

by directors, playwrights and stage designers. This profound lexicographical body of work offers the latest generation of researchers a proven factual foundation to build upon in their own work.

In both volumes of his Dictionary of the Theatre, beyond presenting a general vision of European theatre, he also deals with the forms of theatre found in non-European cultures, thus expanding the concept of “theatre” beyond the traditional boundaries of a pure art form located solely on the stage.

In these volumes, Manfred Brauneck’s wide-ranging knowledge enables him to allow us to engage with various historical developments, people, styles and concepts that are closely connected with the theatre. He thus places a grandiose corpus of work at the reader’s disposal, without making arbitrary judgments. In this way, his work exposes both traditionalist-conservative and alternative-progressive intellectuals to elements which may cause them to reconsider their positions.

The detailed account of the theory and history of the theatre which Manfred Brauneck has presented, giving us and future generations access to this particularly important cultural phenomenon, has led the International Balzan Foundation to award him the Balzan Prize for “The History of Theatre in All Its Aspects”.

Manfred Brauneck:

The History of the Theatre as the History of Society

For over four decades I have been concerned with the theatre, with its theory and history as well as with current artistic practice, above all, of course, in my research work and in my capacity as a professor at the University of Hamburg. There, one of my main tasks was also the training of young directors at the Institute for Theatre Direction that I founded in 1988. As an academic, I was often involved in heated debates with budding young artists, over concepts, evaluations and points of view on the possibilities and limits of the theatre. Admittedly, by that time no one any longer believed that the world could be changed by the theatre. However, it was a question of the topics that these young people were concerned with. In these discussions, academic discourse was weighed upon time and time again by its resistance to the practical staging of productions. It was a learning process on both sides. I have also been curator of a few theatrical exhibitions, and have put a few productions on the stage.

The remarkable honour that is bestowed upon my work through the Balzan Prize gives me an occasion to meditate upon my dealings with the theatre, also upon my view of its history, which has always guided my work. I am grateful to have the opportunity to talk about this subject at this Forum.

When I recall my larger, and perhaps more important works, such as my *Habilitationsschrift* on the reception of naturalistic theatre by an extremely polarized public at the end of the nineteenth century, my works on twentieth century theatre and of course, *Die Welt als Bühne* (The World as a Stage) – the History of European Theatre, I can ascertain that my attachment to the theatre was also essentially shaped by my studies in art history and philosophy, as well as by my interest in the cultural and social history of Europe.

What constitutes Europe today, still a controversial matter in the political sphere, has always been grasped and dealt with by the theatre in its own way. There have been no national borders for theatre, nor have there been for actors, choreographers or directors, for theatre architects or set designers, nor for scenographic inventions, for ideas or even theatrical works themselves. At one time in Germany, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was seen as the essence of German being, and was virtually incorporated into German theatre. In the 1980s and 1990s, Dario Fo was "the world's most performed living playwright", or so it was worded in the citation of the Nobel Prize Committee in Oslo in 1997.

For theatre, the 'National' and the 'European' were never opposites. Often both national and regional traditions contributed to creative exchange across all borders, so as to further artistic developments in theatre in Europe. Successful pieces or technical discoveries on the stage were well-received across borders shortly after their first production. Theatre has always been addicted to the new.

The best examples demonstrate developments that originated in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that influenced, promoted and, one must really say dominated, modern European theatre for two centuries. Italian architects were the first to build freestanding, covered theatre buildings since the time of classical antiquity, such as the Teatro Olimpico, an icon of European theatre construction. Andrea Palladio began building it in Vicenza for a humanist organization of theatre enthusiasts; Vincenzo Scamozzi finished it. Scamozzi's stage construction marked the final break with the principle of simultaneity, which had reigned throughout the Middle Ages, maintaining that every event on the stage had to be perceived as part of the sacral, as it were, *sub specie aeternitatis*. Italian stage architects showed man's earthly life on stage, which is typical of the modern theatre's way of seeing things. From then on, the spectator saw events portrayed on stage as if through a "window", as if they were really part of his own world, or indeed as if faced with his own experience. The idea of the Italian Renaissance, the new assessment of the world that could be felt and experienced without transcending boundaries, was also formative for the modern understanding of the theatre. The eye of the beholder structured the stage space as his "visual space". The further development of stage setting – again from Italy – and its mathematical improvement, the theories and scenographic

discoveries of Baldassare Peruzzi, Sabbatini, Torelli, Andrea Pozzo and many others laid the foundations for almost every form of illusionism on the stage, which then became the aesthetic standard for European theatre, at least until the end of the nineteenth century. Almost all discoveries in stage machinery and scene decoration came from the workshops of Italian theatre engineers. Bernardo Buontalenti was one of the greatest “magicians” with scenery at the Medici court. His spectacular stage sets were circulated in copper plate engravings and caused a stir all over Europe. Earlier, Leonardo da Vinci had already made sketches for similar “stage pieces” for the French court. The creation of stage setting, which influenced European theatre for so long, found its origins in these developments, which came from Italy and crossed all national borders.

Likewise, the theatre festivities of the Habsburgs in Vienna would not have been possible without the Italian theatre architects who were closely bound up with the court, the Burnaccinis in the seventeenth century and the Galli-Bibienas in the eighteenth century. The splendid interior decoration of Germany’s most beautiful Rococo theatre, the Margravian Opera House in Bayreuth, is the work of Giuseppe and Carlo Galli-Bibiena. Giuseppe, who was hired at the court in Dresden as Saxon theatre architect, was released from his responsibilities in order to work in Bayreuth. The theatres at most European courts were then largely in Italian hands.

How a local theatre tradition, whose origins were certainly derived from the *Carnevale* in Venice, became triumphant all over Europe can convincingly be documented in the history of the *Commedia dell’arte*. Gallant, mannered masques once again offered the courts of Europe – whose decline was already foreshadowed in the eighteenth century – the spectacle of the fascinating world of the theatre with its lightness, gallantry and affectation; and all this at a time when reason and the imperatives of utilitarianism were already heralding the spirit of a new age. The end of the *Commedia* was the virtuoso finale of a splendid concept of drama that made people temporarily forget the myth of the origin of European theatre, the dark ecstasy of the cult of Dionysus. When it comes to theatre in the sixteenth, the seventeenth and also in the eighteenth century, one must inevitably pay homage to Italy.

The total interconnection of European theatre on the artistic level, which today is no less effective than in the past, not least through a truly sprawling international festival business, is undoubtedly one of the essential characteristics of theatre as a cultural phenomenon. In my history of the theatre, *Die Welt als Bühne*, this aspect is presented as a general principle. The virulent idea of the national theatre movement in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries never really succeeded in prevailing as a cultural project. It was a reflex of the citizens’ longing for a nation state. This movement could never compensate for theatre’s international nature, which was obvious to courtly

society and was one of the essential components of its creative power. The smaller nations on the fringes of Europe occasionally occupy a special place with respect to a national orientation of theatre culture. There, the appearance of indigenous theatre companies using the local language – even if only amateur – was enthusiastically acclaimed as an expression of the nation. The much more professional Italian, French or German ensembles were entirely dismissed. These nations also operated costly programmes to promote indigenous authors. Once national independence was gained, the fixation on the national was once again abandoned.

The history of the theatre is, however, intimately linked with the development of the history of society and the history of thought, and with the rules and conditions of economics, law and politics. Theatre as an institution is a place where men must work; artists must take orders, woo their audience and make a living with their art. At the same time the social history of the actor has attained a special position in the overall history of the artist. Over the centuries, this profession has been discriminated against in society and subject to special restrictive labour law-related stipulations. I have dealt with this theme in my history of the theatre.

As an institution, the theatre is a constituent element of the cultural life of a society. It reflects the image of a society. A visit to the theatre is an indicator of social and cultural status and has developed its own conventions. To this end, theatre architecture has fashioned a differentiated spatial framework, in which valid, socially applicable hierarchies can be expressed. In this way, theatre architecture defines the possibilities for the individual to participate in stage events. As an architectural monument, the theatre forges an image of the city, often in a prominent position, comparable to churches or government buildings. Ancient theatre constructions stood in direct relation to temples and ritual sacrificial altars. The position of the theatre was originally the same as that of the Agora, where all important communal public events in Athens were held: markets, legal proceedings and public assemblies. This identity was the most powerful sign that theatre was located at the centre of public life. It created images of man, both tragic and comic. Moreover, every age and every society has its own way of laughing or weeping in the theatre, of affirming itself or expressing anger. Theatre has preserved its celebratory nature throughout the entire period of its history. The time that people spend at the theatre is free time. They spend this time together with others. Shakespeare truly meant theatre to be a place for dreams, unsettling as well as pleasant.

Theatre is a joyful, social medium that presents its essence by the dialectic of acting and observing. In this dialectic, theatre must hold its ground and for that reason encounters restrictions and contradictions. However, it must preserve its liberty, respect conventions and limits, yet supersede its own limits.

In the early twentieth century, avant-garde movements broke with all of these conventions and proclaimed their violation of limits and non-compliance with conventions according to the principle of “anti-art”. Geared up for revolt and scandal, they voiced their words of cultural criticism from the stage. At the apex of the movement were the Italian Futurists, and they provocatively celebrated instead of the Nike of Samothrace, the automobile, speed and the cinema. From their point of view, the institutions of civilized culture, museums and the theatre, ossified through convention, were out of touch with modern man’s way of life.

Especially characteristic of European theatre is its relationship to the sphere of politics, to the representation of governmental power, to the *mise-en-scène* of dominance as well as the articulation of political interests. This proximity to politics has been present throughout its entire history. From the very beginning, theatre was admittedly an artistic endeavour, but above all it was a political project. European theatre has a founding date: the year 534 B.C., when in Athens the reigning clan of the tyrant Peisistratos expanded the long-standing Dionysus festival into a larger celebration and national holiday lasting several days. The political, or better, the religious-political purpose of this undertaking was to integrate the rival social groups and aristocratic clans of the region into a common body politic. Only if united in a single community might the country survive against its enemies. The Persian Wars confirmed this political strategy. The arrival of theatre also marks the entrance of a new stage of development in the model of Greek civilization. In this further development there emerged the democratic constitution of the Athenian Polis.

At the beginning of the modern era, theatre galas like the fifteenth century *trionfi* and the sixteenth century *intermezzi* were obvious tools in the political strategies of the dukes in the northern Italian states. *Trionfi* were staged processions as show pieces, which in allegorical scenarios laced with innuendo and with great theatrical pantomime extravagance served as propaganda for military campaigns, political alliances and marriages of the ducal family or state visits. The political purpose of the *trionfi* was to impart a higher meaning to a particular series of events through allusion to myth and history, and was ultimately aimed at political legitimation. At the same time, they celebrated the wisdom of the ruler.

In the sixteenth century, the courts of Ferrara and Urbino were noted centres of theatre production; higher up in the pecking order was the Florence of the Medici, whose political intentions were also equally explicit. At these courts, the *intermezzo*, which was at first merely an interlude within a theatrical performance, developed into a refined, fully developed virtuoso theatre genre in its own right. It had all the features of mannerist artistic expertise, but was a genre of theatrical entertainment apart, the greatest attraction of which

were the stunning special effects. Rulers pursued political aims through the *intermezzi*. In Florence, for example, it was part of the Medici's political strategy to thwart the independent political ambitions of groups of young aristocrats through the organization of exceedingly expensive *intermezzi* that demanded a great deal of effort and financial resources. The absolutism of the seventeenth century is unthinkable without the employment of the theatre for representations of absolute rule. The theatrical representation of the absolute sovereign was an essential component of the political system, its most powerful form of legitimation in the face of the outside world. Louis XIV, his consultants and court artists did the work of representing his absolute rule with hitherto unknown perfection. The king, who himself was a gifted dancer, appeared on the stage during such theatre and ballet performances, thus acting out his real-life role, the Sun King. At these theatrical performances, representation and *divertissement* were a total staged unity, when all of the arts worked in tandem. It was, however, precisely this connection with the political aims of the theatre and a rather insubstantial, lavish inclination for pleasure which was one of the enlightened bourgeoisie's points of criticism of the lifestyle of courtly society. The notion that theatre should be a school for virtue and proper behaviour was entirely extraneous to courtly theatre. Instead these were both fundamental values which the self-assured bourgeoisie expected from the stage. The German idealist Friedrich Schiller spoke of theatre as a "moral institution". In these differing concepts of the meaning and purpose of theatre, two fundamentally opposite images of society clashed. From the point of view of the bourgeoisie, court life was characterized by the absence of productive work and morals. Both these values, however, were central to the image that the bourgeoisie had of itself. Theatre as the most prominent public institution was the focal point of the controversy over this image of society before the French Revolution forcibly resolved this conflict through violence. The use of the theatre by state authority working through the political systems with the aim of advantageous representation and propaganda is one of the aspects of the multi-layered relationship between theatre and politics. For many centuries, however, the theatre also gained benefit from this situation. Artistic innovations were in many cases only possible through the financial resources of the court. The flip side of this relationship, however, is that theatre was continually subject to specific controls, including economic regulations and censorship laws. Even in the sixteenth century, incipient private theatre enterprises were subject to strict rules in terms of the granting of licences, to the point of actually checking the background of the theatre entrepreneur. Theatre management as a profession was long an exception within trade regulation acts. No other art form attracted the attention of the state and ecclesiastical authorities in comparable measure. The reason for this was obvious. It has been alleged that theatre

exerted an exceptionally suggestive impact on its audience, not only through stage performances but also in the context of the gathering of a large, like-minded crowd of people. Thus, especially since the nineteenth century, there seemed to be a potential threat to public order. I investigated this connection in my *Habilitationsschrift* on the reception of naturalistic theatre in the decades before and after 1900. I was astonished at the importance that was given to the contemporary historical view of the cultural status of theatre as an institution in the assessment of this process of reception. It appeared that the higher the social-cultural rank of theatre, the looser the rules of censorship. The reason for this was that these theatres were dominated by an audience from which no political heckling was to be expected. In the prohibition enacted against *Die Weber*, Gerhart Hauptmann's *milieudrama*, the performance was given permission only if theatre directors promised to raise the admission charge, so that a working class audience would be barred from attending. It was the most sensational censorship trial in the history of European theatre. The reaction it provoked resulted in a world-wide wave of legal proceedings against the performance of this work.

How the theatre functioned under the dictatorships of the twentieth century is altogether another story. During the era of the Soviet Union and in Germany under the Nazi regime, authors who refused to conform politically and ideologically were rigorously pursued and their works forbidden, whereas under the Fascist regimes in Spain and Italy measures were far less systematic. In these countries there was no tradition of political theatre comparable to Germany or the Soviet Union. Those who exerted power across the political spectrum in the twentieth century nevertheless used theatre as an instrument of propaganda. In reality, film played a more important role, as it was considered a more versatile tool for propaganda purposes.

If one wants to follow the long path through the many centuries of theatre history, as I have done in my writings on the history of European theatre, one's view of contemporary theatre will change. Many things that seem to be new become relatively less so when viewed in terms of their alleged originality. Identity and economic crises are apparently part of the world of theatre, just as spreading fire was in the past before the advent of electrical lighting.

The break with previous epochs that theatre experienced on many levels in the twentieth century is significant. No other era displayed so many theatrical-cultural facets or had at the same time as many different artistic strands as this century. Social consensus such as those created for educational conventions have been largely lost. The century began with an extraordinarily experimental dynamic, which virtually sacrificed the whole traditional normative structure of theatrical works. The rules and practice of artistic production were newly defined. In the last third of the century, a new international

movement, Free Theatre, sprung up, which not only experimented with new aesthetic concepts, but also constructed a system of decentralized structures. Most importantly, in the twentieth century, a form of politicizing the theatre was practiced which did not occur in previous periods. The essential innovation in the theatre of the last century in every sphere is the new importance that has been given to the director as a creative, conceptual centre of theatrical endeavour. Almost all of the innovative developments in twentieth century theatre were brought about by directors, not playwrights. However, it was playwrights who for a long time ensured a practical continuity with tradition in a historical context. The consequences of the superior position of the director and his virtually unrestricted monopoly on the interpretation of the play remain an open issue, especially with regard to the classics in the context of the role of theatre in society.

At present, I am researching a book in which I intend to investigate – in a historical context – what part the theatre has played in the discharge of old and in the creation of new images of society, what images of society it stabilizes or, on the other hand, calls into question. The work will also deal with the issue of to what extent theatre can still be taken as an indicator of Europe's cultural identity.

The Balzan Prize has given me the possibility to fulfil a long-standing ambition to create a unique research project. The purpose of this research project on which I hope to work in conjunction with the International Theatre Institute and other organizations will be to investigate the development that has led to significant change in European theatre culture in the latter part of the twentieth century. This will involve the examination of its aesthetic foundations, the expansion of its social structures, as well as how theatre has opened up to other performance cultures. Such development was initiated primarily by an international movement of independent theatre groups, through their investigations and experimentation in the artistic as well as the social realm. It will also deal with the importance the theatre has in all its manifestations, for Europe's rapidly changing societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Paolo Matthiae:

Thank you, Manfred Brauneck, for this most thorough presentation. I would like to invite Pierluigi Petrobelli, Professor Emeritus of the History of Music at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" and a member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei to contribute some comments.