

Independent Performing Arts

Visions for Europe

Axel Tangerding et al. present a new book
by Peter Kees, Moosach (translated by Gabi Sabo)

Last year, on November 10, the Austrian writer Robert Menasse, together with many people engaged in the cultural sector, proclaimed the „European Republic“ as an answer to growing nationalism, from Sweden to Italy. Also part of this "intervention" was Meta Theatre in Moosach whose artistic director, Axel Tangerding, had beforehand organised an international networking meeting of the independent performing arts in Munich. The organisation called IETM (International network for contemporary performing arts) offered working sessions to debate the question of how to carry on with and in Europe.

This convention has now spawned a publication which was presented in the Meta theatre: "Res publica Europa - Networking the performing arts in a future Europa", edited by Christopher Balme, head of the department of theatre studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, and by Axel Tangerding. The publication deals with visions for Europe's future. Robert Menasse, Ulrike Guérot who had a share in the manifesto for the European unity, Kathrin Röggla and a few senior students of theatre studies are among the authors. In a seminar, they had explored the difference between purely scientific and journalistic texts.

The Meta Theatre also showed two short films giving an insight into the IETM meeting. In the audience were a few of the students involved, parts of the organising team of the networking meeting as well as Christopher Balme. Everything happened really fast, said Tangerding, it had taken only a few months to publish the book. "Today, at 12 o'clock, bang on time, the first printed copy arrived in Moosach." Since May the opus, published by "Theater der Zeit" is on the shelves.

The performing arts sector is concerned with Europe and occupies itself with the question of how to improve the situation in a climate of Europe-scepticism. There is no ambiguity: the performing arts stand against nationalistic ideas – they have been working transnationally for a long time. This book, according to Tangerding, is not just for professionals of the field, but also meant for politicians to learn from the arts. In the centre of the reflexions on the role of the performing arts in Europe, there are topics such as post-colonialism and diversity. The panel – apart from Balme and Tangerding there were three of the former students – made clear what their visions for the future were. They also talked about the increasing economic pressure in the independent performing arts sector. "One of the performances during the IETM-meeting (other than the working sessions and discussions, the programme contained also performances) had to be cancelled at short notice because one of the actors had collapsed," reported Tangerding. This struck a chord with the audience: the overwork within the scene was deemed huge. On the one hand, quality was to be expected, on the other hand, the economic conditions were deteriorating constantly. The pressure to perform was considered enormous and despite the free decision to work in that sector, it was felt to have turned into a production tread-mill. This evening also highlighted the big difference between networking and the hierarchical structures existing for example in municipal or state theatres. "Hierarchical structures leave more traces than networks, but the latter are more flexible and therefore more difficult to control." Subversive structures meant more freedom and creativity and were more open for new impacts. The evening ended as it had begun, with a video, this time showing an "artistic walk" taking place during the IETM-meeting in Munich's public spaces.