



# ADVENTURES IN LANGUAGELAND

Thoughts and experiences of  
theatre and multilingualism



KLOCKRIKETEATERN

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## Thoughts and experiences of theatre and multilingualism

A short summary in English

## FOREWORD

Klockriketeatern has a long tradition of sharing. Sharing what we have is part of our ethos. The publication you are reading is a part of this tradition. Another principle that we as a theatre stand by, is collaboration. Since the beginning, but especially since 2010, this has brought us in contact with colleagues and audiences that do not talk Swedish as their first language.

A few years ago we received a grant from the private foundation Koneen Säätiö in order to research multilingual theatre. This publication is Klockrikes final report and an addition to the foundation's well established program regarding the practice of multilingualism. At the same time this publication presents us with the opportunity to share our experiences. It is also a signal for the future: we want to continue collaborating, in various languages.

The report consists of the publication you are reading, as well as three short video clips that deal with various questions in regard to multilingual theatre through presenting three of our productions: *Sylvi* (2014-15), *3 Musketeers – East of Vienna* (2016-18) and *Ice* (2018).

We want to thank the Koneen Säätiö and other financial supporters, our co-workers, collaborational partners and all the audience members we have been so fortunate to meet in so many languages during all these years.

Helsinki, January 2019

**Dan Henriksson**, artistic director  
Klockriketeatern

*Note: This summary is translated from Swedish and contains foreword and final thoughts as well as translation of main titles of each chapter of the publication.*

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# KLOCKRIKE – FINLANDS INTERNATIONAL NOMAD THEATRE

Klockriketeatern is an international nomad theatre and one of the leading free group (non-institutional) theater companies in Finland, considering artistic quality, financial support and diversity of the work we do. Our name Klockrike comes from the very first production, *Vägen till Klockrike* (1991).

Today Klockriketeatern is a nomad theatre. Very much like the vagabonds in Martinsons works, we wander across borders, to new and unknown places. We pose questions to ourselves and to others.

Klockriketeatern does not work in the same way as a repertoire theatre. What does that mean? We emphasise the process, working step by step, taking time in between periods of rehearsal. The space we work in is ever changing. What we do looks very different from one year to the next. This is one of the reasons why we want be a free theatre. In the future the range of variety is likely to grow even further. There will be times when we rehearse and research more than we perform, and times when our work will take us more abroad than keep us in Helsinki or Finland. Our work is defined by our way of co-operating both nationally and internationally, in many languages.

Throughout the years we have performed in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Faroe Islands, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Germany and Belarus, and in June 2019 we will have an opening night in the USA (the first Finnish theater to produce an opening night there!). In our day to day professional lives we are currently using Swedish, Finnish and English. In addition we have co-workers whose first language, or home language, is Russian, Lithuanian, Spanish and German. We are planning performances, or currently performing, in Swedish, Finnish, English, Estonian and recently worked in Russian during a workshop in Saint Petersburg and during a festival in Belarus.

*Klockrike – for the values of arts to life and society*

***What freedom was  
could never  
really be explained***

Harry Martinson: The Road, 1948  
(the Swedish original title is  
"The road to Klockrike")



## WORDS AND SPOKEN TEXT

### *On multilingual theatre that reflects a multilingual reality*

This publication is first and foremost about theatre with spoken text that needs to be translated in order to reach a broader audience. But some clarification and narrowing down might be needed here.

Stage art is constantly changing. But the foundation is, according to me, communication between humans. Theatre – parallel to experiments in form, as well as postdramatic theatre – is consequently based on the audience understanding the language which the actor speaks. When words become action, theatre is born.

At the same time theatre is much more than language. It is ethics and aesthetics, form and content, a multitude of methods, a dialogue between stage and audience. When we succeed on stage, we reach the audience in a variety of ways – as theatre is a melting pot of many different forms of art: music, image, dance, literature, social gathering, at the same time that it is a question and a ritual. Theatre is entertainment. At its best, theatre is performing art.

I, myself, am fond of Peter Brooks' classical definition: *théâtre = rra*. Theatre is created through *répétition, représentation, assistance*. First the ensemble rehearses and researches. Then you recreate the material, and in order to make theatre you need an audience. The French is important here: *assisté à une pièce de théâtre*. The audience is helping, assisting. It is only in meeting the audience that theatre finally is born.

## Translation as part of the piece

Klockrike has spent many years researching multilingualism on stage, as both an artistic and a technical challenge. What happens when we use many languages in one show? How does it affect the audience, if we translate – caption – the show? Where should we place the canvas for projecting the surtitles, in order to enhance the audience's possibility to understand what is going on onstage? What happens if the captioning is part of the stage design? Maybe the ideal is that captioning itself would be an artwork? To translate is to interpret.

The artists participating in an international co-operation also need to understand each other. What happens when my Russian colleague doesn't understand me? Or when he or she understands me differently than I intended. Do I need a translation of the words I speak as well as one of the cultural reference that language comes from? Languages live in a reality which exists apart from the theatre. The very second different cultures meet, it becomes important to manage to translate elements of those cultures. In October 2018 we performed in Minsk, Belarus. The concept of *freedom of speech* has a very different meaning to our audiences in Minsk and in Helsinki.

## Why do we want to work in many languages?

There are many answers to this question, yet none is a comprehensive one. This report showcases a variety, a flow, of creative ideas regarding how we have solved questions regarding the understanding of text and meaning, regardless of language.

Finland is an officially a bilingual country. The daily lives for most of us who speak Swedish as mother tongue is bilingual at it's best, but in most cases monolingually Finnish. The theatre is a space where the Swedish language traditionally has been allowed to grow into a founding stone of cultural identity. It is important to hear one's own language.

In recent years Swedish in Finland (both the language and the culture) has been challenged on the level of society. Partly, it is a question of Finnish populist nationalism (which even was part of the government in 2015-19). Partly, it is a question of the majority not understanding the needs of the few, in combination with initiatives to make cuts in the welfare state. The latter shows itself through worse services and changed attitudes. The reason behind these are better found in the realms of economy and political discourse. Profit seeking companies, for instance in healthcare or education industry, that are looked favourably upon by the government, are more interested in selling their products than taking care of people. And at the same time we have this paradox: the vast majority of the decision makers and most citizens of Finland genuinely seem to support bilingualism.

But there are also more languages in Finland. Sami (with three variations in Finland) and Romani have historical roots. English has become more important each passing decade. "Immigrational" languages enrich our culture. Estonian, Russian and Somali are growing languages in Finland. In total, there are over one hundred spoken languages within the population of Finland. But they are not spoken on stage.

Jesper Karlsson

**Over the borders of language**

What part does language play in a multicultural everyday life? We dive further into the question of what multilingualism actually means. We investigate challenges and possibilities the theatre faces in regard to an ever diversifying audience.

Dan Henriksson

**The end of uniformity, “monoculture”?**

Finland is constantly changing. But is theatre-Finland still dwelling in olden times? Is the stage more “monocultural” than the rest of the country. Could the theatre act as an example to a more inclusive society?

Dan Henriksson

**Which languages do we use in this production?**

On what grounds does Klockriketeatern make a decision regarding the languages and the captioning of performances? How do different languages and technical solutions influence the art? We take a look at some examples from our own archives.

Jesper Karlsson

**About language of emotion and multicultural situations**

Matti Raita and Carl Alm, actors at Klockriketeatern, talk about their own relationship to language, what one (or more) emotional language means, and about the differences between performing in Swedish or in another language.

Jesper Karlsson & Dan Henriksson

**From one language to many languages**

Concrete examples from Klockriketeatern – a listing of how we have worked with multilingual productions.

Dan Henriksson

**Economy and consequences**

Can captioning a performance result in additional ticket sales? How do we guarantee accessibility?

Daisy Jacobs (Theater in Paris, 2015)

**Theatre Surtitle: Past, Present and Future**

Captioning in theatres is becoming more and more popular throughout the world, Daisy Jacobs writes for Theater In Paris.

Jesper Karlsson

**Captioning in the theatre**

Even though a multilingual show still is an oddity in Finland, theatres do want to make their repertory more accessible to a wider audience. Captioning in the theatre is thus a question of equality. How it is best done, however, still divides opinions. Open or closed captioning, that is the question.

Jesper Karlsson

**To caption is to interpret**

Captioning a show adds another layer to it. Consequently, captioning is its own form of art, which can be compared to light, sound or stage design.

**Poetic language**

Translating literature is first and foremost a question of art. We asked playwright Laura Ruohonen to comment on her work of translating drama.

Jesper Karlsson

**The many languages of Bartleby**

For a long time, director Milja Sarkola has been interested in making bilingual fiction in this bilingual country of ours. Through an email interview she tells us about the process of staging the multilingual show *I Would Prefer Not To* in Svenska Teatern (the Swedish Theatre).

Jesper Karlsson

**Final words: A reflecting theatre?**

In his final words co-author of the report, Jesper Karlsson, reflects on the theatre as a bearer of cultural meaning.



DAN HENRIKSSON

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## FINAL WORDS: MEETINGS OF THE FUTURE

*Artistic director Dan Henriksson sums up the contents of the publication and opens up about Klockriketeatern's visions for the future, regarding language and openness.*

In this book we have gathered a number of experiences, insights and questions regarding *multilingual theatre*. We hope we don't serve any truths or conclusive answers. This is a report from within a process that continues, in our daily work on the stage, in new projects, may they be in the suburbs of Helsinki or on other continents.

We have talked about some attempts, but much has been left unsaid, as to what the future holds in store when it comes to supporting the understanding of the other – not only on stage, but as the basis of a humanistic life philosophy.

A large and complex question left out, is the domination of the English language. At least from a Finnish or a European point of view, it seems that English automatically, without proper reflection, always pops up and becomes the only language possible when captioning to other languages. The chapter *Theatre surtitles* did provide a bit of variation on the theme, especially in a European context. And we did talk about a few exceptions we have experience of, on our own part. We raise a number of questions regarding (language) competence, quality and identity. And what about Chinese, Russian, Spanish...? What about theatre without words?

It is said that the future is an open book. For Klockriketeatern, openness is a strategic choice. We open ourselves up to collaboration across borders, in many languages. In this book we have discussed *multilingualism*, but hardly mentioned language and identity. Not too far away lies the question of *multiculturalism* and *all the world as a stage* – to speak in Shakespearean terms. We like to view Klockriketeatern as a meeting point – a paradox of a nomad theatre. We want to meet ourselves and others. We want to try to understand, to pose questions and to research. Research is our method and our goal, and curiosity and playfulness are our tools – and credo. In many languages.

Thank you for your interest!



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