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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

### Postdramatic, global dilemmas and local perception twenty-three years after

For some time now there has been a need for the second edition of the book *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After*, i.e. the Proceedings of the conference of the same title, held in September 2009, and produced by Bitef Festival and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. The most obvious reasons being the fact that the 500 copies of the first edition have almost sold out while the interest for the book, even eleven years later (2011), has not decreased. Among more recent requests for the book, and for me exceptionally touching one - given the geographical and cultural distance it came from - was the one by a doctoral student from the University of Hawaii. However, the more immediate reason for the second edition to be published now is not of celebratory nature, like the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first edition of the book *Postdramatic Theatre*<sup>1</sup> was the cause for the conference and the publishing of its Proceedings. Quite to the contrary! The reason for this edition is “commemorative” in nature: the recent death of the author of the book *Postdramatic Theatre*, one of the foremost German and international theatre scholar, Hans-Thies Lehmann. In order to preclude a situation in which we run out of copies, we have decided to publish the second edition of *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After* in digital format.

Before I clarify what is new in this introduction in relation to the one for the first edition - there have been no changes in the book itself, it is the same - I would like to refresh our memory as to the genesis, aims and matters of the conference *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After* and the publishing of the Pro-

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<sup>1</sup> Considering that the book has been translated into Croatian, and not into Serbian, when referring to its title I will use Croatian translation, and when referring to the paradigm Serbian will be used.

ceedings by the same title. As afore mentioned, the immediate reason for the Belgrade conference in 2009 was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publishing of the book *Postdramatic Theatre* by Hans-Thies Lehmann in German (Verlag der Autoren, D-Frankfurt am Main 1999). During the ten-year period between the publishing of the book and the conference, the book was published in many languages - Polish, French, English, Farsi, Slovakian, Spanish, Japanese, Portuguese, Slovenian, Croatian, and became an important reference in theatre and performance studies. The aims of the conference were twofold. On the one side, the conference wanted to explore the influence of the book on contemporary theatrical practice and theory both in global and in local cultural contexts, while, on the other, it wanted to reflect on further developments of drama and theatre, whether they are building on the heritage of the postdramatic or are problematizing it.

Regarding the contents of the Proceedings, it comprises all the papers we received as the final versions of conference presentations, and they were published in their original languages: the majority in English, one each in French and Italian (the Introduction being the only bilingual text, in Serbian and in English). Despite our best efforts at the time, we did not receive all of the final versions of all conference presentations. Nevertheless, as we did then, we shall now, at least, list the names of all the participants: Hans-Thies Lehmann, Patrice Pavis, Elinor Fuchs, Marco De Marinis, Lada Čale Feldman, Aleksandra Jovičević, Karen Jürs-Munby, Ana Vujanović, Marin Blažević, Annalisa Sacchi, Ana Tasić, Tomasz Kirenczuk, Roland Schimmelpfenning, Falk Richter, Tomi Janežič, Oliver Frljić, Katarina Pejović, Bojan Đorđev, Vlatko Ilić and Ivan Medenica. Please note that certain authors, e.g. Patrice Pavis, sent a different paper for publishing than the one they presented at the conference.

The justification - though, one is not necessary - for having the “intellectual courage” to hold the very first international conference about theoretical and artistic reception of this influential book in Belgrade is double fold. Firstly, the fact that the book *Postdramatic Theatre* by Hans-Thies Lehmann was translated into a number of languages including Croatian and Slovenian only affirms its wide-reaching impact and, consequently, its immense influence on the theory and practice of performance arts on the territory of former Yugoslavia. The second reason is the fact that the BITEF festival, co-organiser of the conference with the institute of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, is a place where, already for decades, some of the artistically boldest ventures of contemporary theatre have been promoted; and almost all of these are duly included in the catalogue of postdramatic phenomena and authors given at the beginning of Lehmann’s book.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To the best of my knowledge, just one other conference with a similar topic and of the same scope was organised on the occasion of the book’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in 2019, in Berlin, at Academie der Künste.

In the introduction to the first edition of *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After* I wanted to open up several key issues and dilemmas arising from the concept of postdramatic and its heritage. These concerns echoed in all of the papers and abstracts sent by conference participants, and in the discussions then held on this topic, not just at our conference but also from the pages of leading international journals. Thus, the introduction to the first edition was foreseen as a possible summary of all presentations and/or their subsequent copies in writing and final versions, *i.e.* their key theses, issues and raised dilemmas.

As the title of the introduction to the first edition implies (as is the case with the introduction to this edition), “Postdramatic Theatre: Global Dilemmas and Local Perception”, the introduction was in two parts. The first part covered the then current global relationship between postdramatic and dramatic theatre, postdramatic and performance art, possibilities of their further development, new concepts arising from the postdramatic, ... As these topics, examined from diverse positions and expressing varying opinions, dominated throughout the conference and its proceedings, they were given more attention in the introduction. Unlike these general topics, the topic concerning local reception of Lehmann’s book, its influence on local artistic practices and theoretical considerations was not as present in conference papers and, so, the second part of the introduction was slightly shorter. For this reason, I have decided to offer my own contribution in the second part of the introduction, and in which I endeavoured to map the main points of reception of postdramatic theatre in both theoretical and critical discourses within the local context I know best - the Serbian one.

The introduction to this second edition bears little difference to its predecessor in its first part because since then, thirteen years ago, I have not studied the fate of the concept of postdramatic and its theoretical and/or artistic reception in global context. The second part, however, has been significantly changed in comparison with the introduction to the first edition. Firstly, it is the local scene I know best, logically; secondly, the paradigm of the postdramatic has in the meantime initiated novel, interesting and important research in Serbian theatre and performance studies.<sup>3</sup>

Research in Serbian theatre and performance studies was initiated by a text *Postdramatic Theatre and Political Theatre* written by a renown Croatian

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<sup>3</sup> I have decided not to include the analysis of the use of the postdramatic paradigm in Serbian theatre criticism in the present introduction. Though this was a topic in the introduction to the first edition, for this introduction and for reasons of relevancy such an analysis would require a separate and lengthy research.

director Oliver Frlić, and published in the conference Proceedings book.<sup>4</sup> Frlić does not refute completely Lehmann's claim that within contemporary consumer and media society theatre's potential to open important political issues thereby stimulating, in the tradition of Brecht, changes within the society is almost non-existent; rather, today political potential is to be found somewhere else, in the alternative, the non-hierarchical, in democratic work processes within theatre itself. Or, in Lehmann's own, widely known, words: "It is not through the direct thematization of the political that theatre becomes political but through the implicit substance and critical value of its mode of representation. (Mode of representation does not only imply particular forms, but also and always a particular way of work. Little has been said on the latter in this manuscript, yet it would be worthy to design a research such that it shows how the way(s) of making theatre constitute its political content.) Theatre - not as a thesis, but as practice - is an example *par excellence* how the junction of the heterogeneous symbolizes utopias of a 'different life' (...)"<sup>5</sup>

Although accepting Lehmann's arguments as to why today's theatre cannot be political just by "direct thematization of the political" Oliver Frlić - understanding Lehmann's concept as, after all, "depoliticization of theatre" - argues for a return to the Brechtian concept of political theatre. However, this by no means entails that Frlić rejects Lehmann's approach to the issue: "In my opinion, adequate thematization of the political does not preclude questioning of representational modes which are, in Lehmann's terms, the space in which the political takes place in theatre."<sup>6</sup> After all, Frlić concludes even his text published in the Proceedings with a rather conciliatory question: "Does today's theatre have the strength to create political reality, instead of just representing social reality and appraising critically its modes of representation?"<sup>7</sup> Expressed in this way, Frlić's tolerance has created - as we shall see - a consensus in Serbian theatre and performance studies that Frlić is advocating for a synthesis of Brecht's and Lehmann's concepts of the political in performance arts.

Moreover, it was through this duality, or more precisely through this (Frlić-like) dialectics connecting Brecht's and Lehmann's understanding of the political in theatre, that the work by some of the most politically engaged di-

<sup>4</sup> The English language version of Frlić's text was published in the Proceedings collection, and its version in Serbian language was published under the title *Political and Postdramatic (Političko i postdramsko)* in the double thematic issue of *Teatron* 154/155 (2011). Please note that *Teatron* devoted its three issues (double issue 154/155 and issue 156) to the theme of "New Political Theatre".

<sup>5</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramsko kazalište*, CDU i TkH, Zagreb, Beograd 2004, 334

<sup>6</sup> Cited from: Jasna Novakov-Sibinović, *Političko pozorište Olivera Frlića: od empatije do simpatije*, Sterijino pozorje, Novi Sad 2020, 132

<sup>7</sup> Oliver Frlić, „Političko i postdramsko“, *Teatron* 154/155, proleće/leto 2011, Beograd, 56

rectors - including Frlić himself - from former Yugoslavia was scrutinized in Serbian theatre and performance studies. As I have already announced, these local papers on the topic are the subject matter of the edited second part of this introduction. In the first part I am returning to my summary of key global issues and dilemmas, as already laid out in the introduction to the first edition *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After*.

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The phrase “ten years after”, appearing in the title of the conference, implies a summing up from an historical distance a kind of final balance, and simultaneously raises the question of what comes “after”.

The first dilemma arising here is whether “after” is an appropriate category when the postdramatic is considered. Should we think about the postdramatic theatre in historical terms, i.e. is it only a name for a specific, temporally limited phenomenon in the development of contemporary artistic theatre, which will necessarily be replaced by the new and different – by an “after”? In some of the abstracts that arrived before the conference, such an assumption was dismissed with the argument that it is too early even for the development of new trends, let alone for their theoretical conceptualisation. It has also been stressed that this assumption ignores the fact that Lehmann’s book is not about the history of the theatre, but about contemporary, still actual stage practice, which is as broad and democratic as to include the whole “panorama” (the title of a chapter in the book) of the artistically most radical phenomena, functions and features of the contemporary theatre<sup>8</sup>.

In sharp opposition to the claim that it is too *early* to think about what comes after the postdramatic, is the claim that the paradigm itself comes too *late*. When postdramatic theatre was formulated in Lehmann’s book of the same title, dramatic theatre was largely a historical phenomenon that gave way to many heterogeneous performing practices on the stage. It is hard, even impossible, to encompass them all by a single paradigm, which would, moreover, seem to be only a new stage in the linear history of theatre.<sup>9</sup> However, this does not put into question the importance of Lehmann’s research. On the contrary, the postdramatic is seen here as the last big theatre paradigm, the main value of which is its heroic failure in the Nietzschean sense: unable to justify itself as a paradigm, the postdramatic is, however, the first significant

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<sup>8</sup> These are the theses from Marin Blažević’s presentation; regrettably, we did not get the final version of his paper.

<sup>9</sup> Theses from Ana Vujanović’s presentation; regrettably, we did not get the final version of her paper.

theoretical platform for understanding of theatre and the performing practices *beyond* every paradigm, and thus, most adequate to its subject, which is so heterogeneous to the point of being shapeless.

It is exactly the situating of the postdramatic in the linear history of theatre that legitimates an exploration, present also both in the conference papers and in earlier polemics on this topic, of the relation of the predramatic-dramatic-postdramatic in analogy with the totalizing Hegelian development of art forms through the stages of symbolic-classic-romantic. In one of the most heated polemics about Lehmann's book, Elinor Fuchs interprets the postdramatic as a "movement" containing literally all the major theatre authors from three or more generations (the whole second half of the 20th century).<sup>10</sup> In her opinion, this leads to a drastic generalization, which on the one hand leaves some important reformers of mimetic theatre (e.g. Brecht) in the field of the dramatic, while on the other, it realizes the Hegelian ambition of totalizing at a time when deconstructionism has condemned such projects to failure.

Lehmann has systematically polemicized with these theses, emphasizing that the Hegelian systematic history of "world art" has no methodological relation with his own distinction between developmental tendencies in the European theatre; that making a sharp cut between the "Hegelian totalization" and "deconstructionist breaking down" is reductionist and, paradoxically, quite in harmony with Hegel's binary oppositions that are "fighting for primacy"; that the postdramatic is by no means a "movement", because Lehmann in his book insists on the heterogeneous nature of the phenomena subsumed under this concept.<sup>11</sup> Lehmann accepts the objection that the concept of "*post-dramatic*" should clearly project the phenomenon in relation to which (as being opposed to it or coming after it) it is articulated – i.e. dramatic theatre – and that he failed to do this in his book. He agrees with Fuchs that the concept of "dramatic theatre" is too generalized and thus imprecise, and adds that the development of modern drama does not always coincide with its stage tradition, that the *mise-en-scène* in the Renaissance and Baroque was more open and free – with emphasis on song, dance and visual effects, and not on literature – than the bourgeois theatre of the 18th and 19th centuries. In other words, Lehmann accepts the objection that the concept of postdramatic is based on a reductionist view of dramatic theatre, in which sometimes are hidden achievements much closer to radical practices of the second half of the 20th century than to the bourgeois literary theatre of the 19th century.

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<sup>10</sup> Elinor Fuchs, untitled (the review on Postdramatic theatre), TDR: The Drama Review, 52: 2 (T 198), 2008, New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 179.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Lost in Translation?", TDR: The Drama Review 52: 4 (T 200), 2008, New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 15.

The aforementioned thesis on prematureness and inadequacy of reflections about what comes after the postdramatic, as well as that about the belatedness and inadequacy of this paradigm which is trying to totalize an extremely heterogeneous stage practices, are only two extreme points of the reflections on “before and after the postdramatic”. In contrast to them, there are quite a few works in which the postdramatic is seen only as a phase in the history of theatre and the performing arts, and some newer phenomena are recognized, even if only in the form of witty neologisms like *postpostdramatic* or *neodramatic*. These new concepts have not yet been clearly articulated; we do not even know whether their authors take them seriously; however, they give us a certain idea of what the new phase would be like. It would be about the return of the text to the theatre. No sooner said or written than this statement provokes an avalanche of dilemmas and possible misunderstandings that need to be forestalled right away.

First of all, as it must be clear to anybody who has read Lehmann’s book in a sober state, that for this author the postdramatic theatre does not mean *theatre without text*. As we have learnt from one presentation at the conference, such a paradoxical claim appeared in an “expert” review on the book in Australia.<sup>12</sup> In Anglo-Saxon academic circles, this simplification persists in spite of the full awareness that Lehmann has never written about postdramatic theatre as theatre without text: “While Lehmann never explicitly aligns dramatic with text-based and postdramatic with non-text-based practice, I will argue that his conclusions, inconclusive as they are, are ultimately more likely to consolidate than to fracture the existing binary.”<sup>13</sup> Postdramatic theatre, as Lehmann posits it, deconstructs the classic dramatic form (with its accompanying notions of mimesis, figuration, narration, characters...) and classic notions related to the stage life of drama (e.g. director’s interpretation), but it does not discard the text for the stage as such. Various non-dramatic texts or, as Gerda Poschman puts it, “no longer dramatic theatre texts”<sup>14</sup> – occupy an important place in post-dramatic theatre as well; however, they do not dominate the play, but figure as one among other equal, often independent stage languages. Rather than being subjects of *interpretation*, such texts now realize various non-traditional and autonomous modes of stage existence: they can be enunciated as political pamphlets, sung as songs, spilled as a field of free associations... In other words, not only the type, but also the stage status of texts is undergoing a major change.

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Jürs-Munby, “The vexed question of the text in Postdramatic Theatre in a cross-cultural perspective” (included in these proceedings).

<sup>13</sup> Liz Tomlin, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Gerda Poschmann, *Der nicht mehr dramatische Theatertext: aktuelle Bühnenstücke und ihre dramaturgische Analyse*, Tübingen 1997.

Pavis also discards the erroneous claim that Lehmann opposes “theatre without text” to “textual theatre”. But he maintains that, in the postdramatic theatre, dramatic texts that precede the play and have to be “staged”, have been replaced by texts generated during rehearsals, through improvisations in which the whole company participates.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the main question could be: how to define these texts to which – with the vaguely articulated concepts of postpostdramatic, neodramatic or whatever we wish to call it – the present theatre allegedly returns? Could they include dramas in a traditional or somewhat modified form, or are they radically different plays based on the experience of the postdramatic? By the term “post-postdramatic”, applied in an off-hand, non-mandatory way, Pavis means texts that, although not returning to the tradition of a “well-made play”, continue to tell stories, to present elements of reality, to produce the effects of dramatic characters. Though at first sight it might seem otherwise, this return is not, as Pavis emphasizes, “a reactionary restoration, but simply the awareness of the fact that every work and all human speech are always narrating something.”<sup>16</sup>

It is hard to tell whether Elinor Fuchs is negating or affirming this “retro tendency”, when she suggests, using instances from contemporary American theatre, that it is possible both to break and to embrace the cosmos of dramatic fiction simultaneously. What at first sight, and in the spirit of the postdramatic, might seem to be a dismantling of the cosmos of fiction, is actually, according to Fuchs, its “complication”: the use of postdramatic procedures can launch the same kind of emotional and imaginative processes we traditionally associate with the dramatic theatre.<sup>17</sup> Is this a denial of the postdramatic or, on the contrary, an affirmation of the position that the postdramatic has profoundly influenced the dramatic theatre, which, having absorbed the new experience, has “survived” and gone on, because “the fictive cosmos is hard thing to kill”?<sup>18</sup>

The German writer and director Falk Richter, who participated in the Belgrade conference<sup>19</sup>, speaks about *neodramatic* plays. These are texts that have the postdramatic structure, but offer more energy and emotion. Richter used a similar formulation in an interview he gave to me, answering the ques-

<sup>15</sup> Patrice Pavis, « Réflexions sur le théâtre postdramatique » (included in this book).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Elinor Fuchs, “Postdramatic Theatre and the Persistence of the ‘Fictive Cosmos’: A View from America” (included in this book).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The majority of artists participating in the Conference (Falk Richter, Roland Schimmelpfeng, Tomi Janežić, Katarina Pejović and Bojan Đorđev) have not sent the final versions of their papers for publishing.

tion whether his play *Unter Eis* is postdramatic: “No, it is, I would rather say, *neodramatic*. Although postdramatic structures have been used, I believe that this play offers much more energy and emotion.”<sup>20</sup> One could infer from this that the postdramatic text and theatre are thus identified with a cold, ironic, intellectual and highly conceptual art. I believe that Lehmann would not agree with this interpretation.

The dilemmas and questions posed by the postdramatic do not concern only the relationship between the stage and drama. Misunderstandings also appear in interpretations of the relationship between the postdramatic and performance or the performing arts in general. In the above mentioned polemic, Elinor Fuchs claims that in Lehmann’s book the line between contemporary art of performance and postdramatic theatre is blurred, that these concepts can exchange their places, that the author’s thesis of the postdramatic as an overlap between theatre and performance actually means that the art of performance is a subgroup of the postdramatic.<sup>21</sup> Lehmann characterizes her argument as a misinterpretation, maybe even a conscious one, and goes on to develop his “overlap” thesis in more detail. The fact that theatre as a whole is just a part of performing practices in general (which also encompass rituals, sport, political events etc.) does not mean that theatre phenomena with a pronounced performing character (i. e. overlapping with the art of performance) should not be treated in their separate referential framework, and according to Lehmann the postdramatic is precisely that framework.<sup>22</sup> “The only point here is to name a field where the theatre and the art of performance overlap because that field belongs to the discourse of the postdramatic theatre, and not to analyse the art of performance in any depth.”<sup>23</sup>

When Lehmann’s use of the notion and concept of “performativity” is discussed, an objection by Pavis deserves to be mentioned. Starting from the hypothesis that the postdramatic theatre completely abandons the mimetic for the performative (instead of dramatic presentation through text, actors’ playing and fictional plot and conflicts, the postdramatic deconstructs the mechanisms of speech and treats the text as an acoustic object), Pavis claims that the postdramatic does not go very far in the development of the performative, e.g. that it does not take into account contemporary feminist studies on this subject.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ivan Medenica, „Križa je dobra (razgovor s rediteljem i piscem Falkom Rihterom),” *Teatron*, 146–7, Muzej pozorišne umetnosti Srbije, Beograd, 2009, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Elinor Fuchs, untitled (the review on *The Postdramatic Theatre*), op. cit., 180–181.

<sup>22</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, op. cit., 14–15.

<sup>23</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramsko kazalište*, CDU i TkH, Zagreb, Beograd 2004, 180.

<sup>24</sup> Pavis, *ibid.*

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Besides the summary of the debate whether the difference between dramatic and postdramatic theatre is but a difference between theatre with text and theatre without text, and Elinor Fuchs's remarks concerning the variances in methodological approaches to drama in Europe and the USA, Vlatko Ilić's paper is the only one among the published texts discussing the issue of perception of the postdramatic paradigm in local theatre practices and theoretical discourse. Being from Belgrade, it is logical that Ilić is referring to Serbian artistic and theoretical milieu.

Ilić's stance regarding the adoption of the postdramatic paradigm in local, most of all Belgrade, scene is objective and comprehensive as he emphasises both affordances and limits of the postdramatic breakthrough. In his opinion, one of the most important affordances is that the postdramatic legitimizes a wide array of hybrid performance practices, those that do not fit the tradition of theatre based on "the dominance of dramatic text and its ideology of a unified, well-ordered microsystem."<sup>25</sup> Although these hybrid forms managed to surface from time to time, they were not as visible as today when they are well grounded in Lehmann's theory. Apart from legitimizing nondramatic performance practices, and theoretical widening and democratization of *the theatre*, the postdramatic paradigm also provides a proper, tangible and elaborate theoretical apparatus needed for meticulous research and deep understanding of such practices. However, in Ilić's view, the limits of the postdramatic paradigm are that it, for one, ignores the fact that cultural circumstances differ from one context to another (hidden totalizing ambition of the postdramatic), and that its application is present more in interpreting than in devising stage practice.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, there are misunderstandings, approximations, superficialities, menaces, even ignorance in the use of the postdramatic paradigm in local theoretical, artistic and critical circles. It is my sincere feeling that the reason for this lies in the peculiarity of not only this but also every other "small culture": the one establishing itself in the language other than an international language and which does not have systemic, comprehensive and strategic publishing policies in science. The consequence of this is that scientific research is limited in scope and thus rather irrelevant. In such circumstances, paradoxical situations are rather possible: an important and internationally influential study is translated, however, it is consigned and received without taking into account its wider context. For this reason, such studies - especially if they have the aura

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<sup>25</sup> FN 25 / Vlatko Ilić, „*Svako ponavlja isto retoričko pitanje: da li je pozorište potrebno*“; *beleške o jednoj pozorišnoj sceni i jednom pozorišnom radu* (a paper in this collection)

<sup>26</sup> FN 26 / *ibid.*

of being “modern” - are accepted uncritically, even dogmatized. By rule, the circles dogmatizing them are elite, cosmopolitan, progressive and too assertive thus leading to equally strong and uncritical resistance of a wider professional community, the one which does not follow the latest research in science and arts, and is faithful to what is national and traditional. The paradox arising from this is that science - which should be governed by objectivity - becomes the site of inappropriate confrontations, some of which bear strong ideological background. The foremost victim in these clashes is their very cause: these books toward which opposing opinions have been formed and have been - more often than not - misunderstood, their contexts also, and sometimes they have not even been read in their entirety. In Serbia, during the 1980s, in theatre theory and, consequently, in arts theory, this was the case with Anne Ubersfeld’s book *Reading Theatre*. Nowadays, the same is the case with Hans-Thies Lehmann’s book *Postdramatic Theatre*, though to a much smaller extent.

As highlighted in the opening remarks of this introduction, soon after the publishing of *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After*, Serbian theatre and performance studies became enriched for a considerable number of papers more-or-less inspired by the postdramatic paradigm. More precisely, Lehmann’s concept of the political in theatre became a widespread topic, the immediate cause being the above analysed Frlijić’s criticism of the concept, and his call to a renewal of Brecht’s understanding of the political in theatre, as published in English in the Proceedings collection and in Serbian in the journal *Teatron*. The title of *Teatron*’s thematic consecutive issues, 154/155, 156, is “*New Political Theatre*”. The three issues were planned as a sequel to the comprehensive research on Serbian political theatre, more precisely, its attitude toward the 1990s war(s) on the territory of former Yugoslavia, during Milošević; both researches were conducted by the same editorial team. Apart from sociological reasons, recognition and analysis of new topics and artistic approaches relevant for the political theatre in post-Milošević Serbia, a further impetus for the thematic issues came from theorization of the political in theatre, the latter being inspired by Lehmann’s thoughts.

The afore mentioned Serbian researchers’ consensus that Oliver Frlijić is, both in theory and practice, advocating for some kind of synthesis of Brecht’s and Lehmann’s understanding of the political in theatre, and which we could sense in Frlijić’s own assertions, originates and is grounded in the very thematic issues of *Teatron*. The thesis of “Frlijić-like synthesis” is also present in my introductory text in which I refer to the performance of *Cowardice* directed by Frlijić at Subotica National Theatre. “The difference between the scenes in *Cowardice* and Lehmann’s understanding of the political in theatre is in that although the performance, obviously, problematizes representational modes - slow rhythms, perception difficulties by intentionally poor audibility and

visibility, dominance of audible stimuli over visual ones - it remains traditional (one can say *Brechtian*) as it “directly thematises the political”: human trafficking and the atrocities in Srebrenica”.<sup>27</sup>

A year later, I tensed further the same thesis and on the same example in the edited version of the same text. “From the above analysis one can conclude that the dialectical entwining of the postdramatic political (challenges stemming from modes of representation) and the traditional theatre political (challenges stemming from the very subject matter), and which Frljić is advocating for, is best realized by Frljić himself in the final scene of *Cowardice*, here analysed in detail.”<sup>28</sup>

Though I analysed that scene in the texts mentioned, and in several others, that does not mean that the reader of this introduction is acquainted with any one of them, so I shall repeat this analysis one more time. At the end of the performance of *Cowardice*, the stage remains completely empty, the actors move to left and right off wings. From there, invisible to the audience, the actors are uttering 505 Muslim names in very monotonous voices for about ten minutes. Absence of any stage action, even of visual stimuli (the audience “stares at emptiness”), with the dominance of auditory stimuli (monotonous uttering of names), can create sensory uneasiness within the audience, fear that the awkwardness may last and, finally, prompt a decision to take responsibility by leaving the auditorium (which are examples *par excellence* of Lehmann’s concept of the political in theatre). There have not been many such cases during the performances of *Cowardice*, yet, there have been a few. However, if it is known - and the actors do state it in advance - that the 505 names are randomly chosen real names out of several thousand names of Bosniaks killed by Serbian paramilitary in Srebrenica, then the experience grows in complexity as it becomes impossible to tell whether the (Serbian) audience<sup>29</sup> is upset due to sensory stimuli, absence of stage action and feelings of boredom, or due to moral uneasiness and inability to accept their own ethnic community’s responsibility for the genocide. That, however, would fit Brechtian understanding of the political in theatre rather well.

The claim of the entwining of the two concepts of political in Oliver Frljić’s work is quite explicitly stated, to the best of my knowledge, in the first comprehensive and thorough study of Frljić’s theatre, more precisely his au-

<sup>27</sup> FN 27 / Medenica Ivan, “Novi vidovi političkog u pozorištu: ‘slučaj ex-YU’“, *Teatron* 154/155, proleće/leto 2011, Beograd, 13

<sup>28</sup> FN 28 / Medenica Ivan, “Nasleđe Jugoslavije: ka novom konceptu ‘političkog’ u pozorištu”, *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti* 21, FDU Beograd 2012, 458

<sup>29</sup> FN 29 / The performance was done in the production Subotica National Theatre, Serbian Drama Group. Subotica National Theatre also has Hungarian Drama Group.

thorial projects<sup>30</sup>, and published in Serbia: *Oliver Frljić's Political Theatre: from Empathy to Sympathy* by Jasna Novakov Sibinović. "By no means does Frljić deny the outstanding significance of Lehmann's theoretical discussions on the development of contemporary theatre, and in that sense, Frljić only refutes Lehmann's minimization of theatre's political power but accepts fully the claim that modes of representation are important elements of the political in theatre and demonstrates this conviction in his own work by creating a certain fusion of Brecht's and Lehmann's approach to political theatre today."<sup>31</sup>

One of the best examples of that "fusion" in Frljić's authorial projects, according to Novakov-Sibinović, is the "cycle about the disintegration" (the author is referring to the breakup of Yugoslavia), comprising three performances produced in three different countries of former Yugoslavia, Croatia (*Turbofolk*, HNK Ivana pl. Zajca, Rijeka), Slovenia (*Damn The Traitor of One's Country*, Slovensko Mladinsko Gledališče, Ljubljana) and Serbia (*Cowardice*, Subotica National Theatre). The central topic of all three performances, *i.e.* different manifestations, aspects and periods of/in the breakup of Yugoslavia, clearly ascertain the cycle as belonging to Brecht's concept, the one which opens political topics (directly). On the other side, different, postdramatic modes of representation - the ones in which Lehmann sees the political of this kind of theatre - come down to problematizing the relationship between reality and fiction, documentary material and its artistic processing, thus uncompromisingly addressing the audience and the actors and, as a result, almost forcing them to become aware of their positions in a theatre situation prompting them to or not to assume responsibility for the same. Eventually, as Novakov-Sibinović points out, Frljić does not only question and problematize modes of representation, but in the spirit of the postdramatic, he questions and problematizes the role and the responsibility of the very institution of theatre itself.

Theoretical debate about the postdramatic concept of political, as well as its application in the analysis of Andraš Urban's oeuvre, a director from Subotica and a member of the Hungarian community in Serbia, is the subject matter of a study *Political In The Postdramatic Theatre: recent works by Andraš Urban* written by Atila Antal.<sup>32</sup> One of the theoretical contributions of this study lies in Antal's detailed analysis of the postdramatic political, *i.e.* he separates and elaborates on its two main aspects, posited by Lehmann himself: "aesthetics

<sup>30</sup> FN 30 / By this the author singles out Frljić's performances that are not based on a particular play/drama text, such as *Spring Awakening*, *Bacchae*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* etc.

<sup>31</sup> FN 31 / Jasna Novakov-Sibinović, *ibid.*, pp. 134

<sup>32</sup> FN 32 / Atila Antal, *Političko u postdramskom pozorištu: recentni opusa Andraša Urbana*, FOKUS, Subotica 2011.

of responsibility” (or “politics of reception”) and “virtual political”. These syntagmas, concepts, stem from Lehmann’s key assertion, the one quoted at the beginning of this introduction, about the postdramatic political: “aesthetics of responsibility” refers to *postdramatic modes of representation* (therefore, on the very stage form), and “virtual political” refers to new or different *modes of working* in theatre.

The first concept originates in the fact that postdramatic theatre does not create a dramatic illusion of reality. Rather, audience members and performers become aware of their bodily, spiritual and mental presence, their mutual exchange of energy and co-conditionality as the elements which create a specific “theatre situation” and for which both must assume responsibility (because, there is not a fictional universe that they can hide behind). “Virtual political” is not sharply distinct from “aesthetics of responsibility”, and it implies the political based on the very theatrical practice, unpredictable and futile labour denying the fruition of the creative process into finished products, therefore offering an alternative, more just, utopian model of society.

Following theoretical elaboration, Antal analyses these aspect of post-dramatic political in Andraš Urban’s four performances and performed by his theatre company Deža Kostolanji from Subotica: *Brecht - The Hardcore Machine*, *Urbi et Orbi*, *Turbo Paradiso* and *The Beach*. Concerning Urban’s method, it entails each participant’s search for their own personal motivation, bringing in elements of one’s own, director - actor on equal footing, improvisation and experimentation. In Antal’s opinion this method of working with actors is similar to a well-known “via negativa” principle used by Jerzy Grotowski, according to which the director first and foremost helps the actor to free him/herself from learned techniques and enables his/her individual development.

As for postdramatic modes of representation, most of which come down to awareness of presence and interaction between performers and the audience, these being the essence of “theatre situation”, Antal analyses how these principles are achieved in each of the said performances. In *Brecht - The Hardcore Machine* the audience becomes aware of its position due to being exposed to actors’ heightened energy and physical work. The audience is also exposed in the performance of *Urbi et Orbi*, never knowing if and when he/she might become a part of the performance. The issue of assuming responsibility is especially present in the performance of *Turbo Paradiso*, because in one scene it is only up to the audience whether the performance continues. In *The Beach* the audience is passivized, denied whatever possibility to influence stage action because actors undertake their position.

I believe that the above analysis confirms the starting hypothesis that the paradigm of “postdramatic theatre” has left a deep imprint in Serbian theatre

and performance studies since 2004 when the book *Postdramatic Theatre* was published in Croatian, and in joint Serbian-Croatian edition, but also since 2011 when the first edition of this conference Proceedings collection was published. Other studies on other topics concerning the postdramatic have been published: namely, *Digital Doubles: Theatre In The Screen World* by Ana Tasić (Sterijno pozorje, 2015), and which is an offshoot of her doctoral thesis *Influence and Use of Electronic Media In Postdramatic Theatre*<sup>33</sup> Most likely, there are more - however, this text does not aim to include them all in a systematic manner.

Yet, as we have shown, the biggest influence is by Lehmann's concept of the postdramatic political in theatre, because of - among other things - so many times mentioned "famous" debate on this topic started by Oliver Frlijić ... I received an unofficial, but for me quite emotional, confirmation of this claim exactly a month ago in Epidaurus, the very source of our, Western theatre tradition. There, just a few weeks after Hans-Thies Lehmann had passed, I sat with his widow and our colleague Eleni Varopoulou, Greek theatre scholar.<sup>34</sup> She told me she was under the impression how throughout Eastern Europe it was the political of the postdramatic paradigm, that had had the biggest impact on understanding contemporary theatre and performance arts.

Translated into English by Slavica Miletić  
and Maja Marsenić

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<sup>33</sup> FN 33 / Some of the theses from that research are in her text published in this collection.

<sup>34</sup> FN 34 / The conversation took place in Epidaurus on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022.