MULTILINGUALISM, ALTERMODERNISM, TRANSLATION AND CONTEMPORARY PERFORMING ARTS

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Abstract This essay explores the theoretical foundations of multilingualism and the transcending of cultural and linguistic boundaries in contemporary drama and theatre. Drawing on Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of altermodernism—defined as the ongoing reconfiguration of modernity in a globalized context through movement across time, space, and medium—it examines how theatre navigates issues of translation, identity, and intercultural dialogue. Arguing for a cross-cultural, dialogical approach, the essay proposes that contemporary theatre can embody a cosmopolitan ethos and embrace otherness, fostering equality among artistic languages. In this context, theatre enhances its translatability without compromising its distinctive aesthetic and cultural identity.
Keywords Multilingualism, altermodernism, translation, Nicolas Bourriaud, W.G. Sebald.

Introduction: How to Overcome Cultural and Language Barriers in Contemporary Theatre

The essay will focus on the possible theoretical background of multilingualism and the overcoming of cultural and language barriers in the theatre and performing arts. To serve this purpose, I will link Nicolas Bourriaud's term *altermodernism* as "the in-progress redefinition of modernity in the era of globalization, stressing the experience of wandering in time, space, and medium"[1] to the dilemmas of theatre and performing arts of today, as defined and explored by theorists (Erika Fischer-Lichte, Patrice Pavis, Marvin Carlson, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Wolfgang Welsch, Mikhail Epstein) and artists (W.G. Sebald, Mark Tompkins, Robert Lepage).

I believe that this cross-cultural approach, which fosters a consciousness of the dialogical relationship between cultures, can help contemporary theatre find its own way to

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2025.30.2.17.
The present article was written within the research programme Theatre and Interart Studies P6-0376, which is financially supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.
[1] Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern," in *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, ed. N. Bourriaud (Tate, 2009), 12.

cosmopolitanism and otherness as two notions stressing the equality of languages of artistic practices. On the grounds of interchangeability, theatre can thus gain in its translatability, while not losing its own identity.

When cultural theorist Nicolas Bourriaud coined the terms altermodern and altermodernism as the curator of the exhibition *Altermodern: Tate Triennial 2009*, he wrote:

> "Altermodernism can be defined as that moment when it became possible for us to produce something that made sense starting from an assumed heterochrony, that is, from a vision of human history as constituted of multiple temporalities, disdaining the nostalgia for the avant-garde and indeed for any era—a positive vision of chaos and complexity. It is neither a petrified kind of time advancing in loops (postmodernism) nor a linear vision of history (modernism), but a positive experience of disorientation through an art-form exploring all dimensions of the present, tracing lines in all directions of time and space. The artist turns cultural nomad: what remains of the Baudelairean model of modernism is no doubt this *flânerie*, transformed into a technique for generating creativeness and deriving knowledge."[2]

Example 1: Sebald's Altermondernist Wanderings in Time and Space

Winfried Georg Sebald's oeuvre, which spans 1944 to 2001, is profoundly preoccupied with the theme of memory, both individual and collective. The writings of this "German émigré to the UK"[3] can be understood as sustained literary attempts to grapple with the historical trauma of World War II and its enduring psychological and cultural repercussions for the German people. Central to Sebald's work is a nuanced engagement with the Holocaust, which he often explores through subtle autobiographical resonances and evoking Jewish lives and histories interwoven with his own.

Sebald's innovative prose style—marked by its melancholic tone, associative structure, and the blending of genres—defies conventional literary categorization. The reader can detect various influences of philosophers (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) to "a direct claim to work according to Lévi-Strauss's 'system of bricolage', which he explains as 'a kind of untamed way of working, of pre-rational thought, where one rummages around amongst chance finds, until somehow they assemble themselves'."[4]

Although composed in German, his significant works—*Austerlitz*, *The Rings of Saturn*, *The Emigrants*, and *Vertigo*—are widely recognized in English-speaking contexts through the translations that he closely supervised. Their hybrid form distinguishes these texts. They combine documentary realism, personal recollection, and fictional invention. A signature element of his narrative technique is the integration of enigmatic black-and-white photographs that function not as direct illustrations but as oblique visual counterpoints, enriching the texts' meditative and historical dimensions.

[2] Ibid., 12.

[3] Ibid., 11.

[4] Paul Thompson, "Philosophical Models," in *W.G. Sebald in Context*, ed. Uwe Schütte (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 195. The quote within is from the interview: S. Löffler and Wildes Denken: "Gespräch mit W.G. Sebald," in *Porträt: W.G. Sebald*, ed. F. Loquai (Isele, 1997), 132.

Bourriaud sees the idea of the archipelago—and related concepts such as the constellation and the cluster—"as a model representing the multiplicity of global cultures." He goes on to interpret Sebald's writings:

> "*—wanderings between "signs", punctuated by black and white photographs—[…]* as emblematic of a mutation in our perception of space and time, in which history and geography operate a cross-fertilisation, tracing out paths and weaving networks. […] The two concepts – the archipelago and Sebald's excursions – do not intertwine arbitrarily: they represent the paths I followed led by my initial intuition: that of the death of postmodernism as the starting point for reading the present."[5]

With a detached emotional tone, Sebald's books take us on a journey across Europe, into the past, and along the uncertain paths of memory, history, and fiction. In his writings, Sebald follows a similarly aimless trajectory as the artists featured here, in their real and imagined journeys.

Bourriaud also formulates a thesis that has already been addressed elsewhere—namely, that altermodernity arises from global negotiations, from dialogues among representatives of different cultures.

When Bourriaud chooses such an exemplary artist as German novelist, W.G. Sebald, he stresses the fact that Sebald's books take us on journeys around Europe, into the past and across the uncertain terrains of memory, history, and fiction. If we apply these thoughts to theatre, we quickly see that it holds true for this discipline as well. Afterall, what else is theatre, if not a performative journey around Europe and the World, crossing language barriers and communicating with a language of theatrical signs easily translatable into different languages.

Bourriaud wrote something else that readily translates into the theatrical situation of today. I quote again:

> If twentieth-century modernism was above all a western cultural phenomenon, altermodernity arises out of planetary negotiations, discussions between agents from different cultures. Stripped of a centre, it can only be polyglot. Altermodernity is characterised by translation, unlike the modernism of the twentieth century, which spoke the abstract language of the colonial west, and postmodernism, which encloses artistic phenomena in origins and identities.[6]

He furthermore suggests that multiculturism and identity are being overtaken by "creolization," that artists "start from a global state of culture."[7] Ulf Hannerz's concept of cultural creolization, which we will revisit later, refers to the intermingling and mixing of two or several formerly discrete traditions or cultures.

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[5] Bourriaud, "Altermodern," 12.

[6] Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern Explained: Manifesto," Tate, 2009. Available at: https://clairebishop.commons.gc.cuny.edu/projects/altermodern-, accessed September 23, 2024.

[7] Bourriaud, "Altermodern Explained: Manifesto." Also see: Bartholomew Ryan, "Altermodern: A Conversation with Nicolas Bourriaud," *Art in America*, March 16, 2009. https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/altermodern-a-conversation-with-nicolas-bourriaud-56055/.

Example II: Mark Tompkin's Wind of Artaudian Theatrical Madness

Let us consider another example—this time, the theatre production *Un vent de folie* (*A Wind of Madness*)[8] by American choreographer Mark Tompkins, created for the Mladinsko Theatre (Slovensko mladinsko gledališče) in Slovenia in May 2014. In this production, the charismatic choreographer, director, dancer, and performer Mark Tompkins brought his creative energy into a broader collaboration with Slovenian actors and stage artists for the first time. The performance opens in multiple directions—just as the wind referenced in its title.

Those with an appreciation for the history of the performing arts will surely recall Josephine Baker, the American icon of 1920s avant-garde performance. There are even those who—like Ivan Mrak, Slovenia's greatest tragic playwright of the twentieth century, who dedicated an entire hymnal tragedy to her—hold a particular affection for her. Equally iconic was her Banana Skirt costume, worn at the legendary Folies Bergère in the 1927 vaudeville show *Un vent de folie*, in which she danced her wild variation of the Charleston. This costume remains one of the primary visual relics of the "mad" (*folle*, *folie*) Paris of the early twentieth century—a period that introduced a forceful spring-like wind into European art and culture.

That same kind of wind undoubtedly stirs the theatrical imagination and magic of Mark Tompkins and Jean-Louis Badet, who, together with their artistic team, directed their energies toward various symbolic "springs": the Parisian spring of the "crazy" 1920s, embodied by two iconic moments—Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky for the Ballets Russes, and Josephine Baker's wild, mesmerizing performances at the Folies Bergère. However, the list does not end here. We should add at least the Arab Spring, as a socio-political phenomenon that, for a brief moment, seemed to signal the end of a long neoliberal and totalitarian winter. Into this constellation of "springs," we can also insert Slovenia's own political spring of the late twentieth century, resulting in the Independent State in 1991, along with other Slovenian springs: those of the Liberation Front in 1941 and of the socialist and sexual revolutions. More recently, the protest movements that—like the Arab Spring—seemed poised to dispel the cold and bring forth a flourishing, egalitarian political renewal in Slovenia.

In *Un vent de folie*, Tompkins constructs a singular spectacle: a theatrical dialogue between Slovenian folk and poetic traditions on the one hand, and on the other, traditional American and French stage genres, including vaudeville, minstrel shows, operettas, cabarets, and music halls. All of this is filtered through his distinctive approach to dance-theatre, grounded in the principles of contact improvisation. The *kurent*—the wild man of Slovenian folklore, here reimagined as an eroticized female figure—transforms on stage into various twentieth-century icons who engage in unexpected dialogues across theatre, dance, and music. Thus, we see the spring of a new art rooted in pagan tradition, represented in the Slovenian context by the *kurenti* folk figures, which Tompkins and Badet reinterpret through an American-French lens.

[8] Mark Tompkins, *Un vent de folie* / *Veter norosti*, Slovensko mladinsko gledališče, Ljubljana, 2013/2014 season.

Drawing from a vast and eclectic array of cultural sources the production includes references from the Slovenian ethnological and anthropological archive (*kurent*, Saint George, "Marko skače," partisan and pioneer songs), the golden age of Slovenian popular music (e.g., "Spring Returns" with Oto Pestner, "Snowdrops and Daffodils" with Marjana Deržaj and Beti Jurković), Slovenian poetry (Srečko Kosovel, Tomaž Šalamun, Aleš Šteger), and fiction (Ivan Cankar's *Kurent*), as well as clowning traditions (featuring the figure of Monsieur Loyal), American Western tropes, and musical theatre and Broadway musicals.

The show even references John Ford's notorious Jacobean tragedy, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*—a play still untranslated and unperformed in Slovenia—whose attempted staging is interrupted by appearances from 1950s pin-up queen Betty Mae Page (via vintage *Trip-o-Rama*, *Varietease*, and *Teaserama* film clips), and a queer rendition of Bing Crosby's 1936 cowboy-pop classic *I'm an Old Cow Hand (from the Rio Grande)*. As a kind of crown of iconoclastic excess, the show features what is perhaps its most "impossible" juxtaposition: a recitation of Antonin Artaud's essay "The Theatre and the Plague" by a character reminiscent of Cruella de Vil, delivered in interaction with a medley of partisan, pioneer, and patriotic songs sung a cappella.

In *Un vent de folie*, as in his broader work, Tompkins explores the geographies of complex, often contradictory and mutually exclusive iconographies and narratives that shape the performance's semiotic universe—or *semiosphere*. Here, boundaries are made to be transgressed. Across all elements of the production, from genre to form, a dynamic interplay undoes traditional hierarchies and the dichotomy between high and popular culture. The stage becomes a platform for the creolization of cultures, where poetry, prose, drama, vaudeville, and theory form duets, trios, quartets, and more with dance, theatre, music, circus, and film.

All of this aims to liberate the language of the stage in a manner akin to Artaud—so that the theatre might speak in its own voice about a world suspended between laughter and terror, joy and sorrow, Dionysus and Apollo, the gigolo and the *kurent*. In this universe, Bonnie Tyler's "Total Eclipse of the Heart" instantly morphs into Einstürzende Neubauten's "Total Eclipse of the Sun," which then shifts into Louis Prima's "Just a Gigolo," only to transform once more into the Slovenian folk elegy, "Vsi so venci vejli."

Are We Moving Toward a New Translatable Cultural Identity?

However, these two examples are by no means isolated instances of creolization or the altermodern condition. One need only recall the Québécois theatre visionary Robert Lepage—specifically, his production *The Dragon Trilogy* (*La Trilogie des dragons*), which dissolves the boundaries of national identity and features protagonists who exist in a state of flux: perpetually displaced, free as birds in flight, continuously reshaping their identities according to shifting needs and circumstances. The issue of creolization in theatre leads us to the question of speaking for and representing the subaltern, a topic raised in 1985 by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay "Can the subaltern speak?" In it, she laid bare the contradictions of postcolonial thinking and how, even

with the best intentions of empathizing and "coming to meet," the old patterns of domination and negation are reiterated.[9]

This issue was the subject of heated and overtly political debate before and after the premiere of Lepage's more recent performance *Kanata*. Beginning in 2014 as a joint creation with Ariadne Mnouchkine, designed for coproduction with the Parisian Théâtre du Soleil, the show was scheduled to be staged first in Paris in 2018 and then in Quebec in 2020. It would meet with a singular destiny: it never appeared in Canada and, having first been cancelled, was ultimately staged in Paris in a reduced version under the new title *Kanata-Episode 1. La controverse*, at the Cartoucherie, on 15 December 2018 during the Festival d'Automne.[10] The issue raised by *Kanata* concerns, more radically, the representation of other people and cultures: in this case, the charge of appropriation was not based on the work itself (which the accusers had not seen).

Nevertheless, one could say that creolization has today become something of an ideal within the academic mainstream. Consider, for instance, the transnational, pan-European project *"Playing Identities, Performing Heritage: Theatre, Creolisation, Creation and the Commons"—a two-year research initiative involving departments from the universities of Siena and Kent, as well as* theatre academies from Romania, Spain, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom. The project seeks to explore how theatre might contribute to the creolization of European identity and cultural heritage.

We keep asking ourselves the same question. Are we moving towards a new translatable cultural identity? Is there a balance between cultural globalization and localism? On the one hand, once we acknowledge a certain complementarity between local specificity and contemporaneity, we might move towards a more integrated area, encouraged by political and economic incentives. On the other hand, by pleading for the incompatibility between the "West" and the "South," we might be inclined to strengthen an ideal cultural wall dividing the northern from the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Cultural dialogue, which is the essential key to the coexistence of different peoples and cultures, guides this exchange of visions on civil society, democracy, and human rights, while also underscoring the need to move beyond the culturalism–universalism debate in the name of multiplicity and plurality.

We might be quite sure that there is something presumptuous or, at best, naïve in proposing a theory of this third way, the altermodernity that can avoid binary logic. Nevertheless, as French performing arts theorist Patrice Pavis discusses in his book, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*: all provisional answers to the questions about the status of contemporary culture and interculturalism bear in themselves the dangers of oversimplification, given the complexity of the factors at stake in all cultural exchange and the difficulty of formalizing them.[11]

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[9] For deeper insights into this issue see G. C. Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson, and L. Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. See "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. R. Guha and G.C. Spivak (Oxford University Press, 1988).

[10] For more details, see "An interview with the director by M.C. Mirandette, Hélène Choquette, réalisatrice de Lepage au Soleil: à l'origine de Kanata," in *Ciné-Bulles* 37, no. 3 (2019): 14–18.

[11] Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (Routledge, 1992).

Bourriaud seems to be avoiding the classical question of postcolonial theory, namely the concern with a range of cultural engagements: the impact of imperial languages upon colonized societies; the effects of European "master-discourses" such as history and philosophy; the nature and consequences of colonial education and the links between Western knowledge and colonial power. In particular, Bourriaud is concerned with the responses of the colonized: the struggle to control self-representation, through the appropriation of dominant languages, discourses, and forms of narrative; the struggle over representations of place, history, race, and ethnicity; and the struggle to present a local reality to a global audience.

Perhaps more than ever, today we need to—and here I will use a term from Bourriaud[12]—*translate the cultural values*. Moreover, when we think about the Mediterranean cultural space, we must imagine it as a basin of diverse cultures. In this world, there are Jewish, Arab Muslim, Anglo-Saxon, Latin Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Slavic cultures. The record of historical interaction between these cultures has not always been positive. For centuries, the Euro-Mediterranean world was plagued by various cultural conflicts. On the shores of the Mediterranean, there are deeply distorted images of the Other.

Therefore, we must act with extreme caution to avoid adopting any colonial or postcolonial attitudes that would undermine *cultural creolization*, the struggle of cultures for autonomy and their production of singularities in an increasingly standardized world. Again, I am referring to Hannerz's term introduced in the essay "The World in Creolisation"[13] to describe the intermingling and blending of two or more formerly distinct traditions or cultures. We see it nearly everywhere in today's era of global mass communication and capitalism, but there are important differences as to the degree of mixing. This concept helps Bourriaud in making sense of a great number of contemporary cultural processes, characterized by movement, change, and fuzzy boundaries.

Moreover, we should avoid drawing misguided conclusions, such as the one Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes, when she asserts that "the idea that the United States is the custodian of Western culture is obviously not to be entertained." She reminds us that the United States is "not a white country and everybody should be able to see that,"[14] therefore, it cannot be a representative of Western Culture. Similar conclusions could be drawn regarding European cultures, for example, French culture as predominantly white, etc.

We all know but keep forgetting that the notion of the interpenetration of cultures is far from new. It had instead (as Wolfgang Welsch points out) "already been typical of culture in the past, only to a lesser degree. And not only in Europe. Just consider the case of Japanese culture: it can certainly not be accounted for without taking Chinese and Korean, Indian, Hellenistic, or

[12] Nicolas Bourriaud's keynote address at the *Transforming Aesthetics* conference, July 7–9, 2005, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, accessed September, 22, 2024. http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/aaanz05/abstracts/nicolas_bourriaud.

[13] The essay was reprinted in U. Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity* (Columbia University Press, 1992).

[14] G.C. Spivak, "Reflections on Cultural Studies in the Post-Colonial Conjuncture: An Interview with Guest Editor," in *Cultural Studies: Crossing Boundaries*, 1991: 75.

modern European influences into account."[15] Therefore, we should not feed ourselves with illusions that the twentieth century invented new, unseen paradigms.

Along with the shift from the predominance of Western discourse to the creolization of cultures, we must adapt theatre to a new displacement of borders of languages and cultures. Therefore, we should adopt Spivak's concept, which reads as follows:

> "Another thing that I have said is that rather than look at cultures as substantive origins that give identities, it is better to look at how they are dynamic fields where the work of coding, recoding, reterritorializing, goes on constantly and has been going on for as long as one can look back to study."[16]

Theatre has multiple faces and discourses; it speaks different languages and tells an unlimited number of stories. It is a whole set of formations; it has its own different conjunctures and moments in the past. It encompasses a wide range of work. I want to insist on that! It always was and always will remain a set of unstable formations. It is and will be "centred" only in quotation marks. It has numerous trajectories; many people have and will have different trajectories through it.

Today's cultural identity indeed comprises elements not only of one's home culture but of foreign cultures, too. Greek philosophy, South American literature, and Japanese art have had a decisive influence on our cultural formation over the years. Moreover, German or French philosophy, Chinese and Russian literature, and the arts from many continents have no doubt played a significant role in the cultural formation of any individual, representing strong factors in their worldview and way of thinking.

Such a formation is not only found among academics and elites but increasingly applies to almost everybody today. Most people's identities, not just Western intellectuals or elites, are shaped by more than a single culture. Not only societies, but also people are multicultural.

Does this not sound familiar? Didn't we start our lecture with Bourriaud's notion of altermodernism, criticizing multiculturalism, but trying to define today's culture with updated terms and specificities, but—as Welsch and Spivak—within the same postcolonial discourse and Euro criticism.

Theatre today speaks for a new type of cultural manifoldness arising. A broad range of new differences is developing as well. Transcultural identity networks, woven from partly the same and partly different threads, are not all of the same colour and pattern. Within such an understanding of culture, theatre needs to speak not only against domination but, in order to do this with any success, it needs also to ensure that the hard-earned insights of the field—about the importance of marginality, otherness, local contexts, and so on— do not remain solely in the context of narrow textual readings.

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[15] Wolfgang Welsch, "Rethinking Identity in the Age of Globalization – A Transcultural Perspective," in *International Yearbook of Aesthetics: Aesthetics and Globalization*, Vol. 8, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Založba ZRC Publishing, 2004), accessed June 26, 2009, http://www2.eur.nl/fw/hyper/IAA/Yearbook/iaa8/contents.htm. Available at:
https://web.archive.org/web/20091022105738/http://www2.eur.nl/fw/hyper/IAA/Yearbook/iaa8/contents.htm.

[16] Spivak, "Reflections," 66.

Conclusion: How to Decolonize Theatre and Cultural Practices

Theatre and performance today are increasingly shaped by processes of cultural plurality. They are shaped not merely by hybridity but by what can more precisely be termed *creolization*—the dynamic interweaving of distinct cultural traditions. This interweaving produces complex new forms of meaning, aesthetic expression, and identity. Such entanglements, while rooted in shared cultural myths—whether Mediterranean, Central European, or otherwise—are marked by subtle yet significant differences that resist essentialist binaries.

This condition invites comparison to the historical paradox captured in the phrase *Le Roi est mort, vive le Roi!*—a ritual proclamation of succession that now seems destabilized in the realm of culture. We declare the end of postmodernism, colonialism, or modernism, yet find no clear successor to these paradigms. The body lies in the coffin, but the heir remains unnamed. The failure of the principle *le mort saisit le vif*—a direct transmission of power—underscores the discontinuity and epistemic rupture we face in defining our present cultural moment.

Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of *Verflechtung* (interweaving) offers a critical alternative to the term *intercultural*, which too often presupposes rigid cultural boundaries between "us" and "them." She advocates for a framework that recognizes performance as a space of transformative aesthetics, shaped by negotiation, resistance, and at times, conflict. Her work questions whether any culture possesses exclusive interpretive authority over its texts and performance practices, arguing instead for a postessentialist, non-hierarchical mode of cultural interaction that moves beyond postcolonial binaries.

In the introduction to her book, *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism*, Fischer-Lichte describes a specific situation of interweaving of performance practices, "a new kind of transformative aesthetic,"[17] and raises the following questions:

> "How can aesthetics be complicated through the creative dynamics of intercultural misunderstanding (Bharacha)? Why do particular artists, ensembles, or even entire performance cultures periodically abstain from, resist, or oppose recognizable processes of interweaving (Sorgenfrei, Carlson, Balme)? What cultural, aesthetic, and per se politically charged forms of criticism, resistance, or even hostility might be planned or ongoing processes of interweaving face (Sorgenfrei, Balme)?"[18]

Fischer-Lichte is persuaded that "[t]he concept of 'intercultural theatre' implies a sharp division between 'our' and the 'other' culture. It assumes that cultures are hermetically sealed, homogenous entities […]"[19] owned by specific peoples. She doubts that the people of a particular nation are really "more competent to interpret and understand [their] texts, making them the only ones with access to the true meanings of [a] play."[20] She

[17] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Introduction," in *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris Jain (Routledge, 2014), 12.
[18] Fischer-Lichte, "Introduction," 18.
[19] Ibid., 17.
[20] Ibid.

aims to move "beyond postcolonialism," providing a welcome space for the sorts of discussions on power relations referred to earlier.

This approach finds resonance in the work of Nicolas Bourriaud's *altermodernism*, as well as Marvin Carlson's call for a renewed semiotic engagement with questions of representation, voice, and historical positioning in postcolonial performance, elaborated in his essay, "Intercultural theory, postcolonial theory, and semiotics: The road not (yet) taken"[21] for a special issue of *Semiotica*. Both authors suggest that we are entering a new epistemological phase—one marked not by the prefix "post-" but by the prefix "trans-," as Mikhail Epstein proposes. His notion of *trans-subjectivity*, *trans-ideality*, and *trans-originality* gestures toward a reconfiguration of values once considered central to modernity but now seen as fluid, provisional, and context dependent. His book *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* first written in 1999 reflects on possible terms for the new era that follows postmodernism:

The last third of the twentieth century unfolded under the sign of the "post," which signaled the demise of concepts of modernity as "truth" and "objectivity," "soul" and "subjectivity," "utopia" and "ideality," "primary origin" and "originality," "sincerity" and "sentimentality." All of these concepts are now being reborn in the form of "trans-subjectivity," "trans-idealism," "trans-utopianism," "trans-originality," "trans-lyricism," "trans-sentimentality," etc.[22]

Within this shifting framework, the performer's body—both phenomenal and semiotic—emerges as a site of meaning that transcends geographic, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries. The phenomenal and semiotic bodies of performers thus possess the capacity to tell distinct stories that extend their reach beyond all geographic and generic boundaries. The decolonization of theatre and other cultural practices can be achieved if we come to a consensus that "we have reached a time when no values from any single cultural perspective can provide frameworks adequate to understanding the changes affecting all of us."[23]

To that end, the often-repeated maxim "think globally, act locally" remains vital. A global outlook must be accompanied by a deep engagement with local contexts, histories, and forms of knowledge. This dialectical relationship enables meaningful cultural production that is both rooted and resonant. Moreover, local, and national topics do have international relevance, provided they are framed in ways that highlight their global significance. What is required are not only new critical frameworks but also expanded tools of translation—linguistic, cultural, and epistemological—that allow for genuine dialogue across borders.[24]

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[21] M. Carlson, "Intercultural theory, postcolonial theory, and semiotics: The road not (yet) taken," *Semiotica* 168, no. 1/4 (2008): 129–142.

[22] Mikhail Epstein. "Conclusion: On the Place of Postmodernism in Postmodernity," in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (Berghahn Books, [1999] 2016), 546–547. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782388654-029.

[23] Benjamin Lee, "Critical internationalism," *Public Culture* 7, vol. 3 (1995): 588.

[24] Aleš Erjavec, "Aesthetics and/as Globalization: An Introduction," *International Yearbook of Aesthetics: Aesthetics and Globalization*, vol. 8, ed. Aleš Erjavec (Založba ZRC Publishing, 2004), accessed June 26, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20091024184358/http://www2.eur.nl/fw/hyper/IAA/Yearbook/iaa8/Aless.doc.