



## Postdramatic Theatre and Postdramatic Performance

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**ABSTRACT – Postdramatic Theatre and Postdramatic Performance** – Beginning with the concept of a postdramatic theatre as articulated by the German theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann, this essay considers the recent work of several major international directors – Ivo van Hove, Punchdrunk, Signa and others – as examples of postdramatic performance. It argues that what they have in common is a challenge to the traditional concept of mimesis and of the theatre world as a fictional construct distinctly separated from everyday life and its surroundings.

Keywords: **Theatre. Performance. Postdramatic. Hans-Thies Lehmann. Arts.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Théâtre Postdramatique et performance Postdramatique** – Cet essai parle du concept de théâtre postdramatique, tel qu'il a été formulé par le théoricien allemand Hans-Thies Lehmann. Les exemples de performances postdramatiques étudiées ici sont des œuvres récentes d'importants metteurs en scène de divers pays - dont, notamment, Ivo van Hove, Punchdrunk et Signa. Il est avancé que le point commun à ces œuvres est de défier le concept traditionnel de la mimésis et de l'univers théâtral en tant que construction fictive clairement isolée de la vie quotidienne et de ses circonstances. Mots-clés: **Théâtre. Performance. Postdramatique. Hans-Thies Lehmann. Arts.**

**RESUMO – Teatro Pós-dramático e Performance Pós-dramática** – Este ensaio inicia com o conceito de teatro pós-dramático conforme formulado pelo teórico alemão Hans-Thies Lehmann e nele se consideram as obras recentes de vários diretores internacionais relevantes – Ivo van Hove, Punchdrunk, Signa, entre outros – como exemplos de performance pós-dramática. Argumenta-se que o ponto comum a essas obras desafia o conceito tradicional de mimese e do universo teatral como construto fictício claramente isolado da vida cotidiana e de suas circunstâncias.

Palavras-chave: **Teatro. Performance. Pós-dramático. Hans-Thies Lehmann. Artes.**

Probably no critical term since *theatre of the absurd* has proven as attractive to theatre theorists as *postdramatic theatre*, introduced into the critical vocabulary by Hans-Thies Lehmann in 1999 (Lehmann, 1999). As with almost any critical term, especially in recent times, a major price paid for popularity has been wide application of the term, to the point that anything like a coherent and consistent definition of the term has become quite impossible. Nor, though one can certainly pin down the historical use of the term, there is no theatrical phenomenon to which it refers that cannot be traced back in theatre practice to times long before the term began to be applied.

No more popular prefix has emerged in the critical discourse of the last fifty years than post. Aside from stressing the contemporary quality of the phenomenon in question, all the post terms have in common a sense of rejecting certain key elements of an established tradition. There is often the added suggestion that the tradition being moved beyond had a fairly settled and monolithic character, which an important part of the post movement seeks to destabilize. The *de* in deconstruction serves a similar function. Probably the most useful place to begin is to consider just what is implied by the term *drama* that the postdramatic is moving beyond. Ever since the establishment of theatre studies as an academic discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century, English theatre scholars have generally made a clear distinction between theatre and drama, drama referring to the literary text and its history, and theatre to the realization of that text on the stage. Already at that period, more than a century ago, a few theorists, most notably Edward Gordon Craig (Craig, 1911), attempted to create the sort of clear separation between the two that is central to the concept of the postdramatic. However, the idea of theatre as primarily a visual realization of a pre-existing written text remained dominant through most of the twentieth century and is still dominant in many theatre cultures, most notably that of the United States, which, unlike France and Germany has seen little or nothing that might be called post-modernism in any of its major theatres. Even the semiotic theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, although they made a clear distinction between the literary text and the performance text, almost universally assumed that the latter was derived from the former, in linguistic terms translating that text into another linguistic code or codes, those of theatrical presentation.

The emancipation of the performance from the literary text is arguably the most central concern of the postdramatic, but that emancipation involves other breaks as well. On the literary side, the traditional dramatic text as we have been told ever since Aristotle (1968) is a unified narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Logical cause and effect relationships are stressed within an over-arching teleology. Thus is created the plot of the play, which Aristotle called its action (Aristotle, 1968). Unless the centrality of this structure is recognized, one may be puzzled by the fact that playwrights can and do create what are called postdramatic texts without ever getting into the question of performance. On the performance side, the term postdramatic has been applied equally often to performances that, as Craig advocated, are created without any pre-existing text and to performances, especially in the modern German theatre, whose verbal component comes directly from Shakespeare, Schiller, or Ibsen.

It is not at all coincidental that the term and indeed the concept of the postdramatic should have originated in Germany, since Germany has provided and still provides the most varied and highly developed examples of this multifaceted phenomenon. It is also an important, though less central a part of the contemporary theatre scene in those countries surrounding Germany – France, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. In the Anglo-Saxon theatres of England and America, it is scarcely known in the mainstream theatre, although both countries have produced in their experimental theatres, well outside the main theatrical culture, such important contributors to the postdramatic as the Wooster Group, Richard Foreman, the Theatre de Complicite, and the recent devised theatre movement in Britain (Lehmann, 1999). The few British or American directors that are generally regarded as working in a postdramatic mode and presented in major theatres, such as Robert Wilson and Katie Mitchell (Roesner, 2014), have, not surprisingly, created most of their recent work not in their native countries, but in Germany, which has both the resources and the interest among the theatre-going public to support such unconventional work.

The contemporary German theatre, being both the birthplace and the place of fullest development of the postdramatic, seems to me the best place to consider the current and sometimes contradictory

implications in the theatre of this concept, and to attempt to separate some of the interwoven strands, here and elsewhere, that seem involved in its application. Perhaps the most obvious place to start is with a central and much debated term in the modern German stage, the *Regietheater*, literally *director's theatre*. The term was used throughout the twentieth century, and the first director to whose work it is generally applied was Max Reinhardt at the beginning of the century. However, it took on particularly prominence from the late 1960s onward, when a new generation of directors, headed by Peter Stein, Peter Zadek, and Claus Peymann, broke with the respectful and conventional productions of classic works favored by the post-War Adenauer-era directors in favor of more engaged and political work (Carlson, 2009). The next generation, most prominently Frank Castorf at the Volksbühne, presented far more radical re-interpretations and made the term *Regietheater* a much more controversial one, as it remains today (Carlson, 2009). The term *deconstruction*, which was enjoying wide critical popularity in the early 1990s, when Castorf came to prominence, was often applied to his work and that of similar directors (Kennedy, 1993), a term which, like postdramatic today, meant many different things, from a kind of exposure and critique of the hidden political and structural assumptions of the work (often utilizing devices associated with Brecht) to (in the eyes of its critics) a willful and rather immature debasing and ridiculing of the artistic tradition.

Like Heiner Müller, often considered a leader of postdramatic playwrights, Castorf was an East German artist who was embraced by the West German avant-garde, but who viewed both the East, as it developed under the Soviets, and the West, under capitalism, as failed systems, neither fulfilling the promise that a socialist system should have offered. Politically, then, post-modernism in Germany has a distinct connection with an idealized East, but this tended to be manifested not in the positive program of something like agit-prop but in variations of commentary on the collapse of the presumed rational systems of both East and West, the former sinking into hopeless depression and the latter devoted to soulless materialism. Attacking and exposing the easy traditional assumptions and strategies of the classic texts, deeply associated with this rationalist program, had thus a profoundly political side. Audience members

who resisted this grim view of the contemporary world, or who were shocked by this irreverence for Schiller or Shakespeare, condemned as simple barbarism or adolescent joking the mixing by Castorf, his protégée Andreas Kriegenberg and others into these works of songs from the Beatles, slapstick, violent physical action, pop cultures, breaking of the illusion and even seemingly spontaneous hysterical outbursts from the actors. Mostly due to the influence of Castorf, it is this sort of theatre, the more extreme form of *Regietheater*, that characterizes what most German audiences today would call postdramatic. It normally involves mixing classic texts with all sorts of other material – literary, documentary, and commercial, but mostly contemporary – and has an almost total disregard for traditional dramatic unity or consistency of style, either textual or performative.

Central to this concept is the conflation of postdramatic with the concept of theatrical deconstruction of classic texts, but this ignores a major part of the postdramatic, which, following the advice of Craig, removes itself from the traditional dramatic text altogether. This does not mean that they do not have a text, but it may well be only what the semioticians often called a performative text, one that is created in the performance. An important part of the experimental theatre of the 1960s and 1970s was postdramatic thirty years before that term was coined, participating in a widespread rejection of traditional dramatic texts and of conventional literary and narrative structures in favor of the visual and the performative. In very general terms, one may divide the postdramatic experimentation of that period into two types, both still very much a part of the scene today and in many cases still being explored by the same artists and the same groups. First, there were the single individual artists, the master theatre directors as envisioned by Craig, unencumbered, as the *Regietheater* tradition has predominantly been, by pre-existing scripts but creators of their own total theatre world. The best known example of this is surely Robert Wilson, whose 1970 *Einstein on the Beach* remains a major example of postdramatic theatre almost thirty years before that term was conceived. Another major example would be Richard Foreman, whose first work, *Angelface*, appeared at almost the same time as Wilson's, in 1968. Both artists are still very much involved in the contemporary avant-garde, both having opened new productions within the past two months, Wilson in Berlin and Foreman in New York.

Rather more common in the 1960s and 1970s than today, however, was a kind of postdramatic theatre much more philosophically compatible with the concept of the postdramatic itself, and that is what in the early period was often called the collective creation and what since the early 1990s has been more commonly called devised theatre. Although the two terms have different connotations, they share a fundamental basic strategy, that the performance is developed not out of the artistic vision of a single master artist but out of the collective work of a group, composed in some cases only of actors and in others of actors and writers. Today these groups are often more varied still, combining actors and dancers or actors and various design people, including traditional stage designers, film and video creators, and computer designers. This sort of work was pioneered by the Living Theatre, whose influence in both America and Europe during the 1960s was enormous. The 1967 Performance Group in New York, which evolved in the Wooster Group in 1980, was the most important American example, while the People Show (1966) and Welfare State (1968) were major examples in England. Among the most important companies in France and Germany at this period were those of Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Stein, both of which were established as collectives, although in time changed to director's theatres and away from collectively created works like Mnouchkine's *1789* or Stein's *The Antiquity Project*, both presented in 1974.

Both director-dominated and group-based collaborative theatre that might be characterized as postdramatic have, from the 1960s onward, been extremely interested in one particular approach to production that seems in direct opposition to a central tenant of the postdramatic, that is, the focus on the performing, but non-mimetic body. The deconstructive approaches of a number of modern theorists have encouraged the utilization of other media as a strategy of subverting classic texts. This is of course hardly a new idea. One thinks immediately of the utilization of film and projection by directors like Piscator and Brecht to accomplish a related goal, there subverting political rather than narrative or aesthetic preconceptions. The constantly improving visual technology of the later twentieth century contributed profoundly, again especially in Germany, to providing inspiration for breaking up traditional theatrical performance and its means of mimesis by the introduction of alternate

visual dimensions, both temporally and spatially. Although film clips continued to be widely used in the work of many experimental directors of the late twentieth century, a major new dimension was added to the visual field by the introduction of live video. Castorf was one of the first to employ this technique, first to show audiences live offstage action, and later, as technology improved, to project this action on large screens above the stage and to show the creation of those images by bringing mobile and hand-held video cameras onstage so that the audience could simultaneously see both the image and the process of capturing that image. Although this sort of mixing of live action and its simultaneous video reproduction was especially associated with the Berlin Volksbühne, and with its directors Castorf and René Pollesch in the early to mid 1990s (Carlson, 2009), it has now become one of the most familiar forms of postdramatic theatre.

One of the dangers attending upon any critical term is its appropriation by scholars, artists, and increasingly today by various commercial interests among them publishers, producers, and publicists, with the result that the more popular the term becomes the more difficult it becomes to find any pattern among its various usages. This was certainly true of the so-called *theatre of the absurd*, was true of the briefly fashionable (at least on the continent) of the concept of theatre of deconstruction, and is clearly already true of the postdramatic theatre. Clearly, Lehmann saw as a central feature of the postdramatic its total rejection of the mimetic in search of the solely performative, but when we turn to Castorf and Pollesch's multi-media productions of the 1990s, or for that matter to the more recent work of Ivo van Hove and Katie Mitchell (Trencsényi, 2015; Woycicki, 2014), both of which are among those current theatre artists considered postdramatic, we find that even in such key examples, the center does not hold.

Let us take as examples recent work of these two leading European directors by way of illustration. Both began their careers in the early 1990s, and although Van Hove, typically of continental directors, was much less conventional in his early productions than Mitchell, who was noted for carefully polished productions and Stanislavskian psychological work, neither could be counted at that time among the postdramatic directors. Both turned in that direction around 2007, most notably by the extensive use of live video, very

much in the manner of Castorf a decade before, to provide audiences with multiple perspectives on the action. In neither case did this involve a break with the traditional dramatic text: Van Hove's first major work in this direction and still his most famous, was the 2007 *Roman Tragedies*, combining *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, in a marathon production that remained as faithful to the original as most conventional presentations in terms of the text and the mimetic performance of it. The production has since toured internationally, and was just given its first American production last year at New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music, where it was heralded as an outstanding example of a recent sub-division of the postdramatic, immersive theatre, about which I will say more later.

Mitchell's first major foray into mixed media production also came in 2007, with her staging of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, which is still regarded as one of the most innovative productions of the recent British stage. Since then Mitchell has worked almost exclusively in the style which she established in this production, most recently in *Night Train*, based on a German poetic novella and premiered in October of 2012 at the Cologne Schauspielhaus, and selected as one of the outstanding German productions of that year for the annual Theatertreffen in Berlin. These recent works by Mitchell have been almost literally deconstructions, but not of the dramatic or literary texts she is staging, to which she has been remarkably faithful, but of the process of representation itself. Her technique, whatever the play, remains much the same. The audience sees above the stage a continuous live video, which might be taken for a rather conventional filming of the text in question. Let us say the scene shows the heroine preparing for sleep in her railway coach bed, with a darkened landscape passing by her coach window. The film above appears as seamless realism, while on the stage below we see that the railway coach is in fact a cutaway film set, open toward the audience and the TV cameras, while the passing scenery is actually being projected on a film screen set up behind the window in this fake coach. The entire stage at floor level is made up of small cubicles representing parts of the train and a few other small sets (for non-train flashbacks) which are used in the course of the productions. When actors are not on camera, we see them moving about out of character, resting or preparing to enter the performance area. How this differs from

Castorf is that Castorf never attempted to create a *realistic* through-line of performance in his videos (though he did sometimes have extended such sequences), but used them primarily to keep providing the audience with alternative perspectives. Mitchell's multi-media work then makes a very questionable contribution to conventional ideas of the postdramatic. The dramatic text remains totally intact, and within the video version of that text totally conventional mimetically. At the same time, both text and mimesis are revealed in the simultaneous action below to be totally constructed. The work as a whole is thus not so much postdramatic as post-illusionistic, which in fact seems to me a better term for such work.

Van Hove's technique is very different and less consistent from production to production than Mitchell's. In his 2007 *The Misanthrope*, premiered in New York, Van Hove, like Mitchell, emphasized the constructed nature of the performance being shown, but in a reversed manner. Here the production on stage was mimetically traditional – although created in a modern setting with Moliere's characters, modern society members, conversing on cellphones – and the video was used to work against this mimetic world by showing us scenes for example in the greenroom, with out-of-character actors relaxing or putting on makeup, as they do onstage in Mitchell's productions. Again, neither text nor mimesis are, as Lehmann claims, abandoned, but the illusion of transparent reality that both assume in conventional theatre is exposed as constructed. One might as easily, and rather more accurately, describe it as Brechtian alienation or Derridian deconstruction, exposing how the illusion is created, rather than calling it postdramatic, but that simply makes clear the vagueness of the term.

The *Roman Tragedies* opens up another perspective on contemporary configurations of the postdramatic. Its basic use of video is much closer to that of Mitchell than that of *The Misanthrope*, in that it presents a consistent and consecutive visual narrative, not unlike the filming of a conventional Shakespearian drama, occasionally even, like Mitchell, showing us how a particular scenic effect is mechanically achieved. A much more important feature of this production however is the way that the audience is involved. If the work can be called postdramatic, as it often is, that is neither because it abandons either mimesis or faithfulness to the literary

text, as Lehmann suggests, but because it challenges the audience/performance spatial relationship that has long been an accepted part of the dramatic theatre tradition. During the opening scenes of the *Roman Tragedies*, that relationship is followed, with the audience seated in the auditorium facing the stage, though the stage also has large video screens showing the action. Not long after, the audience is invited, if they wish, to come up on the stage and share the performance space (not literally, however. They cannot in fact move directly into an ongoing scene, but can gather around to watch it from different angles including from the many sofas and chairs on the stage, suggestive of a large hotel lobby). Due to the use of various parts of the large stage and the gathering of spectators in a circle around the performers, those who remain in the auditorium often cannot see what is happening on stage except by means of the video monitors. There are also working bars offstage left and right so that spectators can go there for refreshments, turning their backs to the stage, but again, monitors over the bar allow them to see the same video view of the performance as can audience members.

In the United States this production was, as far as I know, never referred to by audiences, critics, or scholars as postdramatic. The term almost universally used was immersive, which at the present moment is by far the most popular challenge to traditional theatre practice in New York. Immersive was brought into theatre scholarship at the beginning of this century from the world of computer technology, where it has long described the apparent *immersion* of a subject in a virtual digital world.

In the Anglo-Saxon theatre, the term was brought to prominence by the British Company Punchdrunk, formed in 2000 specifically to create a new kind of theatre in which a multiple environment is created within which the audience is free to come and go as they please. It is a more open development of the earlier British form called promenade theatre, which also featured scenes in multiple locations, but in which audience members were conducted from one location to another in a pre-determined fashion.

Punchdrunk's eighth production was the 2003 *Sleep No More*, a multispace environment using motifs, characters, and some textual material from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rebecca*. This has become by far its most successful and influential

production. It was revived in Boston in 2009 and again in New York in 2011, where it is still running and unquestionably the most popular experimental theatre piece in this city. Indeed, it has become something of a cult production, with many audience members returning dozens of times, despite a ticket price of \$95, which is competitive with that of a major Broadway theatre. The term *immersive*, which Punchdrunk introduced to New York, has been since applied to dozens of experimental productions, indeed to almost any sort of production which does not utilize a conventional stage/audience separation. There is even a web guide to immersive theatre in New York, which early in June listed twenty productions claiming that description. *Theatre immersive* has also gained some currency in France and *theater immersion* in Germany, but it has become particularly seen as the foremost challenge to traditional dramatic theatre in London and New York.

Immersive theatre is widely claimed to have reversed the traditional power relationship between the performer and the public, placing the audience in control of the production. Thus, it fulfills, to the fullest extent, Jacques Rancière's vision of the Emancipated Spectator, which appeared in 2007 (Rancière, 2007), the perfect moment for it to be utilized as a major theoretical underpinning for productions like Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*. In fact, almost no so-called immersive theatre has operated in that way. Generally, such productions treat the audience in one of three ways. First, and most conservative, are productions that really should be called promenade productions, in which a small audience is taken to a number of rooms, usually in a single building, in a pre-determined order in each of which rooms they share the space with actors performing a play in a conventional texted, mimetic fashion. Second, there are productions like the *Roman Tragedies* in which a texted, mimetic performance takes place in one or several more or less contiguous locations and the audience is free to move about and observe or not observe the ongoing performance as they wish. Third, there are productions like *Sleep No More*, which offer no standard texted performance but rather a collection of decorated spaces through which the audience is free to wander as they choose. Some spaces are empty but others contain actors offering fragments of texted material. Such actions normally go on as if the spectators are not there, but occasionally an actor will pull an audience member into a private space and speak

to them intimately. Not all audience members have this experience, and those that do can neither initiate the experience nor change it. The actor remains in complete control.

A major European performance group, Signa, founded by performance artists from Austria and Sweden, has come much closer to truly emancipated performances and indeed truly postdramatic presentation, in productions like their *Ruby Town Oracle*, presented in Cologne and Berlin in 2007 and 2008. For this, Signa constructed a small village in a presumed border country (the audience needed to present passports to enter), with twenty-two houses inhabited by around forty actors. Although the actors share a common agreed-upon collective background, civil and religious, there was no story or text, and audience members were free to roam about and interact freely with the performers, pursuing the *story* of the village or not as they chose. In Berlin, the village was open continuously for nine days and spectators came and left as they wished, constructing their own experience out of the raw material of the town (Carlson, 2014). The work in Germany was not called *theater immersion*, a term not much employed in that country, but a *performance-installation*, positioning it as the theatre equivalent of installation art or environmental art, a form developed in the 1970s which encouraged spectators to experience three-dimensional artworks by moving within them.

Such installation pieces move closer to the postdramatic both by abandoning the conventional text and by allowing spectators much more control in the shaping and experiencing of the performance, but they are still committed, as has been almost all so-called immersive theatre, to what some have called the principle enemy of the postdramatic, representation itself. From Aristotle onward, mimesis has been seen as the center of the theatrical art, and the removing of the controlling text does not involve a removal of the mimetic as well, as the *Ruby Town Oracle* demonstrates, so long as the physical surroundings, and even more important, the body of the actor are still interpreted mimetically. In order truly to approach the postdramatic, Lehmann makes clear, the body must be freed from the constraints of the mimetic character, traditionally derived from the dramatic text, and set free to register as purely performative.

The clearest manifestation of this in the contemporary theatre, I would suggest, can be found in the growing importance, particularly

in Germany, but to a lesser extent in America and elsewhere in Europe as well, of the incorporation of material, human and non-human, from real life into the performance. Take away mimesis and a narrative text and all that is left to prevent the postdramatic theatre from dissolving into the raw material of everyday life is the fact that it is presented to the audience within a theatrical or performative framework. It is, to use the term Umberto Eco suggested in one of the first modern essays on theatre semiotics, ostended (Eco, 1977). In fact, semiotic theory anticipated most of what is now being presented as postdramatic theory in the often made distinction between the performative and the narrative actions of theatre as Andre Helbo suggested (Helbo, 1987), or between the semiotic and the phenomenological as Bert States would have it (States, 1985), with the latter term in both cases essentially corresponding today to the postdramatic. The essential change that has taken place in the thirty years between these theorists and Lehman is that while the semioticians saw theatre as what States called a binocular art, composed of a blending of the performative and the narrative, Lehmann's postdramatic theatre seeks to completely abandon the mimetic for the solely performative.

Lehmann is still sufficiently in the shadow of traditional aesthetics to suggest that when he speaks of this emphasis on performance, on the living, non-mimetic body and its inter-relationships with surrounding material, there remains the distinct impression that this body is doing something special, something virtuosic, in which case the postdramatic theatre would in fact be essentially indistinguishable for traditional dance. An important part of formalist criticism would support that position. What Eco (1977) and others pointed out almost forty years ago, however, was that what makes an action received as theatre by a public is not any feature of the action itself, like virtuosity, but merely the fact that it is framed or ostended as theatre. Eco's famous example (derived from C. S. Peirce) is that of a drunken man displayed on a platform by the Salvation Army. His display might well be taken as a pure example of postdramatic theatre. The drunken man is what he is, so mimesis is done away with, and there is certainly no narrative or text. Nevertheless, Eco claims the man for semiosis, on the grounds that the Salvation Army's display of him converted him into a sign

of drunkenness, communicating a plea for sobriety. A purer example was provided by perhaps the best theatre phenomenologist of the last century, Bert States, in his classic essay, *The Dog on the Stage* (States, 1983). The stage dog, like Launce in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, is stripped even of the semiotic baggage of Eco's drunken man. Not only is he non mimetic, but he is non semiotic as well, that is, he simply does whatever he does completely free of text, or rather he creates a kind of text by whatever he does. This, I would suggest, is non-dramatic theatre in its purest form. It has become theatre only due to its placement in a theatrical frame.

Such introductions of the real world in fact go far back in theatre history, but recent years have seen an unprecedented incursion of the real into the theatrical space, and although performance of this kind is not given much attention by Lehmann, I consider it, like Bert States' dog, the most striking and complete sort of postdramatic performance in the contemporary theatre. In the United States, the major pioneer in the sort of theatre that would now be styled postdramatic was surely the Wooster Group in the 1960s, which challenged traditional mimesis, representation, and textuality in favor of direct physical experience. In its European tours, it did much to encourage work of that kind. Subsequently, the Wooster Group, in a very different way, explored many similar performance concerns. The key presence of Spaulding Grey and his autobiographical performances were highly important in developing a late twentieth century tradition of postdramatic performance in the United States, particularly associated with feminist and gay theatre, in which artists denied traditional representation by talking about their own lives within their own bodies.

In the twenty-first century, performances utilizing non-mimetic material have become an important part of the avant-garde in many countries, but perhaps particularly in Germany. Perhaps the best known such group is Rimini Protokoll, formed in 1999 and devoted to creating works based on non-dramatic material drawn from the surrounding real world (Malzacher; Dreyesse, 2008). Aside from their unconventional sources, the group is primarily known for placing on stage not actors but people from outside the theatre whom they find through various, often quite elaborate casting procedures. The presentation of such figures has varied enormously in the course of

their work, but it is invariably non-mimetic and almost always draws in significant measure upon the actual life stories and experiences of the performers rather than upon any external pre-existing text. Performance here almost never implies virtuosic skill, as is usually suggested when Lehmann is talking of the physical side of the postdramatic, but on the contrary, the simple presentation of a living body. The real enemy of the postdramatic is the mimetic.

Perhaps the most striking, and to some audience members, the most disturbing of contemporary self-performance takes the postdramatic in a direction totally unanticipated by Lehmann. This is the work of performers who have some mental or physical abnormality. Disability theatre emerged in the United States in the late 1970s, with both stage and dance companies dedicated to seeking ways to incorporate disabled performers into their work. With the rise of autobiographical performance later in the century, an important part of such work became the presentation of the disability itself rather than its incorporation into another work. A key current example of such work is the 2012 piece *Disabled Theatre* by the French choreographer Jérôme Bel. Bel became during the 1990s one of the leaders of the non-dance movement in France, which in many respects is the dance equivalent of the postdramatic in theatre, based on the denial of mimesis, a pre-existing text, or traditional dance vocabulary. Since 1999, Bel has primarily created work with disabled performers. His explanation, given in a 2012 interview with Gudrun Pawelke, is fundamentally postdramatic. Disabled actors, he said, “[...] don’t try to be anything, they are” (Bel, 2012 apud Pawelke, 2012, n.p.). Thus, they are ideally suited for stated goal in all his works, which is to go beyond representation. His 2012 *Disabled Theatre*, created with eleven actors from a Zurich company, all of whom suffer from Down’s syndrome, is composed largely of these actors introducing themselves individually to the audience and discussing their life and disability.

As I have noted already, Rimini Protokoll has frequently employed non-actors of a wide variety of types in a range of productions that, like those of Bel, seek to go beyond representations. Similar work is carried on in Europe and America today by some of the best-known currently experimental groups, such as Gob Squad, She She Pop, and the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma (Bogusz, 2007; Read, 1993), all

three of which have appeared at the annual Berlin Theatertreffen, Germany remaining the center of such experimentation. Rimini Protokoll's post recent production, *Remote Berlin*, premiered in the spring of 2013, carries on a particular kind of postdramatic theatre which this group has utilized in various forms before and which suggests how even the performing body can be eliminated from postdramatic theatre. In several productions, as in *Remote Berlin*, audience members are provided with earphones and sent to wander about the streets of the city, alone or in groups, guided by remote instructions.

Clearly almost all of the people and objects they pass are not planned as part of the production (although there is always the possibility that some may be), but nevertheless they are *framed* or theatricalized by the performance situation. In one of the most memorable moments of *Remote Berlin*, the audience (about twenty-five in number) are gathered at the end of a passageway on the S-Bahn and encouraged to watch passersby in this and connecting corridors as if they were actors in a performance. Some of these *actors* ignored their *audience*, while a few waved or even took photos of the crowd of unmoving spectators wearing earpieces on their cell phones. I was reminded of a performance experience in New York by performance artist Robert Whitman in 1976 called *Light Touch*, which seated an audience on bleachers within a warehouse and then opened a curtain hiding a loading door to expose to them the street outside as if it were a theatre.

More recently, various combinations of environmental theatre variously called site-specific, promenade, and immersive theatre have in the United States and in Europe placed audiences in environments that were calculatedly ambiguous, not composed primarily or entirely of random non-mimetic materials, like those in *Remote Berlin* or *Light Touch* nor composed primarily or entirely of specifically selected non-mimetic materials, like *Sleep No More*. Instead, they presented inseparable mixtures of the two, as could be seen in Reza Abdoh's *Father Was a Peculiar Man*, set in several blocks of the New York meat-packing district in 1990, or The Foundry Theatre's *The Provenance of Beauty* in 2009, which took audience members on a bus tour of New York's South Bronx. In both of these latter cases, some of the persons and scenes observed were in fact planned as part of



the experience, others were not, and audiences were normally given little information as to which was which. It was not really so much a matter of going beyond representation as blurring the lines between representation and reality, which I think is a better description of the dynamics of such work. It is no longer enough, I think, to say that the enemy of the postdramatic is representation. The enemy is really the stability of the mimetic. The postdramatic is really neither mimetic nor non-mimetic. It is the non-mimetic framed as if it were the mimetic. Remove the frame, and not only mimesis disappears, but so does theatre itself, and what remains is life.

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