

International co-production & touring

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With Contributions by

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0. General outline of the dossier

Since the 1980'ies the performing arts have increasingly internationalized. The increased international touring has been accompanied by an active, international co-production policy in which the financial, organizational and artistic responsibilities of new creations and their subsequent touring were shared by partners in different countries.

In a first generalization we can speak of two different and distinct models of co-production:

1. In this first model, which is still the most common one, one producer, most of the time a company organized around one or more creative artists is co-produced by several, international receptive organizations (i.e. venues, festival, etc...). In this model the different co-producers try to facilitate and create, by joining forces, the financial and infrastructural conditions for the realization of a production which is proposed by the producer. It is this model on which this dossier will mainly focus.
2. More and more, a second model of co-production also takes place, in which two or more production structures join forces to realize a common artistic proposal. Often this is done in an interdisciplinary context with the partners looking for or exchanging complimentary, artistic competences: e.g. the collaboration between a theatre and a dance company; between a dance company and a music ensemble. This second model will only be specifically dealt with in this dossier, whenever it involves fundamental different approaches from the first one.

The topic of international touring should be a dossier on its own and is here only dealt with in as far as it is part of or the logical result of a previous co-production engagement.

Finally, the expertise on which this dossier is based is first and foremost my own one, running from 1990 till 2002 an active co-production and residence policy in Arts Centre Vooruit in Gent Belgium, especially within the domain of contemporary dance. The dance community has probably the oldest & most advanced experience with international co-production and as such is a very useful reference frame, also for other disciplines.

To complement the specificity of my own knowledge and experience, I will ask in a second round a number of distinguished international producers both to comment on my proposals and to add complimentary insights from their own experience. This essential, complimentary second part will be added and published later in the year (probably April-May).

Part I : my own experience.

1. Stating the obvious,
Some preliminary remarks

1.1. Always give priority to the artistic content.

In my contribution “Translating the artists’ needs” to the book “Managing Dance : current issues and future strategies” (Northcote House, 1999), I already warned about some of the pitfalls and dangers of some of the international funding schemes. That is: if you try to design your artistic project in such a way that it matches the criteria of the international funding and co-production schemes, you might be reversing the priorities and as such seriously compromise it.

Always devise and define first the content of your artistic proposal, independent from how it will be realized, financed and then look for the appropriate funding schemes and possible co-producers. With the internationalization of the performing arts the landscape has not only expanded but also diversified and you will probably always find a funding scheme or co-production circuit which fits your necessities. And if you don’t, it is the duty of the funding authorities and the supportive organizations to change their policies and to follow the needs of the creative artists, without which they have no reason of existence.

“We are led by the artists we choose to serve.” (John Ashford. The Place Theatre)

1.2. Don’t forget to develop a strong, home base.

In the early 1980’s, there were worldwide several, artistic communities who were potentially, equally talented. However the ones who were most successful over a longer period in their artistic development and their international recognition and touring, were the ones who developed a strong home base and were able to convince their local decision makers of the importance of their work.

International co-production and touring should always be a complementary source of support. If the company or the artistic project becomes too dependent on it for its realization or survival, you are in a vulnerable and even unhealthy position. So don’t forget to develop a strong home base with partnerships with local presenters, funding authorities, etc... before you launch yourself into the international market. Even for your international projects, your partners at home will often be the main supporters.

And what is true for the organizational side is also true for the artistic content. The most universal artistic statements are often those which are most deeply rooted in their own, local culture.

1.3. To work internationally is not an obligation but a choice.

During the preparation of this dossier the VTI (the Flemish Theatre Institute) organized a session to discuss the same topic with companies who already have a lot of experience with international co-production and touring. Most of the individual stories resembled each other in the way the first international projects of each company or artist seemed to have grown organically out of a personal contact between the artist and a foreign partner and their mutual desire to collaborate.

But after that initiatory moment, to work internationally becomes quickly a conscious and strategic choice which asks for a lot of extra investments both in staff time and finances. As such to work internationally is not a necessity but a choice which should be carefully taken, since it has a lot of consequences for the development of the own artistic project and company.

2. Different forms of co-productions.

The term co-production is often used in very different contexts to describe very different practices. Literally it implies a shared responsibility (hence the prefix 'co') on the production level of an artistic project. But the cases in which this 'sharing' really happens are a minority and even then I will, out of my own experience, argue against too much sharing (see also further).

In most cases there is only one producer who takes all the responsibilities (artistic, financial, legal, etc...) with a number of co-producers supporting or facilitating certain aspects of the production process, with the financial aspect being the primary and most obvious one. As such, a majority of co-productions are basically a form of co-financing or even pre-financing. There is nothing against this reductive use of the term 'co-production' as long as one is aware and straightforward about it.

2.1. Co- or pre-financing.

The main reason for companies to look for co-producers is to secure their production budget. It is very hard to give exact figures of what is a reasonable co-production contribution or budget since it depends so much on the scale of the project, the possibilities of each of the partners, their relationship, the return being asked or given, etc... . So I asked a number of befriended producers what would normally be the co-production budget they were looking for and to express this in a percentage of the actual, artistic costs of the project. And most came up with a figure between 30 and 50 % to be both realistic and healthy. It was also agreed by almost everybody that it would be very unhealthy to be dependent on co-production money for the company's or project's overhead.

In almost all the cases, the co-producers are also the first presenters of the production. As such, part of the co-production money invested is often a form of pre-financing the fees of the actual performances. Again there is no fixed set of rules, but still some general criteria seem to be relevant if the co-production is a form of pre-financing the actual performance fees:

- the co-production budget should always be more or at least equal to the actual fees;
- extra costs (travel, accommodation, per diems, etc...) related to the performance are best kept outside the co-production agreement & should be part of a separate performance contract.

Even this more restrictive definition of co-production as a form of pre-financing performance fees has its value since the co-producer takes the risk of having a 'blind date' with the producer and guarantees both money and performances at a stage when the production still has to be realized. It is especially useful for large scale

productions where both the production budget and the performance fees are so substantial that they acquire a sharing of the risk. The performances guaranteed in advance by the co-producers are also often the stepping-stone around which the rest of the international tour is being built and organized.

A last and major advantage of this way of international co-financing a production is that the money invested might also open up and attract extra funding possibilities since both most national funding bodies and pan-national organizations (such as the European Community) have specific budgets to support and stimulate international co-operation and exchange. Both the producer and the co-producer can benefit from these schemes and they might as well increase the overall production budget as they may offer the (co-)producer a direct support to or return on his contribution.

2.2. Residences

Besides cash, the next important thing for a performing arts artist or producer is time and space to actually make the work. Since a lot of artists or companies don't have their own venue or even not a proper rehearsal space, a specific model of co-production has developed in which presenters offer their theatre or rehearsal spaces to companies or artists in residence. In these cases it has also become a common practice to translate the space and time offered into an actual budget of hours, days, weeks or months and to even attach a certain money value to this support in kind. Since the infrastructure always comes with equipment and specialized staff, these and other services offered (such as technical, promotional or dramaturgical assistance) might be added.

The residence policy has a lot of advantages but also a couple of dangers that one has to be aware of. Being away from home offers you the advantage of not being disturbed by your daily duties and routine and being able to concentrate fully on the artistic project. But for some artists the 'home' environment is the main source of inspiration for their creative process and in moments of crisis you might long for the comfort of being in familiar surroundings. The exploitation of a venue/space also demands different skills from the one dealing with the human resources of an artistic project. And although most artists desire at a particular stage of their career to have more control of their own working space and conditions, the residence model where the responsibilities between the supporting infrastructure and the artistic content of the project are both separated and shared seems to be a model which works well in practice and helps to concentrate and optimize the resources.

Qualities the residence place should offer:

- easy accessibility, ideally 24/24 hours;
- the possibility to really inhabit and personalize it, that is to make it one's own, by not having to share it with other people and being able to leave one's own 'stuff' there;
- offering a private and protected atmosphere, but preferably with a 'window' to the exterior or as part of a larger artistic or social environment;
- basic technical equipment, such as a sound and video installation, a dressing room, a piano, etc...;
- comfortable accompanying living conditions such as a production office, a kitchen, good housing, easily accessible by public transport, etc... .

One particular model of residence which has turned out to be very successful is the residence in a fully equipped theatre space to finalize the work on stage – to make its light design, to finalize the scenery and experiment with sound and any other relevant, technical devices. Often this type of residence is combined with premiering the work abroad away from the stress and tension of the home reception and reviews. The advantages and disadvantages are similar to a regular residence in a studio space:

- the balance between the comfort of the working conditions offered versus the investments to go abroad;
- the fact that being away from your natural environment both might take away or increase stress or external pressure.

2.3. Commissioning work.

A third possible model of co-production which defines a relationship between on the one hand an artist and his company and on the other hand an organizing body, is of a very different nature. In the commissioning model it is not the artist who takes the initiative but the organizer who might be anything from another artist, over a venue or festival, a public authority, a private sponsor, etc... In this model the patron commissions the artist to realize a project or part of a project within a very specific model of production or presentation: e.g., the successful program of Festival d'Avignon in which a dancer is invited to choose a choreographer from whom he/she would like a solo created.

It is clear that in this model the financial and often also the production responsibilities of the patron are much bigger. Often the patron takes all responsibilities until the creation within the event or context which is proposed. While the artist or company both keeps the artistic rights and manages the project afterwards. This type of co-production might also reopen the debate on author's rights and return, especially in more commercial genres such as music (see also 5).

2.4. Artistic co-productions.

Finally there is a model of an interdisciplinary co-production between two or more artists and their respective companies. In this model each partner brings in part of the required artistic competence and human resources.

I personally feel that even in this model it is more sane that only one partner takes the final responsibility on all levels of the production – both artistically, organizational, financial, etc... and that both the investments (e.g. in artistic wages) and return (e.g. a percentage of the performance fees) of all the partners are well defined and balanced beforehand. But this model doesn't exclude a more collective and shared responsibility and might in fact be the only true co-production model in the full meaning of the word.

3. Keys to successful partnerships.

Whichever of the above described co-production models is realized, the co-production relationship implies a degree of engagement from every partner that I always like to refer to it as a 'matrimonial' relationship. And this in opposition with the less engaging love relationship when there is only the engagement to present the work.

In a similar way it is very helpful to think about the relationship between a hosting venue and a visiting company in terms of the host-guest relation and consider all the written and unwritten rules of hospitality that are implied.

3.1. Co-production = a form of matrimony.

Co-productions of any kind imply such a serious engagement of all the involved partners that in order to be successful one should look before one leaps. It is not a condition, but it helps a lot if the partners know each other already well or even better have already collaborated together in a less engaging partnership. For venues or festivals which both have a receptive program and co-produce, the co-production engagement is often the next stage after they successfully invited or presented the artist or company in their receptive program.

The co-production engagement is a far reaching engagement that often involves serious investments and risks. As in a matrimonial relationship it demands a lot of confidence and trust of the partners in each other and they'd better also anticipate (even legally and contractually) possible future crises or unsuccessful results.

In my opinion the co-production partnership should answer the following criteria:

- it is a privileged partnership which also implies that you can only have this partnership with a limited number of partners;
- the different partners don't have to be identical but there should be a certain equivalence in the way they contribute and support the production;

(both these criteria are also important with regard to the symbolical return of the name association of the different partners with the production or artist and which each other, see also 5.1)

- often the co-production partnership is a long term engagement which expands over more than one production which is another reason to take time and seriously invest in the first collaboration;
- beside the obvious more or less successful outcome of the co-production engagement, a key to its success is that both partners take each other seriously and

that they communicate with each other straightforwardly and honestly, especially in moments of crisis (see also 4).

3.2. The written and unwritten rules of hospitality: the etiquette of international touring.

International touring, especially in the performance arts, where both content and the quality of the work coincides with the human resources of the involved artists and performers, is very demanding both for the touring companies and the hosting venues.

In the 12 years I have been responsible of the performing arts program in the Arts Centre Vooruit, I have come to consider the relationship between the inviting venue and the invited company in the simple terms of these between host and guest, i.e. :

- it is the duty of the host to receive the guest in the best possible conditions and make him feel welcome and at home;
- as it is the duty of the guest to respect the house rules and traditions of his host.

Formulated more concretely :

- in the contract and its accompanying documents (e.g. the technical rider) the invited artist or company can define their requirements and the conditions of how they want to be received (accommodation, travel, per diems, technical requirements, etc...)
- but once these are negotiated and defined, they should be flexible enough to adapt or integrate their work within the conditions offered by the venue; since it is the latter's responsibility to well receive, present and promote the work, he should also be given the freedom to do this as he knows to function best within his own specific context.

Again a clear and personal communication both before and during the visit is vital to a successful collaboration (see also 4). And we should keep in mind that both a too indifferent host or a too demanding guest surpass the unwritten rules of hospitality.

4. The importance of communication.

It is my lifelong, professional experience that most problems during touring or any other form of international collaboration or partnership are either a result of bad communication or could be anticipated and avoided by good communication. The keys to successful communication, any communication specialists will define, are related to the three different aspects of the basic communication model: sender --- message --- receiver:

- 1° a good and adequate knowledge of each other by both sender and receiver;
- 2° clarity both in the content of the message;
- 3° and in the chosen form and communication channel.

In terms of successful partnerships in either international co-production or touring in the performing arts, these can be translated in some of the following, practical devices:

- If the partners don't know each other well and collaborate for the first time, a pre-tour where either the manager, the technical director or the artist her/himself visits the hosting venues might be a small investment, time and money wise, which afterwards saves a lot of time & money by anticipating possible problems. Information gathered with other companies or official institutions, such as for instance embassies might complement a better knowledge of the foreign partners.

- The internal organization of every structure is very different – depending on its size, its history, its legal status (e.g. independent versus an institutionalized organization), etc... They are by definition different for a venue and a company. So it is crucial to quickly know and understand who is who within an organization, both with regard to their responsibilities and knowledge. It is also very useful to decentralize specialized discussions (e.g. to have the technical directors of both partners discuss and negotiate the technical aspects of a production), always keeping in mind the host-guest model and also realizing that a particular discussion on one level might also influence other aspects and people: e.g. a technical discussion might have consequences on the financial aspects or on the public accessibility.

- It has been too often, a very negative attitude of both organizers and visiting artists to keep certain aspects of their collaboration, about which either of them is uncertain, in the vague. They will postpone and try to solve it to their advantage during the actual visit, knowing that at that point it is too late for both partners to withdraw from the engagement. I am very much against this practice and I believe that as much as possible should be discussed, negotiated, clarified and confirmed in written form in advance. Only when there is a clear and all encompassing basis agreement, both partners can afford to have a certain, and for the performing arts also necessary, flexibility in its application and realization.

The importance of clear and straightforward communication both in the informal, personal contacts and in their written, formal confirmation and follow-up are important at all the stages of the collaboration. At the stage of presenting a project to a possibly interested co-producer, it is important to know in advance which forms of co-production the partners normally offers and to ask concrete and specific questions about possible support, accordingly. At the stage of negotiating a co-production contract it is important to discuss all relevant aspects, to come to an agreement on each of them and to translate this adequately in a contract (for an example, see appendix). And finally also during the actual touring, it remains vital to a successful collaboration to anticipate possible difficulties by adequate communication.

5. A question of return.

5.1. Symbolic capital.

Although the basis for most co-production engagements is a financial one, i.e. to secure a production budget by joining forces, the symbolic value of the partnership/association is in the arts as valuable. The French sociologist Bourdieu describes in his sociology of the arts, the visual arts in particular, the importance of the 'symbolic capital' and the strategies applied to obtain and maintain it. His very useful and pragmatic theoretical model has been further updated and translated to other arts fields by others such as Hans Abbing (The Netherlands) or Rudi Laermans and Pascale Gielen (Belgium).

As such, certain co-production partners are more interesting than others, not only for the real and actual support they can offer, but also because of their pioneer role within their own community or landscape. In general festivals are often more interesting partners because they offer a greater public exposure and more possibilities for networking since often a lot of artists and presenters are present at the same time.

Also from the co-producer's point of view, the symbolic name association between his project and the supported artist or production, is often the only real return he asks for or actually gets. As such, it is very important to pay enough attention to adequately mention his support in the credits of the production, also during the subsequent touring. And to actively keep him informed of the continuation of the project (e.g. by sending him press reviews or program brochures) also after the actual co-production or collaboration has been realized.

5.2. Real cash return.

Since most of the international touring in the performing arts is still loss-making or needs extra support from funding bodies, most co-producers don't ask a cash return on their investment as is for instance the case in more commercial genres such as pop music, musicals or films. Nevertheless the question may be asked in cases where the co-production is very substantial (as is always the case in types 3 and 4, commissioning the work or artistic co-productions) whether the possibility of cash return (e.g. a percentage of the performance fees during touring) should not be taken in consideration. The return of a successful investment might as such be used to invest in a new project.

5.3. 'Extra curricular' activities.

Often co-producers also like to highlight their co-production engagement by organizing extra activities (such as for instance workshops, lectures, community work, etc...). When this is done as part of the touring it is normally no problem and also the company might benefit from it, since it can be very helpful to extra promote the work. But when it is asked as return for a residence, during the actual creation process, one has to be careful that one's creative energy is not dispersed too much between the actual production and these 'extra curricular' activities.

6. Some examples.

To show the possibilities but also the complexities of international co-production models, I would like to finish this first part with describing a couple of co-production engagements I was actually engaged in during the 12 years of directing the co-production and residence policy of Arts Centre Vooruit. I won't discuss or repeat the positive or negative experiences of each of them individually, but it is obvious that in all these cases a clear, formalized partnership was a condition to their success.

- For a foreign dance company it is 'cheaper' (since they were able to get extra support for the travel and accommodation costs) to finalize their rehearsal and production process on the main stage of Vooruit (which is offered to them with all the equipment and assistance of the technical staff as part of the co-production agreement) than to rent a theatre in their home town. At the end of the residence, a public try-out is organized for both the regular dance audience and interested organizers. The actual performances are organized a year later, as part of a larger tour.

- A Belgian theatre company (bringing in all of its actors and artistic staff) realizes an artistic co-production with a foreign dance company (bringing in his dancers and also supporting part of the rehearsal process with its infrastructure). Since it is a large scale production, the production budget is secured by a limited number of co-producers in different countries, who are pre-financing a fixed number of presentations. Vooruit is one of the partners, but since the production is too large scale for the own stage, a local partnership is set up with the Opera House. This local partnership is supported additionally by the City Council. To the public performances an extra performance (by invitation) is added, paid for by a private sponsor who has engaged yet another party to organize his sponsor event around the performance. Which means that for this extra performance, seven different partners are involved, who each have their specific investments, responsibilities and return.

- Three music ensembles in three different European countries decide to join forces, both artistically and financially to realize a site specific, large scale contemporary opera. Each of the partners looks for extra support with his local funding authorities for different aspects of the production and subsequent touring and together they apply for a European grant in the Culture 2000 program. Since the project is large scale and site specific, they have to find partners and secure an international tour long in advance, before the actual production process starts.

- Vooruit commissions a small scale solo work paying for the whole artistic and production budget and providing the necessary rehearsal infrastructure. In return no supplementary fee is paid for the premier series of performances. After this premier series, the project and its touring are further managed by the company and no extra return is asked, except for the name association: 'this project was originally commissioned by'.

- Five years after its creation, there is a foreign interest in a Flemish spoken theatre production which Vooruit co-produced. As part of the follow up of the original co-production engagement, no money is invested, but the company is offered free rehearsal space to prepare a version in the foreign language. As return a public try-out is organized at the end of the residence which also offers the company the possibility to evaluate the adaptations with a live audience.

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Part II : Comments and interviews with different producers.

1. Farooq Chaudry – Akram Khan Company (GB).

I would like to add two comments about the relation between a company and its co-producers:

1. The status that some high profile co -producers have, is often useful to attract other co-producers from lesser known sources. In addition this same principle can be applied to other more established co-producers to join the "club" so to speak and align themselves with their counterparts.

2. It might also be worth mentioning the difficulties of breaking the ‘marriage’ between, artist/company and co-producer, e.g. when the artist has outgrown the venue due to greater ambitions in scale or wishing for a change of context for the work. These partnerships are often intensely close and can occasionally be very possessive.

The most successful co-production partnerships have been these with a sense of a long term view, supporting Akram’s career rather than co-producing individual projects and allowing for perceived "failures" in this growth. Perhaps what singles these co-productions out more from the others is that beyond, space and money we have also received intelligent and sensitive advice and feedback that has helped to shape our growth.

In a less successful co production, there was very little communication. We never met the co- producer himself until some days before the premiere and did not receive any significant feedback apart from a sense that the show went well. We felt that the co-production was a device to ensure that the venue had the work first with little care as to how it might look. This was reflected in the limited access to the theatre space we received. We did not receive the funds until very late which created anxiety and wasted a lot of management time which needed to focus on developing the project. Since then we have had little to do with this organization leaving us feeling that it was more of a one night stand than a marriage.

2. Guy Coolen – Music Theatre Transparant (B)

With Transparant we have a lot of experiences with the third type of artistic co-productions, where several artistic partners try to share the artistic content of a production. In order for these co-productions to be successful, you need preferably

complementary partners, very clear agreements between all the partners from the very beginning when the project is conceived; and clear and good communication channels all through the production process.

A very good experience was a collaboration with an orchestra. In the conception of the project all decisions, about singers, director, etc... were taken together. But once we started producing responsibilities were complementary. They were responsible for the musical quality. We were responsible for the scenic aspects of the project.

A negative experience was one, where in the beginning there was a lot of artistic exchange and discussion. But once the production process started, with one partner as the executive producer, there was very little communication. The original librettist on whom we agreed, left the production and the composer himself wrote a libretto. As one of the main co-producer and initiator of this project, we were never informed of these changes.

3. Dietrich Grosse – Independent producer (E)

There are three points in the dossier which struck me as extremely relevant for my own practice:

1. For years I was the producer of the Catalan dance company Lanonima Imperial. My experience with Lanonima was that the annual budget of the company would be based on a third part of subvention, a third part of sales and a third part on co-productions (calculated roughly). This was a functioning scheme for years and years. The existence of the company would not have been possible without this international co-production help. This is due to the Spanish cultural model, which continues being much less efficient than in the North or Centre Europe. Although in more recent years, the residence model has been introduced timidly.

Yet I do agree absolutely, the home base is extremely important and very desirable, and on the long term indispensable.

2. The human relationship on as many levels as possible is for me basic. Confidence in an artist comes also out of a good production structure around him. There is also the aspect of visioning and accompanying an artist in his career, accompanied not only by the programming space but also by developing a public for his work.

3. Out of my experience you need the following qualities: strong nerves combined with a lot of perseverance in the daily work and patience in getting all the institutional elements you need together.

I briefly describe one of the most exiting co-productions in which I was involved with Lanònima: a co-production which was born out of a special situation, the war in Croatia/Bosnia.

When we got a help-fax from there, it was clear that only action could be of use, so Juan Carlos Garcia went and gave a free workshop for two weeks in Zagreb for professional

dancers. He got interested in the situation and traveled to Ossiek, which had been severely attacked.

Snjezana Abramovic asked me to convince him to make a co-production for her company (several of her dancers had participated in the workshop) - a complete madness, as the country was very insecure, there was almost no money in our own company and almost no money in the Zagrebacka Plesna Ansambl. But Sneki was insistant; she would bring me to the Vice-Minister at that time, a theatre director. When I saw her will and her confidence I talked it through with Juan Carlos to propose a project which should be born out of the situation and which should go in a direction where he never would have gone himself without this concrete proposal. Sneki was completely willing to try to fulfill his intuitions so he agreed to go forward involving our whole company. The result was a overwhelming piece against the war with two famous Croatian actors, four dancers from Zagrebacka and all the dancers of Lanònima. We had a couple of weeks of preparation in Barcelona only with our dancers, a couple of weeks only with the Croatian artists under the direction of Giovanni and then three weeks all together in Zagreb. The piece played two weeks in a big hall in Zagreb, completely sold out, performances in Barcelona with all the Croatian artists in the Mercat de les Flors and in Italy. The most emotive performance was when the artistic director of the festival in Sarajevo invited the piece to the Bosnian National Theatre and we performed it on the Independence Day of Bosnia. We were all sleeping in houses of families who shared their hospitality with us, them not sleeping in their habitual beds but in the living room of their bomb-damaged houses. At that time Croatia and Bosnia still were heavy post-war enemies. We got a symbolic but encouraging help of the European Council. For me it is one of my happiest realizations as there was clear sense and strong personalities behind the project.

This is an extreme example not to be mentioned as a typical example in any learning book rules, in order to show that at the end common sense combined with strong intuitions can lead you through a lot of difficulties and crazy situations. I don't want to write a novel but what I mean is that certainly there must be, apart from a rational and very clear head, a portion of passion, if possible from all involved partners.

4. Walter Heun – Joint Adventures (D)

I like to confine my remarks to the further elucidation of a few aspects which I believe to be important.

1. See, listen, talk – communication develops into cooperation

International co-productions, and especially production networks that are based on continuity, can emerge when regularly recurrent contacts gradually lead to the development of working relationships that go beyond what is typically described as “vitamin B”. People who were initially strangers gradually become familiar

acquaintances when one repeatedly attends performances alongside them, when one shares the experiences of the pleasures (or pains!) of being spectators at the same events, and when one exchanges views and opinions about events which we have witnessed together.

The primary precondition for the possibility of a long-term, fertile cooperation is trust in the other person's artistic competence. Most of the networks in existence today developed from shared experiences of this kind and from aesthetic preferences held in common by the members of the network.

The best cooperative projects arose from the honest exchange of views about artistic, social, and political problems, followed afterwards by discussions about production-related issues. In this process, partners from different countries give one another essential tips about ways to potentially improve the working situation for artists. Each of these partners works under cultural policies, financial conditions, and structural situations that differ drastically from those under which the others work.

2. Generate excitement – link domestic and foreign qualities

Trust, knowledge, communication, and relationships that have grown naturally over the course of time are the basic preconditions necessary for successful international cooperation. The artistic plans of the invited artist needn't necessarily be in harmony with the artistic and technical possibilities available at the producer's "home base," but they must be brought into a fertile and stimulating relationship with the producer's "base camp." The qualities of the artist and the co-workers for a particular project, the technical and organizational infrastructure, the geographic location, the climate, the architectural factors, and many other issues that exist at the venue can be essential contributors which may be extremely relevant for an artist within the framework of a co-production.

Anyone who wants to become an important partner for international co-productions should above all have the ability to find out about the local conditions, their qualities and limitations. He or she should also be able to get a feel for mutual points of approach and should be able to call the artist's attention to ways in which the artist's own needs can be combined with the qualities existing on-site to result in an artistically successful project.

3. Defend the artist.

In my opinion, an important point in every co-production is the backing that a producer (or co-producer) gives to an artist, both personally and from the producer's institution. I feel that the terms "host" (for the producer) and "guest" (for the artist) are absolutely accurate with respect to the production process. It seems to me that the producer's role as "host" is of paramount importance, especially in artist-in-residence situations where an artist is obliged to work outside of his/her familiar environment and, in some cases, without support from important partners, which may be artistic partners, interlocutors, production partners, or private partners.

Equally important is the backing that producers give to artists when the production is performed. When a producer discusses the artistic work with the audience and with so-called “mediators,” it’s important that the producer is able to find the right words so that an open attitude towards the work and the artist can be generated on-site.

A good artwork always contains aspects with which its viewers are not yet well acquainted. The discussion that art triggers is part of the process! However, if the artwork breaks cultural traditions, runs counter to social consensus, or challenges familiar perceptual habits, this is often accompanied by a lack of understanding. Beyond this, art emerges in a context where diverse agendas predominate. Via the producer, an artist positions his/her work in a system of divergent approaches, tastes, economic interests, and claims to power. These are presented to the artist and to the artwork by journalists, organizers, institutions, financiers, friends and adversaries.

As far as ideas are concerned, a “cultural dialogue” exists between artists and their works, even if they do not communicate with one another directly. The ongoing struggle among ideas maintains the vitality of art, art’s discourse, and the discourse about art. At the same time, this dialogue is accompanied by a process of competition among producers, mediators, and institutions. The trends that are currently en vogue, as well as the artistic statements that are no longer being articulated quite as loudly as they were in the past, imply better or worse conditions of production, i.e. potentials for the distribution of an artist’s own artistic positions. The vehemence and the dissemination – which are determined by the size of the performance venue, the international distribution, the PR, the marketing, and the producer’s work with the press – evoke stronger or weaker responses to the artistic positions expressed in a production.

If the artwork meets with partial or total rejection, then the producer is called upon to play the role of the artist’s “defender.” I regard the producer here as a responsible companion who conveys criticism to the artist whenever the criticism is valid and constructive. If, on the other hand, the criticism is falsely motivated, if it stems from a lack of understanding or results from vested interests, then the producer ought to take a strong stance: he or she must stand firmly behind the artist and the artwork, and must defend both within the “argumentative battle” that is waged in various contexts whenever a production is presented in public. The producer must defend the artist, but not blindly!

4. International partnership and local potentials – an interaction.

If, when one presents one’s local financing partners with plans for a high-quality project, it is also possible to find concrete paths toward the co-financing of the project or even to find foreign financing partners for it, then the path toward the realization of the project is significantly shortened. Conversely, the artistic profile which a producer has earned over many years of work, together with the local financial and production possibilities, jointly determine the producer’s chances of being asked to produce projects for internationally renowned artists.

One shouldn't forget that there are indeed some co-producers whose motivations for co-financing a project are largely determined by their fellow co-production partners and by the international reputations of those partners. This motivation may sound somewhat dubious, but the executive producer can put it to good use on the artist's behalf – if it is accompanied by a fundamental willingness of the co-producer to serve as a host.

For many years, JOINT ADVENTURES has initiated and co-initiated national and international cooperative projects which can be regarded as exemplary. For this reason, I would like to cite one example of a positive cooperative model. This example would be located between points 2.3 and 2.4. in Guy's categorization.

The "New Works" international co-production

The "New Works" production, which we staged within the framework of DANCE WORKSHOP EUROPE in 1991, emerged from the need to bring choreographers into artistic dialogue with their colleagues from other countries and to make their choreographic work visible on the international scene. After numerous discussions, it was possible to find four co-producers who were each interested in supporting one choreographer and who were also interested in the choreographers selected by the other partners. The theatres and their guest choreographers were: The Place in London (UK) with Mark Murphy; Théâtre Contemporain de la Danse in Paris (F) with William Petit; Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt (D) with Portuguese choreographer Rui Horta; and Joint Adventures in Munich (D) with Micha Purucker.

Together, the following co-production model was implemented:

Four choreographers from four different countries each produced with their own groups one short piece about a common theme. The first phase of the rehearsals took place in each choreographer's home city. During this phase, each choreographer's co-producer hosted the dance company chosen by that particular choreographer. Beginning with the midpoint of the rehearsal interval, all of the choreographers met in Munich, showed one another their works-in-progress (in an as yet unfinished state), rehearsed in parallel, and allowed one another to gain insights into their rehearsal work. The shared lighting concept, which was created by one lighting designer, served as a connective element to augment the thematic, artistic "common denominator" that united the four facets of this production, which consisted of four short choreographies. A shared technical team accompanied the pieces until they were ready for their premiere and took care of the technical work during the premiere performance in Munich as well as during the subsequent performances in the co-producers' cities.

The fundamental idea here was to bring four choreographers into a dialogue which would transcend the limits of familiar models (e.g. symposiums, podium discussions, workshops, works-in-progress) and to directly confront the choreographers with one another during the actual process of rehearsing a production. Round-table discussions, in-house video screenings of existing productions, and one-on-one discussions with a dramaturge accompanied this process. The simultaneous production at the same site, and

the shared experiences of the guest performances, temporarily created a community of artists who were engaged in an intensive exchange.

Although the audiences favored a different piece in each city, the joint evening was of extraordinarily high quality – despite the disparate production conditions – or perhaps precisely because of them. Furthermore, the evening showed the disparate responses evoked when artists from different cultural backgrounds each approach the same theme in their own unique ways. One of the pieces produced by the participating choreographers (Rui Horta's "Wolfgang bitte...") was able to win in the final round of Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis in Paris-Bagnolet.

The funds for the production were drawn from the budgets of the several co-producers and contributed by local community grants, international cultural institutions, and the European Commission. All of the participants in this project were paid professional-level fees. Each choreographer was given a production budget to defray the expenses of the stage design, costumes, and music. The collaboration led to the continuation of the partnership among the several co-producers in the form of the ongoing existence of DANCE NETWORK EUROPE, which was one of the first co-production networks for contemporary dance in Europe.

I can cite only one negative example: namely, the collaboration among several different European co-producers for the production of "The Sweatlodge" (1993) by Man Act. Some of the co-producers made their participation contingent upon the inclusion of performers from their own cities in the cast of the show, and some of those performers weren't able to fulfill the artistic demands expected of them. The artistic success was unfortunately not able to establish itself until after all of the guest performances had been given at the co-producers' performance sites and thus after the first contracts for the performers had expired. Only after half the ensemble had been successively replaced by other performers was the production able to enjoy a successful tour and to give approximately fifty performances in some of Europe's most beautiful theatres.

5. Lieven Thyron – Les Ballets C de la B (B)

Within the dance community, co-productions are essential to the survival of the company. Since most of the existing funding schemes are insufficient, the financial co-production contributions are one of the essential pillars of our organization. The core of possible co-productions is too a large extent, Germany and France

Within the company model, the collaboration and absolute confidence between artists and manager are essential to its success. But you also need as an arts manager particular skills:

daring to take calculated risks, to jump in the deep water; guts and communications skills to enter the networking which can be a rather closed circuit; to be able to give and invest

in long term contacts (it takes a lot of kilometers and a big telephone bill, even when you've established your own network to maintain it); a huge personal involvement,...

It has been a conscious decision of the company to work with a professional agent. As a manager you represent the company and its artists. You guide their careers, both artistically and materially you try to create the right conditions for their work. The selling of performances is a different role & can best be done by somebody else.

To work for different artists within a collective model has both advantages and disadvantages. To try to sell one artist with another in a package deal is not done. There is also the risk of over saturation. So the best thing you can do is diversify and try to establish a circuit for every artist individually, depending on his needs and where he/she is in her career.

One really negative example is where a co-producer withdrew his engagement even after the premiere. Although our community still works a lot on the basis of confidence in each other, it is more and more essential to professionalize and to confirm all communications and agreements in written form.

6. Jaap Van Baasbank – Julidans (NL)

One of the main questions I still ask myself is how do you convince your own funding bodies of the relevance of co-production investments? What do you get back as a co-producer next to prestige and a preferential contact with the artist? Maybe we should ask in the future a cash return (e.g. a small fixed amount on every subsequent performance) on our co-production investments (as certain festivals already do). In that way a successful co-production might create extra possibilities for future co-productions. And part of the investment made is paid back by other organizers who benefit from its success but didn't invest in it.

Sometimes companies demand a co-production engagement as a condition to be able to present the production.

Communication and confidence in each other are essential. It is a fragile balance between being involved not enough or too much. In general I appreciate it when the company keeps me informed about the development of the project. I also enjoy the direct contact with the artist. But also the communication with the manager as go-in-between between the artist's desires and wishes and the engagements of the co-producers is extremely important.

It takes years and a lot of personal investment to develop a personal network of contacts and it demands an equal amount of time and investment to maintain it.

One negative example we had, was when we continued an artistic project after one of the co-producers withdrew and the remaining budget was too small to realize the project in optimal circumstances.

III. Appendix

Model of a co-production contract

AGREEMENT

BETWEEN A. Producer address: Phone: + mobile: e-mail: represented by hereafter referred to as 'THE COMPANY'	AND B. Co-producer address: phone: fax: e-mail: represented by hereafter referred to as 'THE CO- PRODUCER'
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THE FOLLOWING IS AGREED

1. GENERAL TERMS

THE COMPANY and THE CO-PRODUCER will co-operate to realise and present "NAME PRODUCTION", a new full evening programme by THE COMPANY. This co-operation will be financial, material, logistical and promotional, as described further on.

THE CO-PRODUCER will present the production on the DATE

In all publications (press, promotional and recordings), local and abroad, about the production, THE CO-PRODUCER will be mentioned as follows:

"PRODUCTION is a co-operation between THE COMPANY and THE CO-PRODUCER"

It is the responsibility of THE COMPANY to include this clause in its contracts with a third party.

For THE CO-PRODUCER this contract will be followed up by X.
Phone; fax ; e-mail

For technical matters please contact Y, the head of the technical staff.
Phone; fax ; e-mail.

2. FINANCIAL CONDITIONS

The total support from THE CO-PRODUCER adds up to the equivalent of TOTAL AMOUNT (1+2+3).

This amount can be divided in:

the commission for the work: AMOUNT 1

to be paid before

the fee for the performances: AMOUNT 2

to be paid

Both amounts are to be paid by bank transfer upon receipt of an invoice from THE COMPANY, to account:

help in kind by THE CO-PRODUCER to an amount of AMOUNT 3

This amount represents the value of the services provided maximally by THE CO-PRODUCER and will under no circumstances be converted into cash nor into other than the hereafter described services.

Use studio	Period	Budget
Use theatre space		
+ technical support theatre space		
Catering		
Office and administrative services		
Promotional services		
Total		AMOUNT 3

THE CO-PRODUCER cannot be held responsible for a higher amount than the one mentioned above. The costs, related to the performances (transport, lodgings, per diems, etc.) are part of a separate agreement.

3. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

3.1. rehearsals at THE CO-PRODUCER's

Rehearsals will be held in the STUDIO from DATE till DATE.

THE CO-PRODUCER provides heating and cleaning of the rehearsal spaces.

On the first day of rehearsals THE COMPANY will attend a production meeting in THE CO-PRODUCER. On this occasion all practical settlements will be made/checked concerning access, keys, dressing rooms, lodging, the rehearsal schedule, use of phones/fax, photocopies, production office, etc.

THE CO-PRODUCER provides technical equipment as mentioned in the riders of its halls and studios.

3.2. The opening (première)

THE CO-PRODUCER organizes the première. The company is entitled to 15 free entrance tickets for its artists, guests and the other partners.

3.3. the other performances held at THE CO-PRODUCER's.

The above mentioned performance fee will under no circumstances be re-negotiable and THE CO-PRODUCER is 100% entitled to the income from tickets. The company is entitled to 10 free tickets per performance.

3.4. the tour

THE COMPANY will provide THE CO-PRODUCER with the tour schedule and samples of the publicity material on which his co-production is mentioned.

4. AUTHORS RIGHTS

THE COMPANY declares that all legal conditions concerning the author's rights (choreography, music) have been made.

The author's rights for the performances (music and choreography) are (not) included in the fee.

THE CO-PRODUCER has the right to make recordings that can be used as archival material. These recordings will not be used commercially, nor made public, without prior written permission by the artist or by his/her representative.

5. GENERAL CONDITIONS

This agreement is valid in law only when it is returned to and received by THE CO-PRODUCER within a fortnight.

THE COMPANY is responsible for any charges, taxes, contributions, insurance with regard to the employment of the artist(s) and his (their) assistant(s) and with regard to its goods (equipment, instruments,).

THE CO-PRODUCER cannot be held responsible for loss, theft or damage to goods (company or personal) taken onto its premises.

In case of unlawful breaking of the agreement by one of the contracting parties, damages - equal to the amount stated above and augmented with possible costs for production, loss of income, administration or prosecution - will have to be paid.

In the event of illness or major disasters (strike, fire, nuclear disaster, traffic accident, unforeseen technical problems at venue,) the agreement shall be broken without any party having the right to claim damages. If necessary, a medical certificate will be delivered.

In the event of one of the parties being in the material impossibility to fulfill the agreement, the other party will have to be informed by the fastest (and most indisputable) means of communication (e-mail, fax).

In case the production is not realized, all pre-financed amounts will be refund by THE COMPANY within a month.

This agreement is construed in accordance with the X law. Only the courts of X are to determine on a dispute.

THE COMPANY agrees with all the terms of this agreement which apply on top of its own selling conditions.

Made in as many copies as there are parties, all of which declare having received one copy.

Read and confirmed
For THE CO-PRODUCER,

Read and confirmed
for THE COMPANY,