Preface

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'Truth in the theatre is always on the move'
(Peter Brook: *The Empty Space*. 1968)

Independent theatre takes place outside the established institutions, the repertory theatres or, as Otto Brahm called them, the "permanent stages". It emerged as an alternative and in opposition to such theatres. In most European countries, it still represents a separate theatre culture, in its beginnings – in the 1960s – a preponderantly politically virulent, and sometimes even a subcultural sphere. Yet it always calls for contemporaneity and explores new paths, even transcending boundaries and conventions.[1]

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1 | In English-speaking countries, this realm of the theatre is referred to as "independent theatre". Furthermore, the expression "fringe theatre" also exists in English. It appeared in connection with the Edinburgh Festival of Music and Drama when on the fringe of this festival a large number of small, independent, experimental theatre groups put on a kind of alternative programme: "amusing and anarchistic" (Brian McMaster). This gave rise to the extraordinarily popular Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The term "underground theatre" originated in the 1960s. It refers to a theatre which regards itself as oppositional in a rather diffuse sense, independent and subversive; garish and obscene in its aesthetic means.

Unlike the term "Freies Theater" – *Theâtre Libre, Teatro Libero, Teatro Livre* – the term "independent theatre" primarily accentuates the distance to the commercially run theatres, to the theatre business as it functioned on the West End stages in London in the 1950s. Later the attribute "independent" was also used by the film industry and referred to a comparable distinction between the production structures of the big Hollywood studios and those of small film companies. Equally important are the American terms "Off-Broadway theatre" and "Off-Off-Broadway theatre". They are collective names for a trend which distanced itself from the commercialisation of the New York Broadway theatre in favour of more experimental and also political aspirations, above all with new production structures. The term "Freies Theater" includes the broad spectrum of meanings of all these terms, but – owing to the historical context – also refers to the resistance to censorship and other

Since these beginnings, independent theatre has undergone distinct changes: structurally, in its artistic orientation and its social positioning. This transformation had its roots in the changed circumstances of the times – the decades after 1980/90 – not least also in the new generation and life experiences of people currently working in the theatrical field, which are so unlike those of the early years. This is also true of the audience of the independent theatre. Since the upheavals in the former socialist countries in the 1990s, independent theatre has been concerned with reorganising itself in public theatre life after a difficult time characterised by government interference and censorship. Also in those European countries in which, up until the middle of the 1970s, dictatorships were in place, in Portugal, Spain and Greece, independent theatre existed under specific conditions, and its history took its own particular course there. In all European countries, the relationship of the independent theatres to the repertory theatres has changed in recent decades. Even if most of the "permanent stages" reacted to the changed circumstances differently during the same period, some underwent a comparably profound change.

Venues of the independent theatre – inasmuch as it exists as a theatre sphere in its own right – are, for the most part, not typical theatre buildings, but 'alternative venues': abandoned factory buildings or something similar, usually buildings rededicated to this purpose yet still showing traces of their original use, and these vestiges of past use characterise the aesthetics of these locations as well as the audience's sense of space and view to the happenings on stage. Much has been eliminated – even in the 'production houses' and 'culture factories' which have since emerged – for example, the tiered pricing and with it the seating hierarchy. Thus, the independent theatre responds to the audience's expectations of a 'different theatre' even in its artistic form, which allows the unwieldy, the cumbersome and the imperfect, and which tries out the unusual and experiments, exposing the audience to its experiments and challenging it as it goes along. In the beginnings of the independent theatre movement, the 'stage' and the audience shared – even in the socialist countries or in the countries under authoritarian regimes – a largely common political, oppositional attitude. In Spain and Portugal, student theatre groups were the nucleus of an independent, oppositional theatre movement. Today, this connection can be seen in a much more differentiated and open way.

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state repression. In the following English translation, the internationally used term "independent theatre" has been adopted. However, all these terms make clear that this realm of the theatre can only be adequately understood in the context of the entirety of the theatre-cultural structures and traditions of the individual countries.

There is no doubt, however, that the independent theatre offers young people the possibility of pursuing their inclination to work in the theatre even if they have not completed the professional training required for an engagement at a "permanent stage" (i.e. an ensemble theatre). Yet, this is in no way the rule, since the circumstances of the independent theatre in the individual European countries are too different. Even the differences among the independent theatre groups in the training standard of those people working there are considerable. In general, an increasing professionalisation can be observed in this scene which has taken place in many countries in the last two or three decades. Of course, for many young artists, actors or directors – often job entrants coming directly from drama school – work in the independent theatre can be a springboard for a career at a repertory theatre.

Independent theatre seeks contact with the audience. In some of its formats, the boundary between observing and participating has disappeared. In the 1960/70s, performances of independent groups – 'in the West' – occasionally took place in factory halls or in front of the gates to factories, in hospitals, in retirement homes or even in prisons, on the street, in parks – in places where one would not expect to find the conventional sort of theatre. Mobility was always a principle of the work of independent groups. Some of these performances were in the tradition of the "Arbeitertheater", theatre for working-class audiences, or the Soviet-Russian agitprop collective of the 1920/30s. Some independent groups found orientation in these traditions and saw themselves as a spearhead in the fight for political enlightenment.

Today, the audience of the independent theatre comes largely from social circles which regard themselves in the broadest sense as 'progressive', which are interested in specific social problems, but, above all, which are open for the work of young artists. A part of the audience presumably belongs to an academic milieu, as is generally the case with spoken theatre and which is also primarily dealt with here. And it is usually younger people and, as is often said, those young in spirit who attend the performances of independent theatre groups. Some of the older spectators were more or less close to the protest movements in the 1960/70s in whose context the international independent theatre movement emerged. A younger generation will discover its own life experiences, its own language, its own music and its own world of imagery in the theatre of the independent scene. The venues at which these performances take place are often quite familiar to younger spectators.

Since then, independent theatre has become a part of the public theatre scene in virtually all European countries. Ever since the 1980/90s, it has been an established part of the European theatre culture, a result of the social and cultural change since the last decades of the twentieth century. In countries in which a traditional (state or municipal) theatre scene no longer or hardly exists today, the independent theatre or independent productions account for

practically all of the public theatre life. Independent theatre is predominantly a phenomenon in the cultural life of larger cities, linked through a brisk touring scene which provides an essential economic basis for most independent groups. Independent theatre is often bound by its emancipatory claim to an alternative scene which distances it from mainstream society.

Thus, most independent theatre groups have adopted a critical stance to the prevailing cultural sector in their own societies, especially in countries in which there is a state-funded or municipal theatre whose prominent stages receive media coverage. The criticism of the 'independents' is also aimed at the ambition of these theatres and their spokespeople of being paramount in representing theatre per se – as an institution – in its cultural and educational significance, and ultimately as a supposedly indispensable bastion of high culture. The predominantly young artists working in independent theatre are apparently of one mind in this criticism.

The criticism of the independent theatres is not only directed at the circumstances in the public theatre sector, but at the artistic orientation of the state and repertory theatres. The independent theatres tend to generalise when implying that the established theatres demonstrate an overall resistance to innovation. It was precisely the stage and theatre directors of the "permanent stages" in the1970/80s who caused a furore with their productions, broke any number of taboos and cast aside traditional conventions. Some of these stages strove at this time to achieve a politically motivated reinterpretation of the "Volksstück" genre, with which the repertory theatre tried to establish a greater proximity to the current reality of those social classes which were usually not the focus of their traditional programmes. City districts were innovatively used for productions, and prominent ensembles performed in working-class neighbourhoods. In some European countries, public policies on culture addressed this problem. This primarily involved the dismantling of centralised structures in the theatre (mainly in France); Jack Lang also concerned government participation in the funding of public theatre and independent groups. These considered themselves to be in a kind of pioneering role with regard to such reform efforts. Quite rightly, the independents saw a reflection of those social structures in the conventions of mainstream theatre which abetted the exclusion of social groups from public cultural life.

The theatre-cultural circumstances in (at that time) socialist countries, or in countries governed by dictatorships until the middle of the 1970s, were fundamentally different from those in the democratically governed countries in Europe.

In this regard, the spectrum of artistic directions which could be found in the work of the independent theatre was extraordinarily diverse. It reflects the change which many groups in the independent scene have undergone

since the last decades of the twentieth century and since the beginning of the twenty-first century. This spectrum reaches – in principle, in the initial period, the1960s/70s – from the adaptation of the political aesthetics of the Brecht theatre, from Erwin Piscator's inflammatory documentarism, a fallback on the theatre movement for the working class in the 1920/30s, from the street theatre, the political cabaret and subversive varieties of clown theatre, the 'happening', as well as the many different directions of the US-American theatre movement referred to as *Theater der Erfahrung [theatre of experience]* (e.g., Jens Heilmeyer or Pea Fröhlich). In the 1980s/90s, independent theatre finally underwent a course correction which, to a large extent, followed the general development of the theatre at the end of this century. The growing professionalism in the independent scene addressed the new developments in spoken theatre: experimental multimedia projects which prioritized artistic intentions over the political statements of previous decades, the entire range of post-dramatic directions, and new performative formats. However, the commitment to specific social groups, such as migrants, the jobless or other minorities, remained a characteristic of the independent theatre throughout the entire course of its history, as did the work in the collective, which is still the prevailing production form of most groups in the independent scene.

If a certain depolitisation of this realm of theatre can be observed today in comparison with the early years, this reflects (somewhat seismographically) the zeitgeist of the last decades – a finding which probably applies to the development of the theatre in general.

The independent (and most likely, every) theatre wants an active audience and decides, wherever the spatial circumstances allow, for theatrical arrangements which avoid a rigid vis à vis of stage and audience. In this respect, the possibilities provided by alternative venues are greater than the standardised spatial arrangements in conventional theatres whose architecture largely prescribes an arrangement in which stage and audience face each other.

Above all, the independent theatre creates production conditions which make it largely independent of government subsidies, but also of commercial constraints, and in this way allow it to maintain a certain autonomy. At least, that was the original idea of the independents. The general tendency is to defy performance bans. Accordingly, the work for the artists in the independent scene is sometimes risky, especially under dictatorships or totalitarian/ autocratic regimes, especially when their work deals with political issues.

As far as the social conditions of artists working in the independent scene are concerned, their situation is predominantly precarious in free societies which are subject to the regulative requirements of the market. This is true for almost all European countries, especially those in the former Eastern bloc, which since the 1990s had to cope with the transformation from a planned to a market economy, which has also massively affected the cultural sector.

Furthermore, in some of these countries, the independent theatre is still exposed to government repression.

Most independent artists must pursue some sort of secondary employment for a living. Only a tiny minority of independents are able to earn a living through their work in the theatre. This situation is aggravated not least by their readiness to relinquish habitual patterns in their artistic practice, and their disinclination to comply with the representational forms generally expected by the established stages. Socio-political regulation of the sphere of artistic creation serves in many cases to exclude artists from the independent scene, or to marginalise this entire theatrical sector.

From the perspective of those working in this realm, the independent theatre's claim to freedom may indeed be primarily a claim to artistic freedom, a personally motivated claim, as well as a socially critical and often a political claim. Thus, the impulses which move the independents are also quite diverse. For young people, work in the independent scene is a way of life, although not necessarily one which will be pursued for an entire lifetime. It is a decision in favour of collective working, largely free of hierarchies, together with like-minded persons, usually in a group which is homogeneous with regard to age structure and which shares the same political and artistic perceptions and mind-set. This may be considered the rule, and it is also true for groups whose members are of different cultural and ethnic origin. Prominent international ensembles such as that of Peter Brook or Eugenio Barba practised this artistic multiculturalism right from the start and often used the ethnic characteristics of the actors as a productive moment in their artistic work, and in doing so jarred the traditional role expectations of the audience. Perhaps this was also a reason why they became role models for many independent theatre groups.

That the independents' claim to freedom is not only restricted to the artistic realm has long been noted by their critics. This may well be one reason why the relationship between official cultural-political institutions and the independent theatre is still strained despite all official declarations to the effect that its social significance has never been questioned (at least openly). In their view, the independents cannot really be integrated into those concepts of theatre culture which are particularly relevant when allocating the public funds available for the theatres, even if the requirements of the large, cost-intensive repertory theatres are not at all comparable to those of the flat operating structures of the independent groups. Not without good reason, the more flexible production structures of the independent theatre or the free productions are frequently the subject of discussion – as in Germany – when it comes to considering a fundamental reform of the theatre systems, not least for reasons stemming from the pressure of fiscal policy plans. In the Netherlands, independent groups are virtually the sole remaining representatives of public theatre – especially after the massive political-cultural cutbacks by the Dutch Parliament in 2011.

The political-cultural relationship with the independent theatre – also with respect to professional reviews of its theatre productions – is apparently challenging with regard to an understanding of theatre which is oriented toward allegedly indispensable, traditional artistic standards and a more or less politically and ideologically neutral concept of culture. As a consequence of an extensive liberalisation of social life, the potential for provocation in most performances by independent theatre groups is, however, rather small, especially for its audience. A resonance which goes beyond these circles will most likely not be realised. In that, the independent theatre today hardly differs from the "permanent stages".

Quite the reverse is true of the public perception of the theatre as an institution in the central Western European countries in the 1960/70s. In these early years, the independent theatre was driven by the dynamics of an international protest movement which questioned the fundamental values of Western industrial societies, including their understanding of culture. Most independent groups considered themselves part of this political movement and were quite willing to hazard the consequences of a break with the traditional cultural structures. The independent theatre also helped to ensure that the boundaries between different art forms became more permeable or were even blurred (e.g., the boundaries which had separated the theatre and the fine arts). The relationship between art and everyday life was also under discussion; new forms of production and communication were tested. Even if developments in the fine arts were almost a decade ahead of those in the theatre, the direction they took was the same. New visual and hybrid genres emerged whose action character shared an interface with the theatre. Although they were of the same ephemeral nature, they also contributed to change in the theatre. The theatre adapted more and more developments from the field of the fine arts, above all when conceiving new space for performances. Essential to these new stage aesthetics was the reception of performance art, object and action art, pop art, happenings and those media interdisciplinary hybrid forms which have led to a kind of 'theatricalisation' of the fine arts. From its outset, this movement had an international dimension.

The Documenta 6 (1977) in Kassel presented an overview of the developments in performance art in the 1970s. In 1979, parallel to the festival, Theater der Nationen, an exhibition conceived by stage designers, took place in Hamburg with the title *Inszenierte Räume*. It dealt with the interaction of theatre and fine arts and with "boundaries and transitions" (Ivan Nagel). Even though these developments did not take place directly in connection with the independent theatre, they strongly contributed to accelerating a process in which boundaries between art forms were becoming blurred or even obliterated. If a more or less stable consensus had existed up to the 1950s as to what art – what theatre as art – was, and what importance art and theatre should have for society, this consensus

was revoked in connection with these dramatic changes, almost all aesthetic paradigms were scrutinised, and the social function of art was redefined and expanded. The fine arts played a leading role in this regard. The developments in the theatre were able to absorb the dissolution of aesthetic norms, a process already underway, and could profit from a creative atmosphere tempered by a break with tradition and characterised by innovation and rebellion.

In the theatre, the mimetic art tradition, which had long been the theatre's true reference to reality, and likewise many of the traditional artistic standards had already been abandoned in the first third of the twentieth century by the theatre of the historical avant-gardes. A process of deliterarisation and depsychologisation of the theatre and acting had already commenced around 1900. The avant-garde continued this process more radically.

The figurine and finally the 'performer' replaced that type of actor who played his role either empathetically or by commenting on it in 'epic' distance. Dadaists and futurists had consistently alarmed the middle classes in independent productions and called their artefacts Antikunst. It was an art not meant to last forever which, above all, was also unfit for exploitation by the 'culture business'. The history of the reception of avant-garde art soon indicated that this provocation strategy had proven to be ineffective. After only a few years, their artefacts not only found their way into the museums, where they were admired as devotionalia of a rebellious time, but also onto the international art market.

Although these developments in the first third of the twentieth century pursued artistic intentions and reacted to the circumstances of a time which had little to do with the concrete political approach of the independent theatre movement in the 1960/70s, the independents regarded themselves as a 'second avant-garde'. Many groups in the independent theatre movement in the 1960/70s could identify with the provocative actions of their historical predecessors and the radical cultural criticism in the manifests of Antonin Artaud, a cult figure of avant-garde theatre in the context of French surrealism.

The Living Theatre, which was founded in New York at the beginning of the 1950s by the stage designer Julian Beck and the actress Judith Malina (a former assistant of Erwin Piscator in his Dramatic Workshop at the New York New School for Social Research), was one of the first theatre collectives and also inspired later developments in Europe. It was theatre which not only rendered a fundamental criticism of the 'American way of life', but practiced a new way of life that celebrated the union of *Life, Revolution and Theatre* in a collective effort, with a radical call for freedom. The Living Theatre ranked among the most prominent theatre collectives in the New York Off-Off-Broadway scene and preoccupied the police force and the courts virtually from the outset.

If the early (up until approximately 1963), rather escapist productions of the Living Theatre did not really reckon with much audience attendance, the

Bread & Puppet Theatre (under this name since 1965) of Peter Schumann manifested a new direction of political folk theatre in its street actions in 1961 with its spectacular, over-dimensionally large stick puppets. In the 1960s, both theatre collectives – The Living Theatre (for the first time in 1963) and Schumann's theatre ensemble (for the first time in 1968) went on tour in Europe. In the middle of the 1950s, Joseph Papp showed his experimental Shakespeare productions on a provisional stage mounted on a wagon in New York parks (including Central Park) and regarded these open-air events (with free admission) as a new form of political folk theatre. Since 1960, this project has been subsidised by the City of New York as the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Throughout the years, the Open Theatre, founded by Joseph Chaikin in 1963, was the Off-Off- Broadway groups which most rigorously pursued a clear political line. In the 1960s, this theatre collective performed his productions, which were directed against the military commitment of the United States in Vietnam, in Europe as well.

The LaMama Experimental Theatre Club, founded by Ellen Stewart in New York in 1964, emerged as the centre of the discussion concerning the upheavals in different artistic genres, especially in the theatre, at the beginning of the 1970s, and this mainly because of international workshops there under directors who were key figures in the independent scene in Europe – such as the Polish directors Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor, but also Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and the Romanian director Andrei Şerban – but also because of the work of artists from more than 70 countries. LaMama was, above all, a forum for young playwrights. Starting in 1965, Ellen Stewart toured Europe every year with her Repertory Troupe. Branches of LaMama were established in Amsterdam, London, Munich, Spoleto and in Paris.

In 1977, the Squat Theatre, which had been founded in Budapest in 1969 by Peter Halász and Anna Koos under the name Kassák-Theatre, moved to New York. It was a theatre collective whose anarchistic environments suspended the differentiation between art and everyday life and which performed at countless festivals in Europe to "realise the theatre which lies beyond art" (Squat Theatre). From the end of the 1970s, the two Californian workers' theatre collectives San Francisco Mime Troupe (founded in 1959) and the Teatro Campesino (founded in 1965 in the wake of a farm workers' strike) went on tour in Europe.

It was the first time in the history of European theatre that this theatre received significant impulses from the reception of US-American theatre developments, comparable to pop art, which was the most important contribution made by the United States to fine arts in the twentieth century. This, too, was a rebellion of the young against the generation of their parents, a frontal attack on their taste and their cultural standards.

Eventually, in the second half of the 1960s – intensified by the escalation of the student demonstrations in Paris in 1968 – a wave of independent theatre groups with a predominantly political orientation was set in motion. With his Teatr 13 Rzędów, which had already been founded in Opole in 1959, Grotowski relocated to Wrocław in 1965, where he established himself as the Teatr Laboratorium, which was dedicated to the research of theatre and acting. Projects such as *The Constant Prince* (based on Calderón and Słowacki; the first version was performed in 1965) and *Apokalypsis cum Figuris* (1968/69), as well as Grotowski's text, *Ku teatrowi ubogiemu,* which was published in Polish in 1965 and first appeared in English (*Towards a Poor Theatre)* in 1969, had a tremendous impact on the independent scene and revolutionised its understanding of theatre. It enhanced the components of independent theatre – which until then had been mostly political – with the aspect of "experience", an existential transgression of borders in the "total act" which Grotowski demanded from his actors. In international tours, almost annually from 1966 to 1970, and in countless workshops, Grotowski and his key staff propagated the idea of the "poor theatre", communicated its spiritual conceptual world, and introduced its acting techniques. From the beginning of the 1970s, Grotowski was showered with official honours as one of the most influential theatre artists of his time.

In 1956, Tadeusz Kantor founded the Teatr Cricot 2 in Krakow and, as a theatre director and professional painter, continued in the tradition of the Cricot theatre of the 1930s. Like its predecessor, the Cricot 2 was an experimental theatre whose hermetic aesthetics were strongly influenced by Kantor's own artwork, the happening, pop art and surrealism. Even though Kantor's theatre represented one of the most distinguished positions in the theatre of the twentieth century, its theatre work ultimately had no direct effect on the independent theatre movement. Kantor's legacy was, however, a new interpretation of the theatre as an autonomous world of sensory images and the uncompromising subjectivity of his artistic work.

Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret was originally founded as an amateur theatre group in Oslo, Norway. In 1966, he moved it to Holstebrø, Denmark following a study trip to Kerala, India. He managed it at the new Denmark location under the name Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium and it was sponsored by local municipal authorities. Barba's work initially focused on researching Far Eastern acting techniques.

The emergence of these theatre laboratories – geographically far away from the political focal points of these years – did not necessarily have to do with the political protest movements at the end of this decade, yet their concepts and working methods were virtually 'soaked up' by the international independent theatre scene in Europe and in the United States because a radical concept of freedom was immanent to their ideas of the theatre: an alternative concept

to the Western understanding of theatre and acting. Whereas Kantor had conceived his Theatre of Death in a confrontation with the main directions of avant-garde art in the twentieth century while also falling back on the ritual masques from the mythical origin of European theatre, Grotowski and Barba, and later also Peter Brook, believed to have discovered a new basis for the art of theatre in Far Eastern spirituality and in the suspension of the dualism of body and spirit so typical for Western thinking. It was necessary to study this and to experiment with it in an artistic context. And in any case, followers of the independent theatre movement firmly believed that the theatre was a place where new experiences could be made.

One of the most radical cases against the Western "written tradition" was made by Richard Schechner with his Performance Group, founded in New York in 1967. Schechter's staging of *Dionysos in '69*, a free adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* (first performed in 1968), was a group performance which probably most consistently and exclusively relied on the human body as a medium for staged, ritual and therapeutic techniques. Schechner also staged the productions of his Environment Theatre on a tour of Europe and was invited with his *Performance Group* to perform at the International Theatre Festival (BITEF) in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

Such theses called the Western style of literary-dramatic theatre into question and were taken by independent groups as an inspiration for a theatre deemed authentic, for a theatre which, from its general approach, was primarily one thing: transcultural. The fact that this course de-substantiated the original political commitment of the independent theatre movement corresponded with the development which the international protest movements took towards the end of the 1970s. The war which the United States had waged in Vietnam, the central point of departure for all political protests in these years, ended in 1975. The political commitment which had also artistically inspired the independent theatre movement was significantly reduced and replaced by an ideologically more or less open alternative movement.

The theatre cooperative of Ariane Mnouchkine, the Théâtre du Soleil (Theatre of the Sun), has existed in Paris since 1964. Originally, Mnouchkine directed a student theatre (as of 1960) influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of a "théâtre populaire". After extensive travels in East Asia (1963) during which Mnouchkine studied the traditional Indian and Japanese theatre, the Kathakali, the Nō and the Kabuki, the Théâtre du Soleil took on more distinct contours. Mnouchkine also oriented herself in her programme toward the tradition of the French folk theatre, as did Planchon in his "people's theatre factory" (Simone Seym) in Villeurbanne, a working class district in Lyon, both of them with great success. Jean Vilar, the most dedicated representative of the new, 'national people´s theatre' in France, coined the idea that the theatre is a public utility like "gas, water or electricity".

Peter Brook, who broke with traditional theatre in 1970 with his production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (still in Stratford, England), founded the Centre International de la Création Théâtrale in Paris in 1968, which was renamed the Centre International de Recherches Théâtrales in 1970 and which became a centre of applied theatre research. Brook's book *The Empty Space* (1968), in which a concept of theatre is described which frees itself from all decorative aspects, detaches itself from any moralising gesture, and only concentrates on the actors, became the 'bible' of the independent theatre movement.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, Rainer Werner Fassbinder founded the Antiteater (1968) as the successor to the Action Theater. Fassbinder's theatre collective was among the earliest independent theatre groups founded in Germany. The radical, culturally critical statements of Artaud and the fundamental opposition of the New York Living Theatre provided the first orientation for his own theatre work. Likewise, the revolutionary theatre collective Rote Rübe was founded in Munich in 1970 after having originated from a LaMama workshop; in the same year, the Freie Theater München emerged, which celebrated a life free of all bourgeois taboos in spectacular street actions. Shortly thereafter, however, West Berlin became the centre of the independent scene and home to the Theatermanufaktur (founded in 1972), which mainly staged political-historical subject matter.

In Italy, the director Luca Ronconi and his group Teatro Libero staged *L'Orlando Furioso* (based on the romance epic of the same name by Ludovico Ariosto) in 1968/69 at the Festival of the Two Worlds in Spolto. In this production, the boundaries between all the art forms were obliterated to achieve a spectacular environment in the tradition of the Italian "Jahrmarkt-Theater" or popular theatre. After the festival in Spoleto, this production was performed in many public places in Italy and subsequently on a tour of Europe and in the US. It was also the year in which the very popular Italian actor, playwright and director Dario Fo took leave of his previous regular audience, the "enlightened bourgeoisie" (Dario Fo), for whom he had long performed as a comedian and satirist. Together with his wife, the actress Franca Rame, Fo founded the theatre collective La Nuova Scena in 1968. In 1970, he changed the name of the collective to La Comune, worked for the goals of the communist party in Italy, and mainly performed in factories and working-class districts of the cities in the north of the country. Fo regarded this theatre work as satirical-political popular theatre. It was a theatre of provocations, but also of improvisation in the style of the travelling folk in the Middle Ages, the "giulari". Fo changed course significantly with respect to his early years. In the following decade, Italy was plagued by a wave of terrorist attacks. The kidnapping and murder of the conservative politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978 was a trauma in recent Italian history.

In 1970, the theatre collective Het Werkteater was founded in Amsterdam. The Shaffyteater and the Mickeryteater, both also in Amsterdam, were venues used by independent theatre groups from all around the world. In particular, the Mickery was a communication forum for the theatre developments of that time in New York (LaMama), London (The People Show, The Pip Simmons Theatre Group) and the Japanese underground-theatre (Terayama Shujis Tenjo Sajiki). The Brazilian director Augusto Boal attracted a lot of attention in the independent scene in the 1970s as the founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, whose subversive acting techniques had been developed in Latin America. From 1976, the director lived in Europe and taught these forms of political theatre in many workshops. Henry Thorau documented Boal's experiments with the so-called "Invisible Theatre", with which Boal experimented in France and Italy in 1978.

The independent theatre of this time was predominantly political theatre and advocated radical-socialist, and sometimes anarchist, ideas. Most groups favoured a new form of political popular theatre that was meant to be (in the sense of Bertolt Brecht) entertaining and realistic without being too 'folksy'. Brecht's theatre aesthetics were primarily accepted in their experimental aspects: the epic structures and the dialectics of presentation and commentary. Jean-Paul Sartre, the most prominent figure and visionary of the left-wing protest movement in Europe, declared "truth" and "radicalism" to be the essential characteristics of intellectual social criticism.

A brief retrospective: The word "free" appears in European theatre history for the first time at the end of the nineteenth century in the names of two theatres: the Théâtre Libre in Paris, which was founded in 1887 by André Antoine, an employee of a Paris gas company and devoted member of an amateur theatre group, and the Freie Bühne in Berlin (1889), where the writer Otto Brahm was the driving force of this private theatre society. Both theatre groups opted out of the existing theatre conventions in their countries. Jacob Grein, an impresario and theatre critic, founded the Independent Theatre Society, in London in 1891, which was a private theatre society pursuing goals similar to those of the "free" or "independent" stages in Paris and Berlin. The performances of these three groups did not, of course, take place in "alternative venues". In Paris, Antoine founded his own theatre. In Berlin, the society Freie Bühne rented smaller private theatres for its performances, as did the Independent Theatre Society in London. In the first year, the performances of the Society could be seen mainly in the Royalty Theatre.

The wish to be free or independent was at this time a declaration of war – not only on the field of art, but on the political circumstances of the times and the economic constraints of the theatre operations in the commercial theatres, whose owners were all private persons who mostly opposed any sort of innovations since they might threaten the commercial success of their "businesses". Especially in Germany, there was a heated discussion in

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which the "Geschäftstheater" (commercial theatre) was confronted with the demand of reformers for a largely government subsidised "Kulturtheater" (culture theatre) – such were the controversial labels. However, this was also a time in which public communication, particularly the theatre, was subject to control by organs of government authority. Politics and art formed a fatal alliance whose functioning was to be ensured by censorship. Thus, it was the primary aim of the "free" stages and the "independents" to elude the censorship laws by assuming the status of a society or club and declaring their performances as private events. However, in France and Germany this meant constant conflict between the author or theatre operator and the regulatory authorities: the police and the courts. Also, most conservative theatre critics joined ranks with the opponents of free and independent theatre makers. Freeing himself from the constraints of the "commercial theatre" was the main aim of Grein's Independent Theatre Society – and this in the highly commercialised London theatre scene, which had almost entirely isolated itself from the continental European developments since this type of theatre supposedly would not 'pay off'.

The artistic focus was on naturalism, the modernity of that time, and realistic performing arts. It was important to gain acceptance for the plays of Henrik Ibsen, Leo Tolstoy, Émile Zola and Gerhart Hauptmann on European stages. These authors and their followers fought to make theatre contemporary once again, to bring "truth" to the stage. Around 1880/90, this was the slogan of a group of young authors in Germany. Furthermore, the new dramatic art had established itself along the boundary between science and art. This was also considered by progressive minds to be modern in those decades marked by a limitless faith in science. The French critic and author Émile Zola had signaled the direction for this development: Writers should "experiment" in the same manner as natural scientists.

The battle lines were drawn: on the one side stood those who had pledged themselves to the fight for modernity; on the other side, the traditionalists who were determined to shield the realm of art from any kind of reference to contemporary issues, especially political ones (at that time this mainly meant "social issues"). These were the subject of the naturalistic plays. Conservative political parties saw the road to revolution and anarchy paved by these plays. Conservative critics simply refused to accept the artistic character of this direction. "Tendenzkunst" ("trend art") was their battle cry. The conflicts escalated to the point that naturalism even became an issue in the French parliament (1894, in connection with anarchism debates), the German Reichstag (1894, in connection with a plot to overthrow the government), and at the party convention of the German Social Democrats in Gotha (1896). However, for the latter, the new dramatic art was not radical or militant enough; it lacked the positive heroism which the great classic dramas seemed to impart.

In order to better understand the independent theatre from the last third of the twentieth century until today, these comments on the early history of the independents around 1890 may be helpful, even though the political and the socio-historical circumstances have changed radically since then. Today, censorship is also a thing of the past (at least in the history books). The European countries settled these issues in very different ways and with a certain time lag. In England, censorship lasted into the 1960s. Since the 1930s, dictatorships have introduced more serious forms of state repression to "bring the cultural realm in their sphere of influence into line", as it was called in the jargon of the NS dictatorship – in the end, to subjugate it to the dictates of their political doctrine.

In the years around 1890, when the wish to be free was mainly related to those circumstances which existed in the theatre, one thing became clear: the interest of naturalistic authors to bring not only "social issues" to the stage, but a new idea of man. The focus was placed on the dependence of man on those elementary factors which biology and sociology had only just discovered: inherited psycho-pathological dispositions and the seemingly compulsive influence of the milieu, the social environment of individuals. Both reflected current materialistic schools of thought and diametrically opposed the idealistic conception of man on which classical literary tradition was based. There also seemed to be a certain partisanship among naturalist writers for those persons on the fringe of society or for those living in psychological impoverishment – or victims of that "Lebenslüge" (sham existence) which Henrik Ibsen had diagnosed as the prevailing state of the bourgeois society at the end of this century.

A situation which in the broadest sense was comparable to this one emerged under this aspect in the first decades after the Second World War. Both victors and vanquished had suppressed the trauma of the catastrophes of war more than they had tried to come to terms with it. In countries which had come under Soviet-Russian control, a socialist new beginning was propagated and violently enforced under the control and direction of the communist parties. The tendency in Western European societies to more or less pick up and continue where they had left off before the war was obvious with the re-establishment of the old circumstances. In countries in which fascist governments were in power, the change of system generally went quite smoothly. The re-education campaign of the Americans in West Germany and in Austria was of little consequence. After the material and psychological devastations of the war, the European humanist tradition was invoked. Plays which dealt with tolerance and enlightened humanity dominated the programmes of the big theatres in the years immediately following the war.

The protests of the young which were soon to be heard in these post-war years were directed against the attitude of the war generation, especially

against that of the 'fathers', against their suppression of guilt and shared responsibility. In France and in the Netherlands, the subject of collaboration with the German occupation force divided the nation. In the 1950s in England, the frustration of a young generation and their protest against materialism and the hollowness of middle-class conventions found expression in the theatre of the Angry Young Men. Soon thereafter, a far more devastating moral analysis of British society was articulated in the plays of Edward Bond. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the documentary theatre of the 1960s posed the question of guilt and responsibility for the annihilation of the Jews and 'investigated' the circumstances to ascertain the perpetrators of the NS crimes. These plays were also concerned with bringing a truth to the stage which had long been suppressed. However, these were positions of political and moral social criticism which were indeed presented in the repertories of the "permanent stages" of Western Europe and not in the independent scene. The ferocity of the debates which then came to light was a sign that the time was ripe for fundamental changes and an intensification of the conflict between the generations. These irritations spread to wide circles of bourgeois society. The psychoanalyst Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich referred to these findings in a book about West German post-war society entitled *Inability to Mourn* (1967). Ultimately, the political morals were on the line.

Similar developments with respect to the direction and radicalism of social criticism took place in Japan, which had undergone a process of adaptation to the Western industrial societies since the middle of the nineteenth century. At the end of the 1960s, an extremely radical theatre scene emerged there which was "alternative" in its aesthetic manifestations and described by the term "Angura" ("underground"). The image which many young people had of the situation in Japanese society was triggered by this movement. In terms of content, it largely reflected the statements of the protest movements in Europe and the United States. One of the most prominent representatives of this direction was Terayama Shuji. Terayama showed his shocking theatrical installations with the group Tenjo Sajiki in the United States and Europe and spread his idea of a subversive theatre in many workshops in the independent scene. It was a radical, alternative concept to Brecht's epic theatre of enlightenment. According to Terayama, theatre is the "only place where lawlessness is tolerated".

The rise of the international protest movement in the 1960s had its origins in the intellectual milieu of the universities of California; in the United States, that country where the interaction of capitalism, imperialism and racism in public life, in the justice system and in the political realm seemed to be particularly blatant and where, at the beginning of the 1960s, it escalated in a series of militant protest actions. Historical cornerstones for the emergence of these protests were the racially motivated unrest in some of the large cities

in the United States which led to solidarity among and a radical politisation of social minorities, the war waged by the United States in Southeast Asia, and the political murders in the years 1963 (J. F. Kennedy), 1965 (Malcolm X, spokesman of the Black Muslim movement) and 1968 (Dr Martin Luther King Jr and Robert Kennedy), which shook the world. In Europe, the escalation of the student revolts in Paris in May 1968 was a signal to initiate a fundamental criticism not only of the universities where this protest began, but of the authoritarian structures in post-war Western societies. A multitude of newly founded student theatres followed in the wake of these protests. In Paris and Los Angeles, the streets were on fire. In 1968, Warsaw Pact troops, which had already put down a popular uprising in Hungary in 1956, marched into Prague – a centre of budding liberalisation under Soviet control – occupied the city, and put an abrupt end to the "Prague Spring". In the Federal Republic of Germany, the extra-parliamentary opposition became more radical: in 1967, there were mass demonstrations when the Shah of Persia visited Berlin, in which a student was shot; in 1968, thousands demonstrated against the adoption of the so-called "Notstandsgesetze" or emergency laws; and mass demonstrations took place in West Berlin. An assassination attempt on the spokesman of the extra-parliamentary opposition, Rudi Dutschke, was the culmination of these sometimes civil-war-like conflicts; however, this was only a preface to the "German Autumn of 1977", when the terrorist attacks of the RAF rocked the rule of law in the Federal Republic. The activists of the protest movements in the 1960/70s used the revolutions in Cuba and Vietnam, but mainly the cultural revolution in China, as models. Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara were celebrated as pioneers and heroes of the revolution.

From the outset, many of these protest actions had strongly theatrical, even poetic characteristics. The slogan of the French student revolts – "Fantasy for Power!" – described an attitude which called for a complete release of creative forces: in politics, on the street and in art. Werner Hofmann has already pointed out the "happening character" of France's May. 1972 Joseph Beuys explained at the Dokumenta 5 in Kassel, Germany, that "everyone is an artist". In their happenings, Beuys and Wolf Vostel propagated the unity of art, politics and life as a total work of art.

An early indication of a looming course correction of the original political protest movement was the pop music festival in Woodstock, New York, in August 1969, at which more than 500,000 young people came together to celebrate peace, music and love: "Fuck the system!" was the slogan of a new alternative counter-culture. The aim of these youth protests was always to shatter the supposed affirmative relationship between art and society. The social philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who was teaching in California, had provided his intellectual following with the catchwords. In this context, being

free always referred to the approach to life represented by a younger generation. The scandalous performance of the Living Theatre at the Avignon Festival and the statement made by the New York group – its "unconditional *No* to the present society" – was one of the theatre highlights in this politically turbulent year (1968).

The countless independent theatre groups which had emerged in the meantime in the United States, in Western Europe and – as a kind of subculture – in some countries under Soviet influence, articulated their political protest and demanded a new kind of art: an "art for everyone". First and foremost, they were concerned with justifying new lifestyles which were to be antiauthoritarian more than anything else. A cramped striving for authenticity was the main aim of art and life. The understanding of the completed artwork which had long served as the focus of art-theoretical discourses seemed to have become obsolete.

A new stage was set in the history of European theatre in connection with these developments and their ideological environment: the intensive artistic and theoretical preoccupation of some directors with non-European, mainly Far Eastern theatre cultures. For the first time, European theatre acquired a global dimension.

The beginnings of this development could already be observed around 1900 and in the first third of the twentieth century when the ensemble of Kawakami Otojiro presented traditional Japanese theatre in a series of guest performances in the United States and in Europe. Developments in dance and the fine arts in Europe also profited from these guest performances, which imparted a picture of an entirely different concept of art extending far beyond the world of theatre. Around 1910-12, Vsevolod Meyerhold discovered the estranging effects of East Asian acting techniques in connection with his "conditional theatre". And Bertolt Brecht indicated the proximity of Chinese dramatic art to his own estrangement or defamiliarization theatre. His verdict that the Western actors were, without exception, dilettantes because they would only reproduce a repertoire of expressions known to them from their everyday life – whereas Chinese and Japanese actors were required to learn a strictly codified system of signs as the basis of their art – was typical for the direction this early reception of Far Eastern dramatic art took. Antonin Artaud brought a new tone into this discussion with his essay on *The Balinese Theatre* (1931). His theories inspired the independents in their search for a theatre which had not been falsified by literary masterpieces. *Enough of the Masterpieces* (1933), Artaud demanded unerringly. The ideological background of this statement was a radical criticism of the Western model of culture.

Thus, in the 1970s it had become virtually an obsession of young people to transcend boundaries – not only the limits of one's own consciousness (with the help of drugs and psychedelic techniques) but also cultural boundaries,

especially with respect to Far Eastern cultures. Transculturalism seemed to be the cure-all for the alleged paralysis of Western Art. Thus the opinion of the French director Ariane Mnouchkine, who in any case believed theatre to be "oriental". Furthermore, some Western directors found a source of inspiration for their own artistic work in the spiritualism of Zen Buddhism, an idea which also emerged in the fine arts. The aim was now to tap this spirituality – not least through journeys to the respective regions.

Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine and Eugenio Barba, who had triggered the interest in Far Eastern theatre cultures, systematically researched the anthropological foundations of their dramatic art. Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba studied the vocal and body techniques of oriental actors in India and Japan. There was a broad consensus in the independent scene that the actor's body and its mechanical possibilities were the actual aesthetic means of dramatic art. With that, it seemed that the traditional acting training which prepared the actor for the "work on the role" (Konstantin Stanislavski), for a "grappling" with the figures in a dramatic piece, had become obsolete. The independent groups practiced the training for this 'other' theatre, usually in the form of workshops. In the independent theatre, this was the beginning of a professionalisation of its own kind. The aim of this training was no longer the character actor of the 'old school' but the authentic 'performer'. In the end, the performer is an individual who must overcome the problems of his everyday life and whose stage appearance is not falsified by any kind of esoteric artistry: the layperson. In this way, for the audience, the aesthetic distance that for a long time aimed to arouse a cognitive process through the events on stage is removed. Instead it professes to present 'life itself', not (just) a mimetic representation of it: a form of hyper-naturalism. The German group Rimini Protokoll referred to this type of performer as "an expert of everyday life". Today, repertory theatres have also long discovered the amateur as a performer. "Authenticity" is the new magic word. Eugenio Barba founded the International School of Anthropology (ISTA) in 1979. However, the reflections on acting techniques and the training methods of Brook and Grotowski in the 1960s had already charted a course in the direction of a 'different' theatre. In this context, Brook even spoke of the "holy theatre" and its "wordless language". This concept of acting differed greatly from the epic way of playing in the didactical theatre of Brecht. It put the relationship of the theatre to the Western literary and theatre traditions into a perspective in which it had certainly previously existed and manifested itself in productions characterised by a faithfulness to the original.

In the 1980/90s, a number of productions of great classical works were staged as 'projects'. The artistic fascination of these productions lay in the synthesis of Western dramaturgy and oriental aesthetics and dramatic art. Thus, Peter Brooks' nine-hour production of episodes from the ancient Indian epic poem, *Mahābhārata* (1985) in a stone quarry near Avignon was

one of the artistic highlights of European theatre at the end of the twentieth century (although not without controversy from the point of view of some non-Western critics). The same is true for the great Shakespeare and Atreides cycles which Ariane Mnouchkine staged at the beginning of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s with the Théâtre du Soleil. These productions also combined oriental stylistic elements (in the costumes, the choreography and the music) with the great literary works of European origin. Mnouchkine even advocated translating the works of Shakespeare into a "language of the body". The productions of Brook and Mnouchkine, whose culinary fascination paved the way for a new artistic direction, were performed in many places around the world. Brook´s production of the *Mahābhārata* was also filmed after the tour.

The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s saw an epochal upheaval which affected almost the entire cultural sphere of the Western industrial countries. The independent theatre movement reacted to this upheaval, too. After the end of the ideological confrontations between 'West' and 'East', it became evident to what extent this had always been a productive factor in art. Furthermore, there were far-reaching changes on the political level, the economic level, and in most of the areas of social life, and not only in the societies of the former Eastern Bloc. The founding of the Polish trade union Solidarnośc in 1980 heralded a new era, and with it the decline of the Eastern Bloc. Five years later, Mikhail Gorbachev announced his policy of "perestroika" – a restructuring of society and the political system in the USSR. The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in1986 made a broader public (including those in Western societies) aware for the first time of the possibility of an ecological catastrophe and shook their belief in a secure future safeguarded by technological advancement. The situation for European economies was further exacerbated by an intensified confrontation with the problems of globalisation. Around this time, the populations in Western European societies were becoming more and more aware of the fact that changes had taken place as a result of the increasingly great number of migrants and that, owing to this, conventions from other cultures which 'old' Europe knew only from pictures from its colonial times were becoming increasingly present in everyday life. Reactions to this led to national-conservative resentment in some countries which, in turn, resulted in political unrest. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, which for decades had been the symbol of a divided Europe. In all European countries, the economisation of the cultural sector increased drastically, which led to further aggravation of the already precarious situation of the independent theatres. Moreover, not only the independent scene but the theatre in general lost ground. This was presumably a consequence of the mass spread of electronic media in the entertainment sector. At the same time, there was an apparently politically endorsed reduction in traditional educational content which had severe consequences for the institution of "theatre", which up until then had been firmly anchored in the

cultural consensus of Western societies. Theoretical discourses which focused on the role of the theatre in rapidly changing societies took place within the artistic sphere. The programmatic writings which had served the independent theatre movement for decades as orientation all dated back to the 1960s. Theatre studies coined the term "post-dramatic" for the newer developments in the theatre, whereby an epoch-making caesura in European theatre culture was evidenced. Apparently, post-dramatic theatre was an attempt to react to these changes and position the theatre in the environment of mass media and pop culture. The American star director Robert Wilson optimally satisfied the needs of the zeitgeist of the 1980/90s with his opulent show pieces, whose texts and images programmatically eluded clear interpretation.

The independent theatre also blazed new trails at the end of the twentieth century. It was indeed a consequence of the changed life experiences of the young people in these decades. Above all, a process of professionalisation gained momentum in the independent scene. Many new groups were founded which no longer primarily defined themselves through their political aspirations. In most European countries, this realm of the theatre was also more or less integrated into the public funding programmes, which had not generally been the case for the independents in previous decades. Only the outstanding internationally active independent theatre companies received subsidies back in the 1970s (e.g., from foundations); some played in permanent venues. Here are a few prominent examples: Ariane Mnouchkine moved into the abandoned halls of a munitions factory, the Cartoucherie in Vincennes, with her Théâtre du Soleil in 1970. The Paris City Council approved this move. In 1979, the city of Amsterdam took over the partial funding of the Mickeryteater. The Berliner Schaubühne, indeed a private theatre yet similar to an independent theatre collective in the orientation of its programme and the circumstances of its founding, received considerable subsidies approved by the Berlin Senate which did everything it could to get the very successful ensemble under the direction of Peter Stein to commit to the city long-term. Peter Brook's CIRT was given a permanent venue with the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, a former music hall (and a building which had actually been condemned). This and Mnouchkine's Cartoucherie were both located in working-class districts of Paris. The same was true for the Berliner Schaubühne, which in its beginnings was housed on the Halleschen Ufer in a former multifunctional hall belonging to the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (or Workers' Welfare Association) in Berlin-Kreuzberg, also a working-class district of the city. In 1981, the Schaubühne moved to the Mendelsohn-Bau on the Kurfürstendamm in the centre of the city. At the beginning of the 1980s, a venue for independent theatre groups was opened in the former ironworks of Nagel & Kaemp in Hamburg. Since 1985, the Hamburg Senate has subsidised the theatre programme of this Kulturfabrik GmbH,

which is now its official name. There are similar theatre venues in other large European cities.

These few examples demonstrating that it is possible to solve the problem of providing performance venues for independent groups or independent ensembles which do not have their own stage are in no way intended to qualify the fact that the availability of performance venues – the prerequisite for continuous and calculable work – is today still one of the most urgent problems facing the independent theatre, as is the case in all European countries.

Since the 1990s, and more markedly since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, financial problems have dominated discussions about the theatre, including within the independent scene. This is particularly true of countries with a theatre scene subsidised by public funding. As a rule, independent theatre groups have to apply for funding for their productions from project to project. The notoriously low level of media attention given to the independent theatre to begin with has adverse effects on willingness to provide public funding, as can be expected. Cleary independent theatre also lacks such charismatic directors, to the extent that they influenced the public image of an 'alternative' theatre from the outset. Many of these directors – whether Peter Brook or Ariane Mnouchkine, Luca Ronconi or Dario Fo – committed themselves with their names and reputations to artistic innovation and a high professional standard of their ensembles. Today, they are quite rightly no longer regarded as representatives of the independent theatre; they are part of a new establishment within the European theatre and have gone their own way in their artistic careers. However, by now new hierarchies have been established in the realm of the independent theatre too, so that the working conditions of individual independent groups or independent productions – on the national as well as on the European level – are no longer comparable.

Yet, today's independent theatre scene is significantly better networked internationally, as well as with repertory theatres, through collaborations as in the 1960/70s. In Germany, for instance, the programme Doppelpass, supported by the Federal Cultural Foundation, finances such forms of cooperation. An extremely active international festival scene has also established itself in the area of independent theatre. However, only a small number of independent groups are actually involved in these two developments. A globally active system of associations and organisations operating on behalf of the independent theatre has also long since developed.

In contrast to the 1960/70s, the influence of US-American groups on the independent theatre in Europe today is of no relevance. One reason for this may be found in the fact that the independent theatre, but not only the independent theatre, remains on the sidelines when it comes to geopolitical areas of conflict. Critics have even remarked that around the turn of the millennium "the distance of the theatre to society" has increased (Peter Iden).

At the interfaces of the fine arts and the theatre, a broad field of hybrid forms has established itself; the same is true for music and dance. In general, the different fields of art have approached each other in their development – a process which today by no means has the features of a rebellion. In the fine arts, theatrical performances have "risen" to the quality of a museum art form. However, the era of happenings and street theatre is over. New formats have come into play.

There does, however, seem to be one constant in the history of the independents from the end of the nineteenth century until today: the ambivalent relationship of the repertory theatres – starting around 1890/96 – to the independent groups or the independent theatre today. This dividing wall between these two realms of the theatre was more permeable than it seemed at first. In practice, this alleged 'rivalry' really only lasted a few years. Although the trend toward the established stages was always recognisable, it was not uncommon for the repertory theatres to adopt innovations, or even copy what was developed in the independent scene, provided it was well received by a wider audience or seemed to fit with the changing zeitgeist. Also remarkable is the fact that directors from the independent stages and the independent scene have moved to the more secure domain of the "permanent stages" – apparently because of better working conditions and the fact that they can remain reasonably true to their artistic standards.

It should in any case be noted that the theatre aesthetics in the final third of the twentieth century have fundamentally changed, and that this development has accelerated since the 1980s/90s. Some productions at leading repertory theatres hardly differ conceptually from projects in the independent scene. Collaborations between independent groups and repertory theatres were made possible through this process of reconciliation but also through changes in the theatre-cultural environment of the "permanent stages". Attending the theatre today is as normal as any other leisure activity, like going to the cinema – and not only for the younger generation.

Once again, here is a brief look at the history of the independent stages:

André Antoine, who was celebrated on tours with his ensemble Théâtre Libre soon after its founding – but who went bankrupt with his theatre in Paris only a few years later (1894) – took over the direction of the then already highly established Théâtre de l'Odeon in Paris, which today is one of the French national theatres. Otto Brahm, who had opened the Freie Bühne in Berlin in 1889 with Gerhart Hauptmann's scandalous play *Before Sunrise,* took over the direction of the most prestigious private theatre in Berlin (the Deutsches Theater at the Gendarmenmarkt) in 1896, after the Freie Bühne had fulfilled its function as a pioneer of the modern stage. With an outstanding ensemble, he was able to continue and perfect his working method. Moreover, the commercially sound financing of the theatre ensured a certain continuity of his work. Eight years

after the founding of the Independent Theatre Society, so severely criticised at first, Jacob Grein was honoured with the highest awards for his achievements in renewing the British theatre.

After less than a decade, the erstwhile 'dropouts' or 'rejectionists' had been reabsorbed by the theatre realm from which they had withdrawn only a few years before, and which in its artistic orientation had significantly changed in only ten years. Personalities like Antoine, Brahm and Grein were the forerunners for these changes at the end of the nineteenth century – for the opening up of the theatre to modernity.

The development took quite a similar course not much more than a decade after the theatre rebellion in the years between 1960 and 1970. A considerable number of directors who had developed their 'artistic signatures' in the independent scene now hold positions as theatre managers and artistic directors of the big state and municipal theatres – apparently legitimised by the "political mission" (Christoph Schmidt) which they had in the 1970s. It must, of course, not be forgotten that in the 1960s/70s positions were held at prominent repertory theatres which could hardly be distinguished from those of the independent theatre movement, at least in terms of their aims and their choice of aesthetic means. Examples of theatre people who have 'changed sides' can be found in most European countries. Also the former 'alternative' theatre venues have today long been integrated into the theatre programme of many repertory theatres.

A practice typical of even the early independent theatre which was soon adopted by some of the repertory theatres (at the latest in the 1980s) was the tendency to work on and stage 'projects' rather than producing plays. The motive for the project-oriented work of the independent groups was initially research into social problem areas, a kind of critical field research from whose findings a dramatic plan was then developed – usually collectively. Besides, experimental, artistic intentions also always underlay this manner of working. Similar projects were those on which Peter Brook worked in the early years of the CIRT, often with a scientific and artistic preparation that lasted for years. The first of these projects was *Orghast* (1971), which was first performed in Persepolis in Iran. It was an experiment whose aim was to research intercultural communication based on a new artificial language. Source materials were fragments of Greek and Persian myths; anthropological and neurological research hypotheses concerning language as a system of expression were also included in the project work. Half a decade earlier, Brook and Charles Marowitz, while still in England, staged Artaud's *First Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty* under the title *Theatre of Cruelty* together with the experimental independent group Lamda within the context of theatre-aesthetic research.

The projects of the Het Werkteater in Amsterdam had a different objective. In the 1970s, this theatre collective explored areas of which the general public

had hardly taken notice: conditions in prisons, in nursing and juvenile homes, and in psychiatric clinics. The collective developed their stage projects based on the researched material. Biographical data, experiences and memories of members of the group were also used as a basis for staged situations. *Ut bent mijn Moeder* (1981) was the most performed project of its kind.

It is essential to mention the production works of Jerzy Grotowski in Wrocław and Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow in connection with artistic project work, because their work is closely associated with the tradition of Polish literary and intellectual history. Together with his dramatists Grotowski developed text collages from different literary sources which served as the dramatic plan. Kantor developed his projects based on fragments of memories from his own biography, poetic texts of his own, and by other authors and his creative work.

Eugenio Barba's ethno-cultural theatre excursions to Southern Italy and to the Amazon region of Venezuela were both artistic and scientific research projects. His own understanding of theatre and what was considered "Western" as a staged representation became very negotiable. On these excursions, the actors from the Odin Teatret were confronted with an audience which had never seen theatre in this sense before. Peter Brook's *Theatre Safari* through Africa, which lasted over 100 days, was a project with similar aims about which John Heilpern published an impressive documentation in 1977.

The Berliner Schaubühne set standards with its projects based on ancient classics (1974 and 1980) just as Ariane Mnouchkine had done with her revolutionary plays (1970 and 1975). In 1977 in Prato, Italy, Luca Ronconi set up the Laboratorio di Progettazione Teatrale in a former cement works, an experimental venue where he and an architect explored the interdependencies of stage production and the space in the factory hall of the former cement works. "The play is the space" was the conclusion Ronconi drew from this experiment.

A distinctive feature of all of these 'projects' was the fact that they only found their artistic form in the process of explorative research work and that, in this process, new theatrical formats were developed. A particular task is now also in store for dramaturgy: the dramaturg has become a quasi-writer. Today hardly any popular classic of world literature escapes stage treatment. These working practices have certainly been facilitated by the widespread flexibilisation of production processes.

For the situation of the independent theatre, the blurring of the boundaries with the repertory theatres has considerable consequences. Few independent groups or independent collectives are now able to develop an artistic profile which is associated with their name and which gives the group a noteworthy or even an internationally recognised position. The two German groups Rimini Protokoll and the performance collective She She Pop, as well as the Belgian group Need Company or the group Forced Entertainment from Great Britain,

exemplify how independent collectives which have developed an artistically original, distinctive manner of working and have focused on a specific (and apparently also marketable) format, are quite able to assert themselves successfully.

In the metropolitan theatre centres, the leading repertory theatres offer a varied programme at a highly sophisticated level of artistry for which often directors are responsible who have developed their 'signature' in the independent scene or on stages which were able to allow them comparable artistic freedom. Most independent groups, with their consistently precarious working conditions, are hardly able to function as a sphere of artistic innovation, much less aspire to be avant-garde. And this is not only because of the far better financial resources and technical facilities of the established stages, but also because the development of theatre aesthetics as well as the theatre-cultural environment of the repertory theatre have moved in a direction and changed so that many long-established conventions have been abandoned which had distinguished the independent scene from the repertory theatres. At the same time, however, they have served to deepen the differences within the independent theatre scene itself, to the benefit of those collectives whose professional working methods and potential for artistic innovation allow them to enter into co-operative relationships with town or regional state-funded theatres, or who, because of extensive support, through the public, from the repertory theatres, are capable of competing successfully in the cultural sector's open market.

The festival Theater der Nationen took place in Hamburg in 1979 and invited the German Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) for the first time, as well as eight highly prestigious stages such as the Wiener Burgtheater, the Peking Oper, the Theatron Technis from Athens, the Royal Shakespeare Company from Stratford, England, and the Maxim Gorki Theater from Leningrad, 16 independent groups from around the world, and nine "one-person theatres" including Marcel Marceau from Paris, the clown Jango Edwards from Amsterdam, and Dario Fo from Milan. This was the first time that the "theatre of the world" was present in all its diversity. It was also the first time that professional independent theatre appeared as an intrinsic part of the culture of the grand world theatre as a matter of course.

The emergence of the independent theatre movement in the 1960s – only a decade and a half after the end of the Second World War – was symptomatic of a social and artistic upheaval of epoch-making dimensions whose ideological centre was characterised by a concept of freedom which extended far beyond the field of aesthetic perception. The developments in the following decades – German "Regietheater" (director's theatre) and "Autorentheater" (author's theatre) or "theatre of images" – have not only changed theatre artistically,

but changed its perception by the public, including that of the "permanent stages". The development of the independent theatre took place under very different circumstances in the post-socialist countries, since it developed as an autonomous, theatre-cultural sector which had usually sympathised with the political opposition. In some of these countries, independent theatre was linked to an experimental, avant-garde theatre scene which had existed there in the 1920s and until shortly after the beginning of the 1930s. In countries such as the former Yugoslavia, the theatre had much greater freedom than in the Eastern bloc countries. As was the case in the entire cultural sector in the decades prior to the great upheavals in the 1990s, the theatre in all these countries had been exposed to alternating phases of 'political thaws' and rigorous controls by party functionaries during 'political ice ages'. The relationship of the independent groups – if they existed – to the state theatres was organised differently in the individual countries, and the administrative regulations to which independent theatre was subject also differed. This was also true for the times before and after the upheavals in the 1990s. At this time in the post-socialist countries, a confrontation with the immediate past (life under the dictatorship) was the central issue, including for the independent scene. Above all, the problems of adapting to the Western economic system and the restructuring of cultural and everyday life provided a wealth of subjects for the theatre, including the independent theatre.

In any case, in this situation one would expect a greater proximity to current events from the independent theatre than from the repertory theatres, which are normally obliged to uphold the national literary and cultural traditions. The idea of a national theatre stands for this continuity of tradition, which has been respected in almost all European theatre cultures since the nineteenth century. This internationally oriented independent theatre allows its audience to become acquainted with theatre from other countries and other cultures during their festivals more frequently than established stages do. This particularly conforms to the public's interest in some post-socialist countries where this 'pent-up demand' triggered an outright festival boom.

The independent scene has almost exclusively occupied the field of experimental dance – as opposed to dance theatre and stage dance as it is presented by repertory theatres. The circumstances in the field of experimental music are similar. In these areas, the independent international productions are today's avant-garde.

The independent scene is that realm of the theatre – in the artistic area – in which presumably far more people of non-European backgrounds work than is the case at most repertory theatres. These migrants, who have long since belonged to a post-migrant generation, are people of different ethnic backgrounds than mainstream society. Internationality and multiculturalism were always integral

aspects of the independent theatre movement. Not least, the more open group and production structures of the independents facilitated the access to work at the theatre for artists with an educational background which did not comply with the conventional requirements for employment at a repertory theatre.

In our research project, Azadeh Sharifi examined the relationship between independent theatre and migration at the European level, as well as the problems experienced by artists whose ethnic backgrounds do not fulfil the expectations which the audience associates with the role. All too often, the ethnic appearance obscures the audience's view of the artistic performance of the actors especially as 'artist of colour'. The independent theatre can counter such expectations in ways the repertory theatres would not dare to attempt. A particular focus of Azadeh Sharifi's research is post-migrant theatre.

Andrea Hensel explored the situation of the independent theatre in the post-socialist countries: the positioning of this realm of the theatre in the overall theatre scene of the respective countries, which have reacted very differently to the changes leading to the collapse of the Soviet confederation of states and the dissolution of the former state of Yugoslavia. She provides an overview of the diversity of subjects and aesthetic directions of the independent theatre in these countries. This is of particular interest, since it was especially this realm of the theatre that played a leading role in more liberal developments in the socialist societies prior to the upheavals in the 1990s.

The study by Tine Koch is devoted to children's and young people's theatre in Europe. Her study reveals that in the European context, particularly in the area of theatre for very young audiences, the most creative conceptual developments in independent theatre are taking place. The established stages, on the other hand, seldom offer a regular theatre programme for this audience. From the political side, which includes UNESCO, although the social importance of children's theatre is always affirmed, it remains underfunded despite this purported significance.

The study by Petra Sabisch presents a picture of the relationships between production conditions and aesthetics in experimental dance, outlines its artistic directions, the most important discussion forums and the current theoretical discourses.

Experimental music is almost exclusively a domain of the independent groups. Matthias Rebstock gives an overview of this scene, discusses the current artistic trends and presents the most important players.

Henning Fülle discusses the theoretical basis for a new post-modern theatre in the context of a 'crisis of modernity' and describes the structural and cultural-political situation in Western European theatre focusing on the new forms of theatre that have developed since the mid-1990s.

Wolfgang Schneider examines the cultural policy for the independent theatre in different European countries and argues that we must adopt a new policy for theatre.

These studies focus on the central areas of work of the independent theatre and its position in the theatre scene in individual European countries. The basis for these studies – in addition to the author's own view – is detailed research with the help of artists working in the independent scene, cultural policy-makers and scientists, and an examination of the relevant research literature.

The increasing consolidation of this area of the theatre since the 1980s/90s has had far-reaching structural and aesthetic consequences for the European theatre culture in general, and has expanded the understanding of theatre and its experimental margins. Thereby, it becomes apparent that the aesthetic and theatre-cultural developments in the independent theatre and the repertory theatres have approached each other.

The independent theatre, however, reflects the social complexity and the change in European societies even more incisively: in its issues, its networks reaching beyond the national theatre cultures and the experimentation with new, more flexible production structures. In keeping with its history, it is still a socio-critical forum of its own kind. It is more open to other, non-European cultures than the repertory theatre can be because of its still largely cultivated orientation toward the national and European literary traditions. By its nature, the independent theatre is ultimately an international community of young artists. This connects – beyond national borders – a certain opposition, at least an uneasiness, with regard to the real system of values in European societies, which has sometimes been deformed by a political pragmatism.

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