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POST-DRAMATIC THEATRE

Since its first use in the 70s, the term 'Post-dramatic' theatre refers to new theatrical forms that have appeared within the constitutive elements of both the language of theatre and spectator perception. The apt formulation 'post-dramatic theatre' coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann, a pupil of Peter Szondi, in his 1999 book *Postdramatisches Theater*, points to the overcoming of the dramatic paradigm that had dominated European theatre until the end of the 19th century. Going way beyond the polarization between dramatic and epic forms, Lehmann took the theory of a crisis of drama to its extreme and argued for the need to overcome the polarization itself since he considered it still caught up within the limits of the dramatic tradition; in this sense, the terms post-dramatic and post-epic theatre are interchangeable.

Pure Aristotelian derived drama, based on the centrality of *lógos* and a progressive and self-contained logical action, reflected an anthropocentric *Weltanschauung* that attributed events to the decisions of the individual. It staged the dramatic conflict of the subject with the other characters: this took place through dialogue and the different articulation of distinct points of view, which determined the outcome of the event. The text, as the sole bearer of meaning and guarantor of meaning, was the pivotal element of this theatre; everything else was subordinate to it and, by comparison, considered peripheral. The mise-en-scene aimed to create an organic and coherent whole that mimetically reproduced reality so that the spectators could orient themselves without problems in the story's development and, thanks to the game of illusion, take part with emotional involvement in the representation.

Around 1880 the dominance of the dramatic form, and its epistemological and social implications, began to falter. This led to doubting the very possibility of representing reality through language and the relevance of individual behavior in society. The centrality of text, and the need to stage drama, began to be reassessed; the potential of other elements, traditionally subservient to the text, was rediscovered, opening the way to experimentation. Changes in the scientific world view, the discovery of complex time structures of the unconscious, and the birth of cinema, led to the start of a gradual historical process of divergence between text and theatre and the reformulation of scenic signs were to culminate as the post-dramatic theatre. By the end of the 19th century, the dramatic apparatus was no longer ideally applicable to a society undergoing constant change. It was even less relevant in the contemporary era facing the end of the great meta-narratives, multimedia, and the disappearance of individual protagonists from the stage of history in favor of emerging blocks of anonymous forces.

Following a very linear conception of history, Lehmann described the path of emancipation of theatrical discourse from drama as a series of progressive stages of self-reflection, decomposition and separation of the elements of the dramatic theatre which, passing through the historical avant-garde, first, then the new avant-garde of the fifties and sixties, finally ended in post-dramatic forms. While early and mid-20th century theatre cannot be accurately defined as post-dramatic yet, it did present several post-dramatic elements from the seventies onwards. These included renouncing meaning and unity, the tendency to paradox, and the de-hierarchization of scenic signs brought about through a wide variety of compositional methods for stage production. In this sense, the post-drama category includes a wide range of possibilities to realize theatre beyond drama, in which staging is no longer a coherent representation of reality, but the very process of theatre itself.

The variety of solutions focused on obtaining a breakdown of the dramatic system is clear from the first manifestations of experimental theatre. The opposition of the historical avant-gardes, what Kirby defined as a hermetic and antagonistic model, provided different answers to the problem of overcoming the traditional theatrical form. On the one hand, symbolist aesthetic, with its intimate character, advocated a retreat into the interior of the individual,

creating a private and static theatre containing few physical energies and monologizing forms that seem to anticipate the Wilson and Grüber's monological structures, or the soliloquies of the actors of Fabre, Lauwers, and Lepage. The definitive renunciation of action and dialogic form cancels the dramatic tension in these productions; the theatrical performance becomes the place of a form of writing which gives rise to new connections between the elements, and the theatrical text assumes importance as an independent poetic language, no longer necessarily joined to the other signs. By abandoning the plot, the concept of teleological time, typical of the dramatic device, is overcome, and representation takes place in a fixed space-time, which does not proceed in any direction. These are characters, partly derived from oriental theatre, which connect the productions of Maeterlinck and Mallarmé to those of authors such as Wilson and Heiner Müller, like a red thread. The monological form of many contemporary performances – e.g., the Wilsonian Hamlet, the theatrical solo *Flaming creatures / Roy Cohn / Jack Smith* by Ron Vawter, or the Goebbels' version of Heiner Müller's *Prometheus* – involving the abdication of dramatic tension, also serves to promote a new awareness of the theatrical process, and one's own presence. The various types of monologue in post-dramatic performances highlight a shift in attention from intra-scenic to extra-scenic communication: language manifests itself in all of its theatrical reality, renouncing any representative purpose. At the same time, the actor's speech unravels the emotional dimension of those who deliver it and no longer that of the represented character. Lehmann used the term *Monologie* to illustrate the tendency of the late 20th century theatre to use monological structures which, not only reduce the text to the monologue form but, together with the voice, the body, the gestures and the characteristic individuality, also isolate the actor or performer in order to create a specific language of which the verbal component is only one element. The monologization of the dialogue, however, can also take place through an additional (and no longer conflictual) use of the language, through a choral structure such as Szondi had already identified it in the symbolist theatre of Maeterlinck. The choir, understood as the sum of voices proceeding in one direction, is essentially a variant of the monologue free from intrinsic dramatic tension. Its use returns in the works on the Greek tragedy from Şerban to Grüber, or even in the emblematic scenic creations by Einar Schleef, built with spoken and moving choirs, establishing with the surrounding space particular connections that are the basis of a specific theatrical language.

The aesthetics of the provocation of futurism, dada and surrealism – belonging to the so-called antagonist position of the avant-garde – represent the moment of shift from the theatrical production to the event, leading to post-dramatic theatre. Here the destruction of coherence achieves the unraveling of the dramatic form: the waiver of sense takes place through fragmentary representations made up of aggressive moments which can involve the public, or by favoring a dreamlike and random logic where the productions of the artists' imagination can stimulate new impulses of creativity in the audience once it encounteres its unconscious. In both cases, this theatre rejects presenting itself as a self-contained finished product. The possibility of unpredictability is now permitted, allowing for subjective readings or even unexpected gestures by the audience. While the aesthetic of duration typical of the symbolist theatre and the *landscape play* formulated by Gertrude Stein cancels the progressive time, in the avant-garde productions of the second stage, time distortion takes place through an acceleration of rhythm with construction techniques, such as collage and montage, which not only lead to an increase in the performance's speed but also require greater perceptive ability from the audience.

These first attempts to break with the dramatic tradition resurfaced in the experimental theatre of the fifties and sixties, and reappear, in a more developed form, in the language of post-dramatic theatre. Here the unraveling of the classic units of drama culminates primarily through the dissolution of the old hierarchies within which, even in Ionesco and Adamov's Theatre of the Absurd, verbal discourse still played a predominant role. In the broad spectrum of possibilities available to the post-dramatic use of scenic signs, de-hierarchization – and with it all its stylistic implications – plays a fundamental role. By removing any

hypothetical connection between various theatrical elements, any element of the performance is placed on the same level: objects, lights, subdivision of the architectural space and other visual qualities are no longer subordinate to language, and dramaturgy frequently shifts from an auditory to an optical level. Thus, for example, even where verbal language still makes up a relevant part, it is not so much the word itself that counts, but the relationship between voice and space or between voice and speaking body. Here one thinks of the Grüber theatre, where the interstice between language and surrounding environment locates the real protagonist: a continuous interplay between dimensions replaces dramatic dialogue with an unceasing exchange between sound and resonance space, which can either be very large or tiny. For his *Winterreise*, for example, Grüber chose the vast setting of the Berlin Olympiastadion, where the audience, concentrated in a tiny section of the disproportionately large emptiness of the stadium, watched and connected assorted scenic elements and readings of text fragments from the *Hyperion*. Conversely, for performing Čhecov's *An der große Straße*, he opted for the confined space of the small rehearsal room of the Cuvrystraße in Berlin which was filled beyond capacity with travelers.

In the same way, the de-emphasis on language in post-dramatic theatre leads to different relationships with the performance and the body that produces it, so that it is downgraded from unique vehicle of meaning to one scenic element among others, sometimes even disrupting. Where verbal communication prevents the assimilation of the visual element by interrupting or disturbing it, genuine conflict can arise between theatrical performance and text. Vocal interferences, generating a kind of perceptual shock, are present in many works by independent groups and in directors such as Schleef and Giorgio Barberio Corsetti. In particular, in Barberio Corsetti's Kafkaesque reworkings, language presents itself as a foreign body, seemingly resistant to a theatrical representation which is constructed by using optical tricks, projections, and media technologies. The gestures of the actors, which run parallel to the text, only display links to individual visual parts of it, while, for the rest of the time, express individual reaction models. Equally, the leveling out of any hierarchy of signs determines a reification of the verbal material, which no longer represents facts, but pure phonetic exposure. Like other theatrical elements, language becomes an object to be exhibited, made up of its own specific sonority which turns it into a signifier whose meaning is often indecipherable. The voice is presented as separate from the body from which it originates, thus making the mediality of the body visible. In this regard, the perfection of speech is discarded, and unprofessional ways of speaking and defects, such as stammering and pronunciation errors, are accepted. The conflict between body and word is evident, for example, in Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio's *Giulio Cesare*, where a laryngectomized actor delivers Antonio's famous oration with the help of a mechanical speech device. Here the metallic and artificial voice definitively loses its seductive charge and becomes a mere sign product, no longer organically inhabiting the body that produces it. Speech reification can also occur through changes in the duration of the text, as, for example, in the case of the Angelus Novus theatre's reading *The Iliad*, where, after several hours, the words seem to acquire their independent corporeality and create a sound horizon dissociated from the readers. Sometimes the rediscovery of the phonetic materiality of verbal production can create an auditory space that differs from the optical one. In Jesurun, for example, this occurs through the practice of relocating voices by employing invisible microphones placed in locations that differ from those of the bodies and the video image. Thus, the viewer's gaze, starting from visual and acoustic dramaturgy, continually oscillates between what is seen and heard as it moves within a sound landscape that ends up triggering a series of differentiated mental associations.

If, on the one hand, the elimination of hierarchies restores language to its physical dimension even beyond meaning itself, on the other one, the body, self-sufficient in its gestures, loses its value as a mere signifier and gains relevance as "agent provoking an experience freed from all meaning" (Lehmann 1999, p. 362). Motor activity – or its impediment – together with sculptural corporeity, bring physical tensions to the fore with their relative flow of energy and replace the exclusively mental duel that took place in

drama. Sometimes, the body is subject to total exposure, detaching it from the space-time continuum: as a kind of art object, it is presented in all its concreteness, highlighted through a wide range of different techniques, and offered in all its fullness to the spectator's gaze. Apart from underlining a weakening of the idea of action and giving the impression that the characters are puppets in the hands of mysterious superior forces, the use of *slow-motion* in Wilson, for example, completely exposes the bodies of the actors to the public as they move in slow motion, becoming bundles of tense muscles, tendons and nerves. Here, the deconstructed gestures lose all purpose and present themselves as a series of estranged mechanical acts which, although still recognizable, seem to have lost their familiarity through decomposition. However, plastic poses can expose corporeality by referring to the universe of sculpture and revealing the viewer's voyeuristic inclination towards those on stage. This happens in the Lauwers' theatre, where actors often become immobile – even provocatively – with their gaze turned towards the public. Here, ideal classical physicality is no longer on display. On the contrary, the performer is nothing but a sacrificial victim showing their fragile, trembling, aged or degenerated body, which while being subjected to ruthless exposure is forced to deal with its own imperfection.

Through the dissolution of the traditional differentiation between the human and animal world, the common thread running through the different post-dramatic uses of corporeality is the negation of the anthropocentrism intrinsic to the dramatic form. The exposed body, silent or groaning, which no longer expresses itself through sensible language, is the clear demonstration of a definitive overcoming of the drama of man. The preference for degenerated or sick body images and for actors with disabilities or speech disorders suggests a rapprochement of human reality with its primordial and bestial form. Animals, which could not appear on the stage of dramatic theatre, are frequently present in post-dramatic performances; for example, the Belgian Jan Fabre, who extensively uses them also in his performative actions and public installations. For him, animals are nothing more than "empowered men" and, thanks to their unparalleled ability to use their sense potential and display external signals, have the same rights as the actors once they appear on stage.

The de-hierarchization of signs also involves the removal of the separation between center and periphery typical of dramatic representations. The paratactic sequencing of post-dramatic theatre leads to an experience of simultaneity which sometimes leads to stimulus overload in the public: the elimination of an action whose events are represented in progression and highlighted at the center of the theatrical performance opens to the possibility of a stage where there is often the simultaneous presence of multiple elements, from which the spectator may freely choose to which to give priority. Defocusing and reducing everything on stage on the same level, therefore, requires a free-floating reading by the recipient who, alone, must find correspondences and create connections among the presented elements. Wilson's theatre, for example, divides space evenly through the creation of different depths on the stage, which present several actions simultaneously, leaving the viewer to decide whether to create a synthesis between the observed figures or whether to consider them independent from each other. In this sense, the inevitable fragmentation of perception, derived from the material impossibility of processing all simultaneously occurring actions on stage, expresses the fragmented and disorganized character of post-dramatic theatre. Faced with simultaneity, viewers must necessarily select the elements on which to focus their attention from time to time, so that the final reception of the representation always remains potentially incomplete and subjective.

One of the most significant consequences of the evolution of theatrical language in post-dramatic theatre has been the parallel development of perceptual modalities whereby active and productive participation of the recipient gradually replaced the passive and a-problematic reception of the drama audience. For example, playing with sign frequencies, both in the sense of an overabundance and reduction of scenic elements, awakens the spectators from their usual torpor *vis-à-vis* the performances: while, on the one hand, a proliferation of signs and their accompanying simultaneity force spectators to continuously and dynamically elaborate stimuli, on the other one almost zero action combined with long

pauses and a general formalism also compel them to create connections based on a minimal amount of material. Overcrowded spaces, teeming with activity, can also be intentionally transformed into vast, empty stages, as for example the minimalist works of Wilson, Jan Fabre, Saburo Teshigawara, or works such as *Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wußten* by Peter Handke.

It is clear how changes in image order strictly connect to a radical transformation of the traditional conception of space and theatrical time: the average dimensions, self-contained scenes and the temporal unity and linear progression of drama, are all permanently abolished. Post-dramatic theatre's typical predisposition towards extremes leads to the propensity for excessively vast or compact spaces, whose dimensions can also be altered – as we have seen – through both proliferation and disappearance of human figures. Thus, the stage can be divided as in Wilson, creating multiple simultaneous actions that overload the spectators' senses, or it can also be built in a non-traditional way so as to promote a physical rapprochement between audience and actors. This happens in Schleef's theatre, where the cross-shaped stage causes the actions to move from the depth of the performance towards the audience, forcing the spectators into close and uncomfortable contact with their own physicality and directly experience voice strain, sweat and, sometimes, pain. In Wilson's case, thanks to the completeness of its internal organization, the theatrical performance is still distinct from the *theatron*; the division of the apron generates an experience of simultaneity which just liquidates classical chronological time. In Schleef, instead, the modification of the traditional shape of the stage leads to accentuating the perception of corporeity. It can thus be seen how the different uses of the elements in post-dramatic theatre imply multiple modes of perception and show how the various theatrical signs intertwine and depend on each other: in Wilson, time can be slowed down through slow-moving bodies, but also sped up through simultaneity produced by the division of space; the modification of the stage structure in Schleef, on the other hand, has consequences for the spectator's experience of physicality. Space, time, body, media, and voice are all elements that cooperate in creating a new theatrical language in which the particular use of any of them determines a specific evolution in the others.

These are all new ways of using elements that activate the public, both by forcing it to construct the meaning of the performance and by canceling the comfort zone of the audience as no longer separated from the space of the performance itself. A dynamic and subjective reception through scenic sectioning is also promoted by Lauwers' works, where space is divided according to thematically defined uneven fields. Here, in essence, the fabula is first deconstructed and then reorganized based on individual, identified themes, and several scenic nuclei are created where the action takes place from time to time. The actors come into play through changes of focus, so that the public's attention is moved from one part of the theatrical performance to another, depending on the area involved. At the same time, the actors out of focus remain where they are and transform themselves into spectators of the ongoing action. This procedure, which produces a perception somehow similar to that of film editing, determines a fluidity of the theatre frame: spectators can decide whether to focus on the action or concentrate on other details, becoming themselves the architects of the cuts and focuses.

The elimination of the audience/performance division, which Schleef only hinted at, becomes clear in the works of groups such as Angelus Novus or directors such as Josef Szeiler, after the dissolution of Angelus Novus company. In these artists space remains open and actors and audiences use it indifferently: spectators can enter and exit whenever they want, possibly even showing boredom and disturbing the performance. Like the actors, they are themselves under the gaze of passersby who, from the outside, are free to decide whether to just have a quick look at the performance or to enter and join the vision. This is what happened in Tokyo in 1992 when *Hamlet / Hamletmaschine* was set up in a film studio with the door left open for the whole duration of the work. Such solutions not only suggest an extra perception of space, which in this way becomes equally shared between audience and actors, but also make each spectator more aware of their presence and the

responsibilities this entails. In this sense, theatre is conceived as a happening which the public, through its choices and behavior, can contribute to creating or disturbing.

The dismissal of a clearly separated scene from the rest is even more drastic in the early works of the Spanish group La Fura dels Baus, where the spectators become themselves an integral part of the staging. Here, the idea of sharing space reaches its maximum expression through the total reduction of the physical distance between actors and audience. The latter is literally prey to the action: it is abruptly hit from every direction, pushed from one side to the other to make room for the artists, dazzled by lights, deafened by noise, and often overwhelmed by fear in the face of the most brutal actions. The opening of space, however, can also be achieved in other ways: sometimes the performance takes place in public sites in which actors and spectators become a community that is host in the same way. In some cases, theatrical projects can be developed over several days (therefore with an automatic abolition of the concept of dramatic time), resulting in the dissolution of the border, normally visible, between staging and everyday life. In Christof Nel, Wolfgang Storch and Eberhard Kloke's *Aufbrechen Amerika* in 1992, for example, spectators were moved for three days, on foot or by different means of transport, through the industrial region around Bochum, while at several points along the way events of various kinds were displaced, so that the daily surrounding environment temporarily merged with the theatrical scene without being in any way distinct from it.

The creation of open spaces away from a traditional space conception is also made possible through a new way of using media, which is typical of post-dramatic productions especially since the 1980s. While an indirect use of media mostly serves to show an ironic distancing of the theatre from media language (as with *cool fun*), a constitutive use of them can contribute to widening the boundaries of the stage space. Using technology, especially in the form of video installations and projections, helps create connections with other spaces that can only be imagined by the viewer. In the theatre of Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, but also of the Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio or the *Magazzini Criminali*, working with video images and monitors allows to connect spectacular effects to the scenic actions; actors often seem to enter or exit virtual spaces in which their physical presences appear to dissolve and rematerialize. High-tech enables the suspension of the Euclidean geometry laws with human figures being presented upside-down, bodies apparently segmented thanks to screen stacks showing single parts of them, or actors interacting *in absentia* through video recordings with those who are physically present on stage. Sometimes technology allows to create performances which are totally set in virtual spaces, as in nineties Helena Waldmann's works. The *Vodka konkav* performance, for example, was entirely reproduced on a wall covered with concave mirrors; here, through a series of projection games, reflections, doublings and psychedelic refraction effects, the audience, unable to identify any living body, had to wait until the end to discover the exact number of dancers they had witnessed during the performance.

In all the examined cases the aesthetic distance is reduced if not canceled at all: the theatre process is no longer hidden, on the contrary the technical functioning of staging is made intentionally visible. The purpose of theatrical production is no longer to create an illusion of reality which spectators passively witness from the comfort zone of the stalls; the creation of fiction is made manifest; the public, torn from its security, actively builds the theatrical event and, as we have seen, also experiences it close-up. Dramatic theatre represented a self-contained event, bound by its well-defined limits in time and space. By contrast, post-dramatic theatre is a rough sketch in need of spectators to complete it through a synthesis of traces of meaning and kindled associations derived from within the horizons of their personal experiences. In this process, while recognizing theatre, they become even more aware of their own presence, of their own being in that moment, in that space, in front of that theatrical event. Already Brecht, with his epic theatre, had tried to restore full legitimacy to the theatrical process and make it visible through various estrangement-effect techniques, but post-dramatic theatre goes even further. Unlike Brechtian theatre, the act of representation is not found on the same level as that of what is represented; representation

precedes what is represented and, sometimes, even appears as a purely self-referential act of communication devoid of any aim reference. While Brecht, in essence, tried to distance the spectators in order to make them aware of the representation, by contemporaneously highlighting the narrator's demonstrative presence, post-dramatic forms stress the personal presence and the intensity of self-referential contact. In short, they do not accentuate the distance from the theatrical process, but the proximity in the distance. While the Brechtian spectators were led to detach themselves from the timing of the theatre, post-dramatic spectators are immersed in the here-and-now of the scenic process, fully sharing its space-time dimension.

Canceling aesthetic distance can also be achieved through either constantly haranguing the public, leaving the spectators continuously stimulated and unable to relax (for example in Peter Handke's provocative piece, *Publikumsbeschimpfung*, which already in 1966 proposed a new model for theatrical language) or through a strategy and an aesthetic of undecidability. Frequent irruptions of reality into the continuum of representation, in fact, determine an insecurity on what is fiction and what is reality, which is typical of postdramatic theatre. Sometimes actors discuss the technical issues of the show or detach themselves from the action and engage in actions apparently related to the everyday life sphere. In Fabre's *De Macht der Theaterlijke Dwaasheden*, for example, at the end of an exhausting moment, the lights come on, and they take a break to smoke a cigarette in front of the audience. In Lauwers, characters who had just died in the fiction get up a moment later and are safely accompanied off the stage. These are procedures that, in addition to entailing an underlying ambiguity and a consequent state of perpetual vigilance in the spectator, cause the net reduction of any dramatic tension. Focusing on the presence and physical actions of the actors means that even themes such as death, loss or fear are treated with a particular emotional detachment resulting from the unmasking of the moment of fiction.

Given the centrality of shared actor/audience experience and spectator participation in the performance procedures, post-drama is on the borderline between performance and theatre. By renouncing the goal of mimetic representation, theatrical language presents itself as a production of presence in the sense of Gumbrecht's performative procedure. As theatrical productions slide into the territory of performance, they receive new aesthetic validation through the abandonment of action development, psychologically defined characters, increasingly sped up perceptual rhythms, and the relevance of the body as both subject and object of the action. By offering themselves on stage in all their physicality, post-dramatic theatre artists are often performers rather than actors. Moving between simple acting and non-acting – according to Michael Kirby's scale – they definitively renounce character incarnation and limit themselves to a communicative will or to an existence presentation without information. In this sense, post-dramatic theatre is a moment of exchange in which the spectator plays the crucial role of the theatrical partner who must decide on the success of communication.

The wide spectrum of gestures and movements without a referent, typical of the new theatrical language, can also be considered as a moment in which the dramatic action is definitively replaced by the ceremony and its catalytic function of attention through the isolation of the object. In many cases, post-dramatic representations have all the typical characteristics of ceremonies in which the cultural aspect of the first forms of dramatic theatre re-emerges. Some productions by Tadeusz Kantor, for example, precisely present this centrality of ritual. The author's language revolves around the theme of loss so that the representations are often images of what remains beyond the catastrophe: death, starting point and presupposition of Kantor's theatre, is not presented dramatically, but on the contrary is ceremoniously repeated through the scenes of the last rite of burial. The well-known life-sized mannequins the actors carry are mere symbols of a previous human essence, traces of an objectified memory transforming the stage into a place of transition, where the passage from what is alive into what is dead is fluid.

It is clear how extremely inclusive the concept of post-dramatic theatre is. Starting from overcoming the form of the drama, it has grown into a variety of forms and ways: a theatre

of objects, monologues and choirs, of images and of subdivided and cinematographic space, are just some concretizations of this reversal of dramatic language, which someone wrongly interpreted as a new theatre after or without text. While, as we have seen, dramatic form previously corresponded to a particular conception of the world, post-dramatic form reflects an evolution that has also been political, social, and cultural. Today, we can no longer ground theatre in interpersonal conflicts derived from the individual's adherence to a univocal and valid code of value for all. The great protagonists of history have disappeared and, above all, so has the social cohesion shown by Schechner as the basic principle of the dramatic model, understood in terms of a progressive succession of norm-breaking, crisis, reconciliation, and finally restoration of the social continuum. While theatre as an educational tool and source of information has decayed, contemporary post-dramatic forms have reacted with an aesthetic of responsibility and a politics of perception to the stunned condition of the spectator/citizen (in the sense of Samuel Weber) in the society of the spectacle, where repetition and habit have led to an increasingly marked dissociation between message and recipient.

Lehmann's theorizations on the new theatrical language have found a wide echo in studies on the scenic arts of the twentieth century, and today the existence of a post-dramatic theatre is a well-established fact by experts in the sector. Of course, there have been some sporadic refutations, especially regarding the respective roles of author and director in the birth and development of the new theatrical aesthetics, and the terminology used to talk about the scenic forms from the seventies onwards (Sarrazac, for example, prefers to speak of rhapsodic theatre). However, while we agree on the global change in the theatrical language of the last decades of the century, some scholars have gone further and have identified a new and ongoing overcoming of the post-dramatic forms described by Lehmann. Theatre in Québec, Belgium, or Italy, for example, already seems to point towards a return of assertive drama centered on the interpersonal confrontation and some measure of narrative continuity. For some, theatre built on the deconstruction of dramatic language and separation of its constituent units reached its maximum expression in the eighties and nineties, and today there is a gradual return to a more conventional theatricality at the service of representation. This is a scenario already considered by Lehmann himself, when he imagined post-dramatic theatre evolving into a rediscovery of dramatic characters after the unmistakable distancing between drama and theatre in the late twentieth century.

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