

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

**Manfred Brauneck**

**2010 Balzan Prize for the History of the Theatre in All Its Aspects**

**Balzan GPC Adviser:** Gottfried Scholz

**Researchers:** Andrea Hensel, Tine Koch, Petra Sabisch, Azadeh Sharifi

**Affiliated Institution:** German Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), Berlin

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Manfred Brauneck is Former Professor of Theatre Studies at the Universität Hamburg and Director of the Zentrum für Theaterforschung in Hamburg. He designated half of his Balzan Prize to a research project which investigated 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 was the centre of focus.

The proposed research entailed producing four thematic studies consistently oriented towards fostering a new generation of researchers. The first colloquium took place on 20 October 2011 in the ITI offices in Berlin's Kunstquartier Bethanien. Its aims were to reach a fundamental understanding of the project, to discuss the first steps to take, and to work out how to approach the thematic studies. Another of the study's aims was to investigate the phenomenon of "independent theatre" within the European context – 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 while also examining how this independent scene has reacted to those changes.

The second colloquium took place in the Kulturfabrik Kampnagel in Hamburg on 27 and 28 January 2012. The host, director Amelie Deuffhard, provided an extensive report

on her work in Kampnagel and as head of the production house Sophiensaele in 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 professionalization 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 11 to 13 May 2012 in 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 primarily saw as multidisciplinary, interculturalism and internationalism. Henning Fülle reported from the studies forming his doctoral project at the Stiftung Universität Hildesheim, concentrating 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.

Under the title "Art and Life. Transformations in (Eastern) Europe's Independent Theatre Scene", a fourth colloquium was held on 8 November 2012 at the University of Leipzig in the framework of the Euro-scene festival in Leipzig. The discussions and panels primarily addressed the international perspective. This entailed considering the structures and working practices of free and independent theatre in other European countries.

The conference "Post-migrant Perspectives on European Theatre" was held from 20 to 22 March 2013 at the Goethe Institute in London. It analyzed these developments together with representatives from the arts, academia and the cultural policy. Based on the regional theatre scenes in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, the

conference mainly focused on questions of representation, networking and the institutionalization of post-migrant theatre in Europe.

At Kampnagel in Hamburg, the fifth colloquium took place on 10 and 11 April 2013. It was dedicated to the topic of independent music theatre. Prof. Dr. Matthias Rebstock was invited as expert to give an overview on the varieties and developments of independent music theatre in Europe.

The fourth year of the research project, *The Role of the Independent Theatre in Contemporary European Theatre: Structural and Aesthetic Changes*, was dedicated to the completion of the thematic studies. The four studies and additional essays on experimental music theatre and different cultural policies for independent theatre scenes in a range of European countries were published in German and English by transcript-Verlag in November 2016. The English version was chosen by the Library Selection Committee to be accessed free of cost at “Knowledge Unlatched”, as one of 150 publications worldwide in 2017.

All studies were presented to the public during a symposium at the University of Hildesheim in December 2016. The symposium was set up in close collaboration with Prof. Dr. Geesche Wartemann and Prof. Dr. Matthias Rebstock (both from the Institute for Media, Theatre and Popular Culture, University of Hildesheim) and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schneider (Institute for Cultural Policy, University of Hildesheim).

As follow up to the essay “Varieties of Independent Music Theatre in Europe” by Prof. Dr. Matthias Rebstock, four studies about the independent music theatre scene in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Berlin and London were carried out in 2018 and published in a book.

## **Publications**

Manfred Brauneck und ITI Zentrum Deutschland. *Das Freie Theater im Europa der Gegenwart. Strukturen – Ästhetik – Kulturpolitik*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016.

Manfred Brauneck and ITI Germany. *Independent Theatre in Contemporary Europe: Structures – Aesthetics Cultural Policy*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016.

Matthias Rebstock and ITI Zentrum Deutschland. *Freies Musiktheater in Europa: Vier Fallstudien/Independent Music Theatre in Europe: Four Case Studies*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020.