Towards New Europe: Arvi Kivimaa, *Kultur*, and the Fictions of Humanism

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The New Europe is not and must not be a cold political entity, but a spiritual force that builds from the sufferings of the present time a bridge to a better, more humane future.

*Arvi Kivimaa, 1941*

... now for a while, the nations of the world are becoming connected regardless of race and the form of society... in the signs of a strengthening of international mutual understanding and the consolidation of peace.

*Arvi Kivimaa, 1966*

Let me start with these two *almost* fungible quotes, which, date and context aside for the moment, seem to develop a single, utopian claim. Stemming from the pen of the same Finnish writer, but separated by twenty-five years, the statements make compatible claims for a humane and peaceful world order. And yet, their historical situation—the first delivered for a Europe driving toward racial cleansing, the second for a Europe divided by the Cold War—renders them intrinsically incompatible, even antagonistic. Compatible in their vision of an improved European society, both passages involve an unstated, implied cleansing: in the former, a Europe-yet-to-come of the undesirable bodies of ostracized European populations; in the latter, the Europe-of-the-present of the racializing politics of the recent past. Echoing the themes and attitudes of the earlier remarks, the rhetoric of the 1966 passage silently rewrites it, urging a vision of racial harmony that specifically negates what hardly needed to be mentioned in 1941: the foundational function of race in the Third Reich’s, and the Axis Powers’, New Europe.

It is a bitter irony of postwar Europe that this 1960s globalizing, peace-consolidating agenda was promoted by the well-supported literary intellectual, theatre and stage director Arvi Kivimaa (1904–84), whose racially inflected wartime writings for both Finnish and Third Reich audiences
envisioned a New Europe sustained by the *Kultur* of privileged “European” peoples, a vision subsequently disowned by his postwar call for World Theatre Day.

Director of three important venues, the Finnish National Theatre (1950–74; Associate Director 1949–50), the Helsinki Folk Theatre (1940–49), and the Tampere Theatre (1937–40), as Vice-President of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) Kivimaa proposed in 1961 to institute a World Theatre Day, celebrated worldwide on March 27 ever since the opening of the “Theatre of Nations” season in Paris in 1962: “Each year a figure outstanding in theatre or a person outstanding in heart and spirit from another field, is invited to share his or her reflections on theatre and international harmony.” In “all corners of the five continents,” theatre professionals honor Kivimaa’s formative idea of an international, humanist theatre, implicitly honoring Kivimaa himself. Insofar as “we” celebrate Kivimaa, though, we unknowingly corroborate his successful disavowal of the New Europe he