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## **“Postdramatic Theatre”, a decade later**

It is a special pleasure and an honour for me to be present at this meeting, since a number of experts, highly esteemed colleagues and friends have gathered in order to shed light on the latest developments in the art of theatre and performance, and have chosen the ‘anniversary’ of a book I published a decade ago as the occasion for the gathering. I wrote it in an attempt to be of help for those who were trying to find and apply concepts, words and serious attention to so much of the inspired experimental artistic work in theatre and performance which I had witnessed over decades and which I wanted to be understood and evaluated in better ways than was usually the case. The book has in fact sometimes been read as an unqualified justification and defence of all kinds of really or seemingly destructive, deconstructive, fragmentary, non-literary performances – which it was not intended to be. The “poetics”, if you like, of postdramatic theatre, which is constituted by its description, is one thing, the artistic quality (even if it is no longer easy to make use of this term without much precaution), another.

The study was written for practitioners, therefore at some points lengthy and detailed theoretical elaborations were passed over. Consequently, a number of theoretical issues were left open to further discussion. It also paved the way for a series of downright misunderstandings – that the postdramatic is non-textual, that the postdramatic ends all drama and so forth – in spite of the fact that the opposite views are clearly stated in the book. The word ‘postdramatic’ describes aesthetics and styles of theatre practice, and thematizes writing, written drama, or theatre text only in a marginal way. There is postdramatic theatre with dramatic texts – in fact, with all kinds of texts. Also, there is a description in the book of a variety of theatre forms, from a de-dramatized presentation of dramatic texts all the way to forms which do not rely at all on a pre-given

dramatic text. There are a number of important new styles of writing which have emerged since or were already present in 1999, but I do not see a “return” to dramatic figuration as a strong movement.

Ten years is a long period of time nowadays, with developments in the arts and in theatre happening at a brisk pace. Much of what was marginal and hotly disputed in the 1980s had already become more common in the 1990s, and has now become part of the ‘mainstream’. Some of the emblematic protagonists of postdramatic theatre like Jan Fabre and Jan Lauwers, whose work is influenced strongly by dance and performance, continue to create strong and controversial work and have come to be accepted as authentic and even decisive gestures of contemporary art and theatre. You would not have guessed in 1999 that Lauwers would be presenting at Salzburger Festspiele, or Fabre be chosen as curator in Avignon. Robert Wilson’s aesthetics have become commercialized for a long time and his work is enjoyed now by a wide audience. In Italy, an artist like Giorgio Barberio Corsetti became director of the theatre Biennale in Venice. No doubt the techniques of visual dramaturgy often tend now to become mere spectacle in the big houses and are presented as entertaining stimuli in many productions. In other words, postdramatic is no longer a term necessarily denoting deviant, oppositional or radical practices. Elements of postdramatic practice have become generally accepted and define much contemporary theatre practice as such – not without often loosing edge in the process.

Let me now shortlist in the first part of my paper a number of interesting developments and aspects of the “languages of the stage” (Patrice Pavis), mainly in the German theatre. Some of them continue developments which began to be felt already in the 1980s and 1990s, others introduce new accents.

In the second part, I will reflect on some issues and aspects which seem to be important for a further theorizing of the postdramatic “paradigm” or “styles”.

### *Groups*

In 1995, Heiner Müller and in 2001, Einar Schleef passed away, and in recent years also Jürgen Gosch, Peter Zadek, Klaus-Michael Grüber, Pina Bausch, and Christoph Schlingensief. For many observers, these deaths are a sign and symbol of profoundly changing times. These were all great creators, representing the best of German Regietheater (Director’s Theatre). They cultivated new ground for the theatre: working on the edge of performance (like Gosch), creating a cross-over between theatre and dance (Pina Bausch),

a playfulness (Zadek) and, every time, a radically individual vision of theatre (like Grüber). Even the untimely early death of Christoph Schlingensiefel may be seen in this perspective: a highly provocative, radical and radically idiosyncratic personality, even if he was an inspirator, and animator more than a theatre director in the classic sense. The new development is marked – this is the first aspect – by a shifting emphasis from the individual genius on top to collaboration or group work off and on the institutions. In spite of the breakdown of a number of important venues for experimental work, we observe a broad scene of young and semi- or non- institutionalized performance and theatre work – mostly by groups which experiment with all kinds of positioning of the spectator, redefining theatre in different ways beyond the dramatic model. You cannot call it exactly "an underground". It is a scene where names like She She Pop, Gob Squad, andcompany&Co., Hoffmann and Lindholm and others, as well as the acclaimed Rimini Protokoll, indicate only the top of the iceberg. Authors who direct their own writings like Rene Pollesch or Falk Richter, and the close collaboration of authors, dramaturgs and stage designers are frequent now. There is definitely a renewed spirit of the collaborative working style, albeit in a mood which differs from the times of the "creation collective" some decades ago – if only for its less utopian idea of entirely collective work.

Working in a collaborative style, if certainly not without the dominant voice and inspiration of one artist, the "pop-theatre" of René Pollesch has gained wide resonance and paved the way for other similar forms of theatre. Barbara Weber, now director of the Neumarkt Theatre in Zurich, is a case in point here, with her "unplugged" evenings and also with her fresh renderings of classical texts – *The Lears* for example, where King Lear was associated with the question of the family. The feminist group "She She Pop" also referred to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, when they asked their fathers to appear together with them on stage and then initiated some animated debates about the respective positions of fathers and daughters.

In this milieu, we find many an original production which can be called in one way or another 'site specific'. Spectators are invited to visit private living places, to enter some special environment for a couple of hours, to experience an uncommon situation where some performance, reading or presentation takes place. A situation of exploration, even research, and of uncommon encounters is the goal. There is a profound interest in working in and with urban and other public or half-public spaces. The urban space, the architectonical and social realities of the urban environment, are explored (as with Rimini Protokoll, but also less known groups like Arty Chock in Frankfurt, who invest public places in order to highlight in theatrically creative ways some political

or sociological significance of the site). Projects of this sort work often with video, or transform a given “place” into a newly defined and artistically/politically invested “space”. Richard Maxwell and others may perform in a hotel or private apartment.

The work of Pollesch has become more and more political in a sophisticated way, no longer thematizing only the problems of the virtual dimensions of work, but basic concepts of the capitalist style of living. Among the titles of his productions we may now find *Darwin-win* or *Calvinism Klein*. He is generally recognized as one of the most creative producers of politically relevant work – and of comedy. In a party atmosphere or club ambience, the speaking ‘characters’ (who are in fact collective instances of speech and not individual *dramatis personae*) develop theoretical issues on stage, often in the form of directly theoretical discourse transformed from the third to the first person. This can produce ambiguous playful “dialogues”, which in fact constitute not real dialogues but a chorus divided up into voices, presenting sociological and political issues and denouncing in a satirical vein the ideologies of representation, “subjectivity”, identity, or desire pre-coded by the power of cultural and social norms.

### *Dialogue between theatre and society*

Pollesch’s development is significant for a second strong impulse in the theatre of the first decade of this century: namely, the impulse to re-open the dialogue between theatre and society by taking up more directly political and social issues. It is fair to say that in the enthusiasm of finding (and experimenting with) the new postdramatic artistic means – visual dramaturgy, media, fragmentation, performance-like acting, opening of real and virtual spaces – this dialogue had to a certain degree been lost in the postdramatic work described 10 years ago. In 2000, Bonnie Maranca and Gautam Dasgupta, in an interview in *Theater der Zeit* expressed utter disappointment at finding the German theatre different from what they had seen it to be in the 1970s: less politically, philosophically and artistically daring, presenting too much spectacle and showing little “dialogue with the society”. The motives for a certain re-entry of the political and social dimension since then are rather obvious: Nine-Eleven 2001, new wars, the rise of rightist populist leaders in Europe, the restructuring of the whole ideological and political field after the “Wende”, and last, but not least, new social problems of different kinds. Theatre definitely felt and feels a need to deal more directly with political issues, even if there are no solutions or perspectives to offer. We have to do with much politically

motivated theatre, but rarely in the sense of offering a specific ideological viewpoint. There are plays – in fact, a wave of plays – about managers, started by Urs Widmer's *Top Dogs*, and with Falk Richter's complex *The System* as a high-point. We find not so much a return to socially engaged drama as to all kinds of mixtures, re-elaborations of documentary work, aesthetics of performance, theatrical actions and activities – all with a remarkably steady focus, in dance as well as in theatre, on the exploration of everyday life. (The popularity of authors like Michel de Certeau and Marc Augé is significant in this respect.) Theatre and performance are more about research into the everyday life which we only think we know well. Their techniques are more presentation than representation, more an artful exposure of realities and creation of theatres of situation than a representation of dramatic fictions about them – although this practice certainly has not entirely vanished.

The aesthetics of physicality, just like high tech, computer, internet and video, can become the tools and the milieu for the reawakened social and political interest. The work of Rimini Protokoll without professional actors, where the encounter with "real" people is more important than the dramaturgy of a fiction, has gained widespread visibility, but there are a large number of smaller works in the spirit of documentary, which, inspired by Rimini Prokoll, often use non-actors for manifold explorations of everyday life. Thus, Hans Werner Krösinger, for example, and others stage political documents and material in sophisticated ways. Or we find theatre about the personal history of individuals in a political context – inspired by the techniques of oral history from the academic field.

The main artistic problem in many of these works is not simply the choice of the presented material, but the question of how to develop what Marianne van Kerkhoven would call dramaturgies of the spectator. The postdramatic dramaturgy of the spectator implies a heightened awareness of and continued reflection upon the position of spectating as such. Understandable as the desire to "thematize" social and political issues may be, we must not forget that the truly social dimension of art is the form, as the young Georg Lukács observed. As long as the forms of conventionalized ways of spectating are not interrupted, the conventional mode of reception in theatre (and film) tends to reduce to insignificance even the most daring documentation and political criticism. Therefore, it remains essential to acknowledge that the truly political dimension of theatre has its place not so much in the thematizing of politically burning subject matters (which, by saying this, are not, of course, excluded!) as in the situation, the relation, the social moment which theatre as such is able to constitute. Theatre must be considered as a situation, and its aesthetics

must be derived from this basic concept. It seems, however, that postdramatic strategies continue to be seen by many theatre practitioners as more suited to dealing with social issues (unemployment, violence, social isolation, terrorism, issues of race and gender) than the traditional model of socially engaged drama. In fact, there arose a conspicuous movement in roughly the first five years of the new century: the New Realism, proclaimed by some directors with reference to the English tradition of realist and socially critical work. But, notwithstanding the international renown of Thomas Ostermeier, this wave has cooled down a lot. I do not have the impression that many people expect interesting new revelations of the theatre in this direction. In fact, the strongest impact of the “in-yer- face” movement was the reception of Sarah Kane, whose writing turned more and more away from the remnants of drama in her first plays like *Blasted* and, with *4. 48 Psychosis*, came close to being a perfect example of postdramatic texture.

### *Chorus*

In 2001, the German theatre lost Einar Schleef and with him the director who had rediscovered the power of the chorus as a tool and basic element of theatre. Inspired by his work, there is now much theatre which makes ample use of choral structure in different ways. This development merits being mentioned as a tendency in its own right. It is obvious that the interest in the chorus further undermines the basic structures of dramatic representation. Since antiquity, the chorus has been a theatrical reality which opens and breaks up the fictional cosmos of the myth or dramatic narration and brings into play the presence of the audience here and now in the theatre – in the “theatron”. (This is one of the reasons why the chorus could not find a place in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, whose main focus was the closure of the work of art, its autosufficient totality and completeness.) It might have seemed that Einar Schleef was only a solitary figure in reanimating the chorus, but since the years when his productions provoked huge debates in Germany, the use and the discussion of the chorus did not end but gained ground. Here could be mentioned the works of Volker Lösch, who works with a direct address to the audience and with choruses – for example, of the unemployed and citizens of the area, in order to articulate social and political issues. His work raises polemic reactions – and in fact, often provokes the suspicion of mainly profiting from social misery for spectacular effects without reflecting on and questioning the theatre apparatus which it makes use of. But it is not only in the domain of such immediately “political” theatre that a return of the chorus can be observed. It is a telling fact

that a director like Nicolas Stemmann also presents *The Robbers* of Schiller in choric style (performers sharing and changing roles, creating with voice and gesture a "word-concert", as Stemmann terms it, in the manner of a jazz or rock band).

### *Dance*

Another tendency – after the collaborative way of production, the dialogue with society, the return of the chorus – is the enormous and widespread interest in dance, the spreading of theoretical and practical work with, in and on dance.

William Forsythe is exploring the cross-over between dance, installation, performance, festive event, interactivity and political reference, in works like *Human Writes*. Meg Stuart combines on the one hand dance and minimal exploration of gesture in combination with huge settings and theatrical spectacle, with, on the other hand, small scale poetic works. Constanza Macras and others politicize dance theatre, crossing freely between dance, performance, physical theatre, acting and installation. Dance has become a practice which is much more widely received and has exerted influence in many fields of theatre practice. The cultural politics of the German state has been eager over a number of years now to support dance with a huge financing project, called Tanzplan. Dance is also an essential factor in the reconsideration and reshaping of theoretical notions of what might be an adequate criticism and academic discourse, namely, the reflection of choreographers about their work within the "cultural field", in Pierre Bourdieu's sense (Xavier Le Roy, Boris Charmatz, Thomas Lemen). Dance, like theatre practice in general, is constantly – and much more so than in the 1990s – criticizing, reflecting, exhibiting its own problematic status as aesthetic or nothing-but-aesthetic practice, rejecting often the seemingly naïve production of a closed aesthetic fiction presented for contemplation.

Authors and directors are increasingly experimenting with the possibilities of dance and choreography, integrating dance into their work. Falk Richter, for example, has collaborated repeatedly with the Dutch choreographer Anouk van Dijk – in *Trust*, for example, where problems of social, financial and individual credibility, the themes of "the weariness of the self" as discussed by Alain Ehrenberg, are articulated in a new form of "dance theatre" created by a literary author in collaboration with choreographer and dancers during the process of rehearsals. Laurent Chétouane, earlier renowned for his seemingly exclusive concentration on word and text, has been working for some years



now with the co-presence of actors and dancers, while at the same time staging strong texts (Hölderlin, Lenz, Büchner, Brecht). He invites spectators to share a state of collective being on stage without the “masks” of highly stylized form or easy emotional identification. In such work we do not find by any means a return of the “Tanztheater” of the 1980s (where dance had the unquestioned lead), but a new practice where dance becomes an integral part of the wider projects of an author, a director or an author-director in collaboration with choreographers and dancers. The point here is the postdramatic exploration of a “choragraphie” in every direction – gesture and dance coming into play as silent commentary on and questioning of the spoken word; the word entering into new forms of dialogue with the space and the gesture of the present and dancing body. In this stage-landscape, the individual subjectivity tends to become part of a larger horizon. Heiner Müller: “In every landscape the ‘I’ is collective.”

We may relate the general interest in dance to the heightened interest in the choreographic aspects of *mise-en-scène*. There are the choreographed spaces, the movements and little dances in Christoph Marthaler’s work, mostly with Anna Viebrock; there are the strong elements of choreographical, rhythmic and gestural patterns in the productions of Michael Thalheimer, who often realizes an interesting separation – between strong gestures and body movements and a strict standstill of the body, when the actors deliver their text, often at high speed. We can speak here of a rupture with naturalizing representation. While traditional dramatic representation from Lessing to Stanislavski tries to create an impression of “natural” behaviour, this logic is here abandoned in favour of the principle of a somewhat Brechtian conscious exposition of an often highly artificial language and – in parallel – a repertoire of precise gestures and body movements.

### *Narration and Theatre of the speech act*

Another tendency – number five – can perhaps disperse some prejudices concerning the role and importance of the word. The language of the body is not all. A new importance can now be observed of text, of word, of narrative above all, which had been superseded in the 1980s and early 1990s by visual explorations, even if the verbal dimension had never really vanished. There are now a large number of theatrical works based on epic texts, on novels. Directors often prefer epic texts, narration, even historical commentaries or theoretical texts, to explicitly dramatic texts. Theatre has developed numerous ways of telling stories without falling back into the tradition of realist dramatic



impersonation and closed fiction. Sometimes the reference to film narration comes into play here. A director like Robert Lepage makes a sophisticated use of cinematic style, video, film, epic narration, collage and other technological devices. In Poland Grzegorz Jarzyna made *Das Fest* from the Dogma Film by Vinterberg; several theatres in Germany did this too. Peter Greenaway in 2001 presented a production called *Gold* in Frankfurt am Main. It is interesting to note that Angela Schanelec from the New Berlin School of Filmmakers also works in the theatre – the so-called Berlin School concentrates on a style of narration which is consciously dedramatized and emphasizes patient non-dramatic observation of everyday activities. It can be argued that such new tendencies in cinema and postdramatic theatre are related to each other in ways which still have to be explored theoretically.

The renewed emphasis on narrative combines with the renewed interest in text and word in yet another direction. Some of the most impressive moments in contemporary theatre highlight the metaphorically (and sometimes actually) naked actor or performer, and seem to be driven by the desire to make us aware of the wonder, so to speak, of the pure act of speaking, the physical and also mental confrontation of the spectators with a speaking body in its basic simplicity (which constitutes in fact a complexity of the highest order). In some works we find a strong impulse toward the actor as performer, an impulse which is paralleled by a resistance to all simple theatricality: décor, costume, well-studied gesture, reinforcement by music and lighting effects. I propose to call it a *theatre of the speech-act*. We may think of Dimiter Gotscheff who, inspired by Heiner Müller, "de-theatricalizes" theatre and marks the scene with a concentrated textual presentation in radically minimalist settings – spaces often conceived by Mark Lammert. Speech, text and word establish here and in other cases an intimate relationship which overcomes the fourth wall, allowing the theatre to become a space for thinking and reflection, interrupting the purely aesthetic apprehension by a provocative "implication" of the spectators, who are forced to go along with this radical reduction of theatricality and enter into an unusually intense relation with the "pure" speech act of the performer. The reduced and minimalistic works of Laurent Chétouane provoke audiences by a hyperbolic concentration on text and the act of speaking. Spectators find no drama or identification with fictive character, but have to deal instead with the real presence of the actor(s). This kind of theatre allows the spectators to experience a deep "relation" with the actor/performer – though many leave the theatre disappointed because they have been denied the expected spectacle. But works of this kind do not in any way indicate a return of the theatre to a conventional dramatizing or a simple return of the text – even if they are easily

misunderstood in exactly this way. They are instead comprehensible only as an intrusion of elements of performance practice into the theatre, which may sometimes overshadow but may also, as in these cases, highlight the textual material. It is the physical and mental reality of the act of speaking, or of the performance as speaking and of the performance of speaking, which is at the centre of this theatre. It is about the physical, real speech act, about the situation of performer and spectator in their intimate confrontation; it is about performance – not about an exclusive or predominant concern with the text. It is therefore a logical development that Chétouane has for some time now incorporated dance and danced gesture into his work, creating a mutual echo space for the word and for the dance.

I will stop here with my cursory overview of the five tendencies in the last decade which I find significant, and will come now to the first of some questions for the raising of which there is every good reason.

1) Taking into consideration the developments since 1999, is there a need to revise essentially the notion of postdramatic theatre? My impression is: no. I feel that the categories used in the book continue to hold true for the description of much of the new work. Armin Petras, Nicolas Stemmann, Falk Richter, Sebastian Hartmann, Stefan Pucher and so many others – all depart from the frontal situation of literary theatre, adopt the chorus or the completely open space, practices which may imply dramatic elements but make ample use of overwriting dramatic story and readable signification by performance, physical theatre, interactivity, opening the fictional space to the theatron. The work of Heiner Goebbels is taken by many to be representative of the current state of affairs in theatre language, and his work is quite obviously postdramatic, and includes painting, philosophy, music, bridging theatre and installation, as in *Stifters Dinge*.

In Germany, the term has meanwhile come close to signifying contemporary “Regietheater”. The word appears in dictionaries and in theatre criticism. The leading German theatre journal put the word in bold type on the front page three times and engaged in a critical discussion of it, claiming in an edition of 2009 that the catchword “postdramatic” has dominated the discussion in the last ten years. Some artists refer explicitly to the term (on their homepage, Rimini Protokoll have called their work “postdramatic”) and some directors accept it for their productions. And I observe with pleasure that *Postdramatic Theatre* also seems to be helpful for new tendencies in theatre pedagogy.

A report on the French theatre scene by Bruno Tackels in 2006, in *Theater der Zeit*, stated right from the start that he would take Postdramatic Theatre as

a guide line for his report. To my surprise, critics, scholars and practitioners in Japan, Latin America, Australia, Poland, Spain and in the Balkan region found and continue to find the book helpful. Translations continue to be published (fifteen so far), and there is a widespread reception and discussion of the term and the book even in areas where I did not at all expect such interest: for example Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Columbia. "Performing Literatures", the issue of *Performance Research* of March 2009, offers ample proof that the term, as it is theorized in the book, has retained a certain "use value". It is a point of reference in many articles, and used to analyze performance and writing (Tim Crouch, Jelinek, Kane); it can be productively used, questioned and criticised in exploring the complex drama-theatre relation. In academic, as well as critical discourse, the term "postdramatic" is used quite regularly, often in close connection with performance and/or experimental theatre in general.

In spite of criticism of a different kind, it is, I suppose, generally accepted that the notion has been useful and productive:

- in pointing to a "dramatic" enlargement of the possibilities, technologies and aesthetics of theatre practice;
- in pointing to the central importance of overcoming a far too close association in the minds of spectators and critics of theatre with the literary genre of drama;
- in widening the perspective on theatre/performance as a practice which transcends the divisions between art, social practice and theatre, and which is best analyzed as an "edge of art".

So I do not see the necessity of speaking of a post-postdramatic theatre or the like.

2) The theoretical problem of the interplay and conflict between *theatre* and *drama* remains, as I see it, a tool with which to re-think the European tradition of dramatic theatre, as well as the European tradition of its theory. My proposal of the sequence predramatic, dramatic and postdramatic, although sometimes seen as a kind of Hegelian process, is no more than an attempt to rethink the development of European theatre from the perspective of contemporary practice. The inner tension and even, as has been said, the "contradictio in adjecto" between drama and theatre in the notion of "dramatic theatre", is an issue which needs and merits further elaboration. As was argued in *Postdramatic Theatre*, the Hegelian definition of beauty is already in his own dialectics questioned, disturbed, broken, where "drama" is concerned, by an irreducible element of chance, non-beauty, a predominance of the "particular" over the "general" – be it only in the person of the actor who is wearing a

mask and appropriating the beautiful to his own idiosyncratic and particular personality. Postdramatic theatre is in this respect theatre in the age of the self-reflection of the concept of the beautiful, and to be considered as an “edge of art”, consciously questioning its own status as an object of contemplation and becoming an element in different kinds of practice (social, political, pedagogical, documentary...). The proposal of Jean-Pierre Sarrazac was that the notion of “rhapsodic theatre” might be more helpful for understanding the general movement of contemporary theatre practice. This notion refers to Brecht, the Brechtian actor, and to Bernard Dort. As useful as the term is for a number of approaches to theatre where the textual dimension remains in the centre, the idea of the rhapsodic seems to be rooted too much in the dramatic and Brechtian tradition and, as far as I can see, does not adequately account for all those dimensions of theatre which bring it close to non-literary or less literary aspects, like performance, installation, dance and so forth. So, I see no need to replace postdramatic by rhapsodic.

3) As the book failed to make sufficiently clear, the term “postdramatic” is to be understood in terms of historical reflection on two levels. On the one hand, the word “postdramatic” was supposed to function as a critical and polemical term which would distinguish a number of theatre practices which I had studied (roughly since the 1970s, and surrounded as well as permeated by the advent of a culture of predominantly mediated performance), from those practices which were and often still are guided by the idea of a theatre centred around dramatic structure in the sense of the tradition of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since within a rich and influential (and often still very creative) landscape of institutionalized theatres in Europe, the dramatic tends to be taken as “the” natural model of what theatre should be, it remains necessary even 10 years later to point out that numerous practices which deviate more or less radically from this model can make the legitimate claim to represent the living, authentic and significant theatre of today. “Postdramatic Theatre” is not simply about the “death” of the drama (or the text or the author...), but about a shift of view point on contemporary theatrical realities.

At the same time, the book clearly indicates (by implication rather than argument) the thesis that the “dramatic mode” of theatre – in the precise sense which we can give to the notion behind this term “dramatic”, building on Hegel, Szondi, Brecht and others – is very unlikely to be reanimated in the future. There are numerous arguments to be made in favour of this thesis, one of them being that the idea of the dramatic does not in fact point to some eternal anthropological given, – which is probably the case with theatre – but refers only to a very specific, historically limited, particularly European concept of theatre

which is possibly – I would say probably – on the verge of losing its ground. On this level, the term "postdramatic" echoes the notion of the predramatic which I used for ancient Greek tragedy, and implies that the historical preconditions for the dramatic mode are disappearing in a more fundamental way. In this sense, the word "postdramatic" indicates not the sum of theatrical aesthetics from the 1970s through into the 1990s, but all theatre, in earlier as well as future forms, which is no longer dominated by the dramatic model. As to whether the concept in this sense may be found useful in the analysis of more general cultural patterns or habits beyond theatre, is a question which has surfaced in the mean time, but which I would like to leave to sociology, psychology and cultural studies.

4) On the other hand, there is disagreement about the use of the term "theatre", a dispute which brings into play the relation between postdramatic theatre and performance, and sometimes, on an institutional level, between theatre studies and performance studies. I remain unconvinced that it makes much sense to give up the term "theatre" and subsume all theatrical practice under the term "performance". Whatever we take as the defining criterion of performance, it is obvious that theatre, like other advanced artistic practices, has adopted elements of performance (self-referentiality, deconstructing meaning, exposing the inner mechanism of its own functioning, shifting "from acting to performing", questioning the basic structure of subjectivity, avoiding or at least criticising and exposing representation and iterability ...), while inversely, performance has become 'theatricalized' in many ways, so that with most important contemporary artistic manifestations it is unproductive to quarrel about their definition as performance or theatre. And there are some dimensions of postdramatic theatre which simply are not performance: visual dramaturgy, hybrids of theatre, installations and others. Thus, without taking up here the debate about performance, where Rose Lee Goldberg, Elinor Fuchs, Peggy Phelan, Philip Auslander, Josette Féral and others have intervened, I will just state in a summary way that there is in my view no need to draw a sharp dividing line between theatre and performance. Theory of performance and theory of theatre operate on common grounds. Depending on your point of view, you gain different insights about this common ground. Many a study about the presence and also *The Future of Performance* are important contributions to the understanding of theatre and performance alike, but in no way need they entail subsuming all theatre under the notion of performance. It may well be that a European thinker is biased in favour of the notion of theatre, confronted as they are with the rich "dramatic" tradition and the experimental vigour of contemporary theatre, but on the other hand, it may also be that in cultures

where theatre is experienced mostly in its really outdated and/or commercial forms, there may occur a certain distortion of perception leading to a temptation to discard much too quickly theatre altogether, in favour of performance. Even if theatre may be abstractly defined as a branch or sub-genre of performative activity in general, it deserves and needs to be studied in its own right, and not only in the light of Schechner's "broad spectrum approach". And this implies, especially in our times of quick loss of historical consciousness, an insistence upon historical reflection and awareness. The term "postdramatic theatre" has the advantage of pointing to the fact that, even today, theatre and performance artists alike are confronted with enduring norms and ideals of the dramatic tradition, and also in their own consciousness and practice they are, if only in an unconscious way, haunted by the backdrop of the drama. And only if in some future time or cultural space there would be left over no trace of memory whatsoever of the dramatic theatre then, indeed, a notion like post-dramatic would loose its meaning.

There is another terminological question lingering in the background of these disputes: the proximity of the notion "performance" to the wider concept of "performativity" in general. I confess to a certain scepticism with regard to the concept of the performative. This is why I referred in *Postdramatic Theatre* to Hamacher's notion of the "afformative". The term performative cannot be completely separated from the idea of a successful functioning, a positive doing, an achievement of a goal – there is an activist bias connected to the notion. And this from the very start: "How to do things with words." This bias does not, of course, keep the notion from being useful for describing many features of art practice. But it also tends to conceal one aspect of art in general and theatre/performance in particular which, in my view, is of extreme importance: a certain passivity, a not-doing in the spirit of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to". To say the least, much performance/postdramatic theatre constitutes an articulation of a deep doubt about doing, achieving, realizing, performing. Performance has become, as has been convincingly demonstrated, the new paradigm of disciplinary society – "Perform or else..." (Jon McKenzie). And one of the most productive aspects of the concept was Judith Butler's analysis of the performative production of (gendered) identity. Even if performance may be a reflection of a society where performance has become a dictate, I do not see the necessity to let go of the paradigm "theatre", which does not imply an association with this activist bias (and allows us even better to account for critical practices of ironic subversion of the established patterns of performativity as envisaged by Judith Butler).

5) One last issue: a basic reality of postdramatic theatre is obviously the shift of attention and emphasis away from representation, or "*Darstellung*" of a work or process, to the creation/presentation as part of a "*Situation*" where the relation between all participants of the event becomes a major object of the artistic concept and research. The notion of the "*dramaturgy of the spectator*" points to this development. Theatre is following a movement which in the visual arts has been established for decades. Michael Fried's notorious polemics against "*theatricality*" in some modern art aimed at exactly this point: the dependence of the work upon the spectator. This observation, deprived of its polemical intention, is useful for the description of postdramatic practice, which often tends to focus upon the relation of the event to the spectators (and the relation of the spectators among each other) as the basic material of the artistic elaboration. Nicolas Bourriaud writes that in such art, which he has described as "*relational*", social relations can constitute the living material for some of the practices in question ("*Precarious Constructions. Answer to Jacques Rancière on Art and Politics*"). It is interesting to find that Bourriaud describes a general shift in the idea of art under the heading of "*relational aesthetics*" which is very similar to postdramatic theatre: many contemporary artists think of their practice not so much as giving form to an object but as constructing a form for possible human relations. Even if I would criticize that Bourriaud emphasizes too one-sidedly the harmonious aspects, the "*convivialité*" in these art practices which aim at proposing other possibilities for our inhabiting of a common world, his ideas are important and useful for further theoretical and practical elaboration of postdramatic theatre as a theatre of situation. After taking into consideration the elements of conflict, distancing and polemics in such constructed spaces of relation, which in Bourriaud are somewhat underrepresented, "*relational aesthetics*" contributes to a better understanding of comparable phenomena characteristic of postdramatic theatre.

"*Relational aesthetics*" does not, as far as I can see, necessarily deprive art of its "*artistic*" aesthetic dimension, as Jacques Rancière argued. In a comparable way, postdramatic theatre does not lose its aesthetic dimension as art if it gives up the notion of its autonomy and negotiates hybrid alignments with social, political, and other practices. These debates confirm the idea of postdramatic theatre as a laboratory for imagining, inventing, investigating other kinds of human relations when it explores new ways of spectating and invents different kinds of positions for spectators. This may indeed constitute its truly political character, even if the intention of the individual work is not consciously political.



**Summary:**

The text outlines major tendencies of experimental theatre practice in the past decade: emphasis on group work, dialogue between theatre and society, return of the chorus, narration and theatre of speech-act. In the second part, some theoretical issues are briefly discussed in relation to these observations. Does the concept of the 'post-dramatic' still prove to be useful? In what way does the tension and interplay between drama and theatre remain a tool for understanding contemporary theatre and performance practice? The text ends with an outline of three major fields of discussion: the concepts of pre-dramatic, dramatic, and post-dramatic; theatre and performance; and the notions of 'theatricality', relational theatre and the autonomy of the aesthetic field.

**Hans-Tis Leman****„POSTDRAMSKO POZORIŠTE”, DESET GODINA KASNIJE****Rezime:**

Ovaj tekst skicira glavne tendencije prakse eksperimentalnog pozorišta u prošloj deceniji: isticanje grupnog rada, dijalog između pozorišta i društva, povratak na upotrebu hora, naraciju i teatar govornog čina. U drugom delu rada, ukratko se razmatra nekoliko teorijskih pitanja u vezi s pomenutim opažanjima. Da li se koncept postdramskog još uvek potvrđuje kao upotrebljiv? Na koji način napetost i međuzavisnost drame i pozorišta opstaju kao sredstvo za razumevanje savremenog pozorišta i izvođačke prakse? Tekst se završava skicom tri glavna polja istraživanja: koncepta pred-dramskog, dramskog i post-dramskog; teatra i performansa; pojmova „teatralnosti”, relacionog pozorišta i autonomnosti estetskog polja.