

Manfred Brauneck

Former Professor of Theatre Studies at the Universität Hamburg and Director of the Zentrum für Theaterforschung

2010 Balzan Prize for The History of Theatre in All Its Aspects

For his wide-ranging account of two and a half millennia in the History of European theatre, as well as his research on currents and events of an international nature in the world of theatre.

Institute Administering Research Funds: German Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), Berlin

Adviser for the General Balzan Committee: Gottfried Scholz

The Role of the Independent Theatre in Contemporary European Theatre: Structural and Aesthetic Changes

Manfred Brauneck has designated half of his Balzan Prize to a research project, which investigates the interaction between changes within social and legal conditions for performing artists, changing methods of production and distribution of theatre art and the shifting dialectics of content versus form in European contemporary theatre. The role of independent theatres in the holistic systems of theatre culture will be the centre of focus.

The different theatre systems in Europe are going through a fundamental change. Shifting prerequisites, new production methods and structures of organisation have changed the content of the theatre as well as its reception. Studying this context will be an important aspect of the project. One of the most important factors driving these changes are the breakdown of the political systems in Eastern Europe after 1990 with emerging new paradigms in social and cultural life, followed by the increasing pace of globalization, which has been changing the shape of Europe fundamentally since the 1990s.

These vectors have created more flexible and decentralised production structures, new cooperative relationships and brought new technologies to the planning and the

direct creation of theatrical forms of expression as well as changes in the distribution processes (e.g. increased orientation towards target audiences, PR/marketing, internationalisation, event orientation etc.). All of these elements change the nature of the work and the living conditions of theatre artists in a lasting way. Existing studies deal with the respective local/national contexts or, are focused on single aspects (e.g. mobility or social status).

A concept was developed for the proposed research in close cooperation with Prof. Dr Manfred Brauneck. It entailed producing five thematic studies as well as a series of overviews of the situation for the independent scene in different European countries as well as an empirical investigation of independent performing artists' socio-economic position. Subsequently it was agreed to do without the reports on individual countries and the empirical investigations because the value of the data expected from the countries in question was limited and at risk of rapidly becoming out of date. This was on account of the wide fluctuations within many of the groups and also because, from country to country, the levels of outside support differed widely. This will not, however, affect the project's wished-for representativeness nor its inclusion of the European context. Instead the overall discourse that was initially sought will be included within the thematic studies. The entire research project has - in line with the Balzan Foundation's principles - been consistently oriented towards fostering a new generation of researchers.

With regard to the project up to this point, one thing can be stressed: the regular colloquiums and authors' meetings have become an important platform for continuing exchange within the research group and have furthered comprehensive analysis of this extraordinarily varied field of study.

The first colloquium took place on 20th October 2011 in the ITI offices in Berlin's Kunstquartier Bethanien. Those present were: Prof. Dr Manfred Brauneck (General and Academic Coordinator), Dr. Thomas Engel (Director, ITI Germany), Friederike Felbeck (author), Prof. Günther Heeg (mentor, Universität Leipzig), Andrea Hensel (author), Christine Koch (author), Dr Barbara Müller-Wesemann (mentor, Hamburg), Dr Petra Sabisch (author), Prof. Wolfgang Schneider (mentor, Stiftung Universität Hildesheim), Dr Azadeh Sharifi (author), Prof. Gottfried Scholz (Balzan Foundation) and Andrea Zagorski (Project Leader, ITI). The aims of that colloquium were: to reach a fundamental understanding of the project, to discuss the first steps to taking the work in, to work out how to approach the thematic studies. What was very helpful

in this regard was Prof. Dr Manfred Brauneck's elucidation of the research proposal. The focus on the developments of the last twenty years reveal a shift towards globalisation, evident since the 1990s in the increasing interconnection, digitalisation and concomitant economic pressure in most European countries. Just as important, however, are the complex social transitions in Eastern Europe countries that have led to a rearrangement of theatre there. Another of the study's aims is to investigate within the European context the phenomenon of "independent theatre" - even though it is conceptualized very differently in different countries - and to examine social changes with regard to the effect they have had on independent theatre whilst also examining how this independent scene has reacted to those changes. The authors presented a first sketch of their research projects for group discussion:

- Friederike Felbeck: *Intercultural Exchange in European Theatre*
- Andrea Hensel: *Independent Scene(s) as Core and Catalyst of New Structures in the Theatre. On the Relationship between Innovative Production Forms and Creativity in Theatre Aesthetics.*
- Christine Koch: *Children's (and Youth) Theatre since 1990: Developments, Trends, Visions. A Comparative European Study.*
- Dr Petra Sabisch: *Artistic Working Practices and Criticism in Contemporary Dance and Performance Art at the Point of Intersection between Production and Aesthetics, 1990-2011*
- Dr Azadeh Sharifi: *Post-Migrant Theatre*

The discussion of the individual topic areas was centred primarily on the significance of the independent scene within the theatre systems of various European countries.

The second colloquium took place in the Kulturfabrik Kampnagel in Hamburg on 27th and 28th January. Those present were: Prof. Dr Manfred Brauneck, Friederike Felbeck, Andrea Hensel, Christine Koch, Dr Barbara Müller-Wesemann, Dr Petra Sabisch, Prof. Dr Wolfgang Schneider, Dr Azadeh Sharifi and Andrea Zagorski. The host, the Kulturfabrik's director, Amelie Deufelhard, provided an extensive report on her work in Kampnagel and as head of the production house "sophiensaele" Berlin. She focused particularly on structural changes and changes to modes of production in the independent scene, delineated financial and funding models, and described the professionalisation of independent performing artists that has now been achieved. Equally useful in guiding the research was a discussion with the Viennese performance collective "God's Entertainment", who provided an insight into their working practices

as an independent artists' collective within the Austrian cultural scene. The young researchers presented their work up to that point and there was a discussion of the steps to be taken in the coming months. It was also decided to include the main aspects of the individual country reports within the framework of the thematic studies.

The third colloquium took place at the invitation of the Stiftung Universität Hildesheim from 11th to 13th May in Hildesheim. Those present were: Prof. Dr Manfred Brauneck, Dr Thomas Engel, Prof. Günther Heeg, Andrea Hensel, Christine Koch, Prof. Wolfgang Schneider, Dr Azadeh Sharifi and Andrea Zagorski. The colloquium opened with a podium discussion of the role of independent theatre in Germany. Chaired by Prof. Dr Wolfgang Schneider, the speakers were Prof. Dr Jens Roselt (Stiftung Universität Hildesheim and Chairman of the Niedersachsen Theatre Committee), Prof. Dr Annemarie Matzke (Stiftung Universität Hildesheim and performer in the group "She She Pop") and Prof. Dr Gesche Wartemann (Stiftung Universität Hildesheim). The main topic of discussion was how to place the independent scene's developments, production forms and aesthetic concepts within the general context of the German theatre landscape. Prof. Dr Wolfgang Schneider and the dramaturge Henning Fülle provided a complementary report on the position of independent theatre within the debate on cultural politics in Germany. Prof. Schneider gave an analysis of cultural politics in Germany with regard to the subsidised theatre system and the policy of supporting independent theatre. As part of the analysis he outlined the criteria for this support, which he saw as primarily multidisciplinary, interculturalism and internationalism. Henning Fülle reported from the studies forming his doctoral project at the Stiftung Universität Hildesheim; he concentrated on the emergence of independent theatre in Germany and its evolution since the 1960s. Fülle discussed the discourse of recognition of the independent scene in politics, the media and the theatre industry. For him, the essential factors in consolidating the independent theatre are professionalisation, state support, which has now been established, and improvements to infrastructure, which have now been made.

The next colloquium is planned for November 2012 in Leipzig. The discussions and panels will address primarily international perspective; this will entail considering the structures and working practices of free and independent theatre in other European countries. ITI-Germany placed information about the research project on the ITI homepage, in its annual report, in the members' magazine *Impuls* and also has regular updates in its newsletter. Moreover, the ITI centre, co-operating organisations and the Goethe-Institut have been informed of the Balzan Project.

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http://www.iti-germany.de/pro_balzan_en.shtml