

Foreword

If, over the last few decades, one had given credence to the Cassandras among the clan of theatre critics, one would have had to conclude that “good theatre,” “theatre of value,” in which the text—spoken by well-trained actors and displaying “literary quality”—demands concentration, attention and patience in the audience, was terminally ill. The disease took the form of a many-headed Hydra, diagnosed as postmodern and performance, physical theatre, abstract theatre, theatre of the real, and many other supposed ailments. Evidently, this was a conflict in the tradition of the age-old struggle between young and old. It is important to remember these polemics, because they tend to be overshadowed by the very positive and enthusiastic response that my book *Postdramatisches Theater* found among theatre people right from the start. Nevertheless, this critique accompanied the book’s immediate reception like a constant chorus for roughly a decade following its publication in 1999. Then these voices quietened down a lot, especially since the book was a success in Germany. This was paralleled by an unexpectedly intense resonance in a multiplicity of divergent milieus of theatre discourse and practice: Latin America and the US, Russia as well as Eastern Europe, even in Iran and India. Kai Tuchmann’s book deals with one especially fascinating aspect of this worldwide reception: the resonance *Postdramatisches Theater* found in East Asia.

In fact, the Japanese version was the first translation, even before the French, and Li Yanan’s Chinese translation came out only a few years later. This translation was welcomed by young Chinese theatre people, though there was also a certain academic resistance towards the book. (I remember the moment in Shanghai Theatre Academy on my first visit to China, where I taught about *Rimini Protokoll* and all the students were very interested. But after the lecture two teachers from the Academy came to me and said: “But this is only presentation—not representation.”)

Li Yanan has played a great role in the reception of postdramatic theatre. She even introduced some of the pedagogical aspects of Germany’s Giessen School to China, thereby expressing guiding principles for postdramatic theatre practice that have given rise to interesting debates and changes. One was the tendency to stay close to the real of experiences in society. The notion of the “real” here should not be mistaken for the concept of realism, but rather has everything to do with a

Lacanian notion of the Real: that which evades both the symbolic structure and the imaginary. So even Hans-Werner Kroesinger, for example, and his documentation of the real, digs into the underground of the society. It is less his intention to inform the spectator at the level of consciousness, but rather to create an awareness of the Real, which is always concealed.

Another important element is of course the dimension of the political. Whenever postdramatic theatre is held, debate is created. Postdramatic theatre took on the role of opposition to depoliticized theatre. But soon it became clear that theatre as such cannot be judged as politics. It remains true that theatre is never directly political, it has a specific relation to the political dimension. This dimension is carried out in postdramatic theatre essentially by opening theatre space to the audience—thus redefining theatre as something that is not representation for spectators but an event created with the spectators. In this respect, the artists, many of them groups, have displayed remarkable creativity in developing post-dramatic dramaturgies. I here allow myself to adapt the definition given by Kai Tuchmann, who understands dramaturgy not as a traditional craft of adapting drama to the stage but rather a practice and a theory for enlarging, opening, and transforming the theatre.

Hans-Thies Lehmann
Athens, October 2021