interdisciplinary practice. These visits will not only offer an opportunity for the participants to see work by Flemish artists, they will also get the chance to meet these artists, discuss the work with them, or to have a look at the infrastructure. The programmes will be organized and prepared by the institutes, including the selection of locations, works of art and artists.

- Guided working visits for Flemish artists or cultural operators to a specific country, region or city. These visits are meant to allow the participants to get acquainted with the artistic developments of a specific country, city or region and to open them up to Flemish artistic practice. A number of target countries/regions have been selected by the joint institutes, including the Flemish government's preferential partner countries (South-Africa, China, Morocco, Turkey, Congo) or the 27 EU member states. The choice is always based on artistic motives – similarity and parallelism, convergence and / or divergence... These working visits are not only intended as a means to gather information about the country, region or city of destination's artistic developments, but also to investigate whether (and which) forms of cooperation can result from these visits.
- Given the privileged relations between Flanders and the Netherlands, establishing closer links and alliances with Dutch artistic practice is also one of the institutes' prior options, especially with regard to establishing joint international strategies.

3. Events

In consultation with the Flemish government, the institutes are prepared to support combined events and activities abroad. They can achieve this by spotting interesting opportunities abroad (European cultural capitals, world fairs, urban projects), by initiating joint ventures abroad themselves or by joint information and promotion campaigns on the occasion of specific events.

4. Development of vision

Given their intermediate position between public authorities and the artistic communities on the one hand, and their international orientation on the other, the institutes advocate regular consultation with the public authorities to establish better coordination and organization of projects abroad and to stimulate permanent reflection and adjustment (if required) of the policy to be pursued. In turn the institutes will be able to tune in more efficiently and flexibly on government priorities, including European priorities, such as cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, culture and creativity, culture as a vital element in the EU's external relations etc... The government, in its turn, will be able to keep a finger on the pulse of the [international] artistic landscape and to attune its policy to developments and tendencies if desired or required.

DIVERSITY

In 2007 *Tracks. Artistieke praktijk in een diverse samenleving* [*Tracks. Artistic practice in a Diverse Society*] was published. This publication was meant to provide easily accessible information about intercultural experiments in artistic practice. *Tracks* was the result of the conviction that a lot of intercultural experience has been acquired in the arts. The book wanted to make this expertise, which is all too often overlooked, visible in order to encourage others to take the intercultural plunge. The individual track of some twenty artists and organizations led to more general insights about the pitfalls and challenges of intercultural artistic practice. The success of this publication – with the entire print run of 1,250 copies expired in less than a year - was the best illustration that this initiative responded to a need. For that reason, the arts institutes will update *Tracks* with new experiences and a number of new case studies (2013) and give assistance to

initiatives taken by the government to improve the circulation of expertise about intercultural practice.

E-CULTURE

Profound changes are taking place in the production, distribution and preservation of art and culture. Moreover, technological developments in the context of a society of knowledge and information are affecting the way people take part in the cultural process. Creation and production increasingly take place outside the traditional circuits of production and distribution. Disciplines and sectors begin to operate together in new forms of partnerships. New means of expression and formats emerge everywhere on the globe. The divisions between creation, production, distribution and preservation are fading. Still, film screening, performance, the concert or the book will, of course, never really disappear. They will, in time, take their place next to a digital supply.

This evolution has generated a wide range of new opportunities and challenges for the arts. The role of artists and the meaning of artistic creation are changing in an interdisciplinary environment with numerous crossovers outside the traditional artist's studio or rehearsal room. But how do you support these forms of creation? What will be the social and cultural impact of this crossover? Which role will the creative industries assume? Which forms of joint private-public cooperation will emerge?

The arts institutes want to guide and assist the arts on their way to e-culture. Awareness raising and the distribution of examples of good practice, knowledge and information will be a first strategy. There is a need among artists and organizations of examples and good practice to integrate e-culture in their work. There is a need of mediators who can help them develop forms of cooperation. The second strategy will be encouraging research

and initiating research projects. Given the recent developments within e-culture, there is a great need of pilot projects, feasibility studies and testing. Projects such as these can be launched within the cultural environment itself, or in joint venture with media, science or innovation and cultural industry.

DATA ANALYSIS

In 2008, the arts institutes and their partners (interest groups oKo, VOBK and Clubcircuit) launched a comprehensive project of data collection in the arts: *Kwarts.be*. By means of an online inquiry form, organizations fill out annual indicators. This will enable them to compare their own figures with those of others in the sector. But it will also make policy-oriented analysis for the global sector possible. This system will enable us to acquire more refined knowledge about the business and pragmatic aspects of the work of organizations: artistic activities, personnel and manpower, infrastructure, finance, ... During the next couple of years, the arts institutes intend to refine the data analysis system on the basis of the data input since 2007.

ART AND CULTURE EDUCATION

There has been a lot of movement in the area of art and culture education, both on the level of policy making and in the artistic and education communities. Common denominator is the awareness that embedding well-founded and competent art and culture education structurally in the school system will be a major contribution to a society's cultural identity(-ies).

However, this is a very complex issue involving numerous questions and interests. In general terms we can make a distinction between the universal, democratic dimension on the one hand – the assumption that each and everyone should, in some

way or other, be given the chance to be exposed to art and culture – and the schooling/training of talent on the other. The arts institutes want to focus their activities on these two dimensions during forthcoming subsidy term. In the wake of an inquiry conducted by Prof. Dr. Anne Bamford, attention will be paid both to culture and art education at school (compulsory education) and part-time art education. Schooling and training of artistic top talent will be another point of interest. Rather than organizing activities themselves, the institutes will keep a finger on the pulse of education policy makers, and will not fail to bring the importance and value of art and culture education constantly to the attention of policy makers in the area of culture and education.

ARTISTIC HERITAGE: ARTISTS' ARCHIVES AND COLLECTION BUILDING

Responding to the increased interest in the cultural heritage, both among the public and policy makers, the arts institutes wish to attract attention to *private archives of artists*. So far, no clear-cut position has been taken, nor are there practical instruments for a durable and accurate preservation of artists' archives and how they can be made accessible. A proper field analysis in all artistic sectors about archives of artists will be required to allow future policies to tune in on the actual needs as of 2011. The institutes want to do their part in developing a vision on the preservation, management, research and opening of historic and future archives in Flanders.

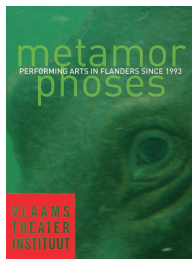
A second point of interest is the building up of collections by the arts institutes. By 'collection', we refer to the institutes' proper archive of relevant documentation, digital documentation, databases ... and archives, documents, recordings acquired from external archive builders (artists, critics, writers, ...).

Since it was founded in 1987, VTI (Flemish Theatre Institute) has developed into an open organisation with strong links to both the sector itself and the policy-makers. The reason for its existence is the need for sound information among the public, theatre professionals, politicians, students, press and academics. On performing artists and their work. On cultural policy and stage matters. On international work and intercultural dialogue. On developments and trends. On infrastructure, touring and art education.

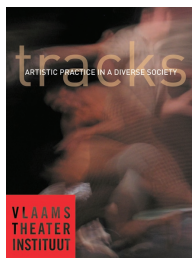
- Documentation centre for theatre, dance and music-theatre
- Sectorial think-tank in a diverse and international Flanders
- Critical interface between theatre-Makers, the public and the policy-makers

<http://en.vti.be>

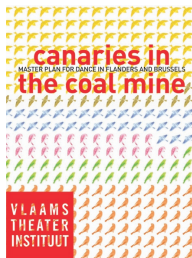
OTHER PUBLICATIONS IN VTI'S BOOKLET SERIES WITH THE HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR RESEARCH ACTIVITIES ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE:



Metamorphoses. Performing arts in Flanders since 1993 (2007) singles out trends in performing arts production from 1993 onwards, and reflects on challenges for cultural policy makers and performing arts practitioners.



Tracks. Artistic practice in a diverse society (2007) brings together best practices in cultural diverse arts practice.



Canaries in the coal mine (2007) is a master plan for dance in Flanders and Brussels. It gives an overview of the current state of play and formulates recommendations for its future.

Free downloads at <http://en.vti.be>

Colophon

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