

## Introduction

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The twentieth-century theater has witnessed the gradual decline of verbocentric drama in favor of the image, the performing body and more recently the digital and media technology. Concomitantly the playwright has gradually been superseded as the initiator of a theatrical production by the director, the performer or the composer of a hybrid media spectacle. The dramatic text—traditionally known as the backbone of good theater—has been doubted and writing for the stage has often become a secondary, unskilled drafting of spoken lines or a collage of written fragments devised to fit a performance piece, mostly developed in workshop and rehearsal. From Artaud's infamous condemnation of playwrights as the reptiles of the theater, through Barthes's announcement of the death of the author, to Lehmann's claim for the state of a postdramatic theater, theorists have also been working towards the demise of both the written dramatic text and its skilled artistic creator, the playwright.

However, after many years of a theatrical practice that has denied the artistic value of words in contemporary theater, there has been a radical reevaluation and repositioning of such absolute distrust and rejection of language from the stage. The impoverishment of theater's ability for generating complex and memorable emotions and sophisticated thoughts of lasting value beyond the momentary affective arousal of immediate spectacle has already created a new reverence for skilled artistic writing, especially done for theatrical performance. The power of words to heighten for the audience sensory perception but also refine the mental process of reception has now been recognized and many contemporary playwrights (Novarina, Crimp, Churchill, Barker, Fornes, Svich, Jesurun, Greenspan, Greenberg, Overmyer, Foreman, Mee, Shawn, Wellman, Jenkin, Kennedy, Suzan-Lori Parks, Maxwell, among others) show a renewed ability to use words phenomenologically and reconstitute their performative effective-

ness. They show a strong awareness of the changing, hybrid forms of culture and theater as well as a tremendous adaptability and imaginative initiative for collaborative theater work of a different, composite nature. Obviously the word is finding a new function in today's theater and the playwright is negotiating a new meaningful position in the complex (post)reality of infinite theatrical possibilities, that is a wide spectrum of appearances and disappearances.

With this in mind, we circulated a call for papers inviting contributions tackling various aspects of the issue, such as the role of the playwright in a postdramatic era; the director as auteur; authority and auteurism in the theater; the playwright as director; the word versus the image; new (im)possibilities for collaborative theater; devising text/adapting text; the body as text; poetic language and the stage; hyperstage /hypertext; the virtual, the corporeal and the symbolic in the art of theater, and playwriting in the electronic media age. We were surprised as much as we were deeply pleased to receive such an impressive volume of outstanding contributions, especially by younger scholars.

From the papers submitted for consideration we have finally chosen for publication fifteen, which we divide into five distinct yet interrelated parts, beginning with what we thought would be the most appropriate way to open this special issue: the voice of the authors themselves. **Howard Barker** eloquently argues that the overexposure of the naked body to the relentless Utopian gaze has led to the decomposition of the subject and that the desperate enigma of the flesh can only be fully restored by the tragic text's unique ability to utter the opacity, the impenetrability of the body. **Caridad Svich**, in her own passion-ridden essay, convincingly talks about a "restless" theater, a theater that crosses borders all the time, a theater well equipped to meet the challenges of our postmodern era. In her own words: "the dramatist writes the score in blood, and the public, the spectator, need be pricked."

The four papers included in the second part, entitled "**Repositioning the Dramatic**," provide a useful theoretical and practical survey of the field, which is in full accord with the views of the writers exposed in the previous section. **Catherine Bouko's** contribution defends the flexibility of the postdramatic paradigm as theorized by Hans-Thies Lehmann and proposes a first typology of "independent auditory semiotics," whereby the musicality of the performance does not cancel the text; on the contrary it is through the incarnate "utterance of the text that the musical language is created." **David Bradby** looks at how the production of "textual material" by

contemporary French playwrights has radically changed the physiognomy of the local avant-garde performances. No longer a distinct genre, this “dissolving dramaturgy” comes closer to poetry and abstract art as it can only be fully mobilized through the voice and movement interaction of the actor(s) in the performance space. **Dimitra Kondylaki’s** essay furthers this problematic and sees the present dissolution of the dramatic form in France and its adoption of a poetic dimension as the result of a more general crisis in the literary genres. While discussing a number of contemporary French dramatists, she focuses for best illustration on Valère Novarina’s “Theatre of the Ears” and she concludes, like Bradby, with an aporetic attitude for the future of French theater. **Avra Sidiropoulou**, develops her ideas along similar lines but in a more optimistic light. She claims that the emergence of a certain type of neo-dramatic writing within the Anglo-Saxon literary canon has come to fill up the need for dramatic language to reveal its performative potential. Like Bouko, she sees this “reformed” language “as sound, as body, as music [...] gradually restoring the balance between drama and theater.”

In the next part, “*Word and Spectacle: New Configurations*,” **Virginia Dakari** turns to Beth Herst’s performance *Dark Room/Gray Scale/White Noise* and examines the tension found in the interplay of living versus digital/symbolic suffering bodies. She concludes her essay with an evaluation of the future of the dramatic text and its contested technologically-empowered hybridization. **Lisa Mendelman** focuses her attention on Suzan-Lori Parks’s play *Venus*. She explores Parks’s staged silences, called “Spells,” and their affective valence between distinct bodies. She concludes that Parks’s “Spells” allow an interaction that highlights the complex dynamics of love. **Vagelis Siropoulos’s** essay concentrates on Andrew Lloyd Webber’s compositional method in his musico-dramatic texts. Although the composer’s surface aesthetic appears as “postdramatic,” in reality his tendency is towards a more traditional dramatic musical aesthetic, which—Siropoulos contends—is responsible both for his apotheosis and his subsequent decline on the musical scene.

In the part “*Text as Texture*,” **Daphna Ben-Shaul** turns to the performance *Discovering Elijah, A Play About War* (first staged in Israel in 2001), in order to show how Ruth Kanner’s postdramatic search has generated unique directorial patterns that, while not precluding performances of written plays, rely on the power of words, mostly through adaptation of non-dramatic texts. **Núria Casado Gual’s** paper also draws inspiration from a theatrical show, *CollAge*, that focuses on old age and the inner life it may

generate. It reflects upon the boundaries and potentialities of dramaturgy, as a collage of diverse material, and performativity, as a collage of theatrical techniques, when the intricacies of the ageing process in its advanced phase are placed center stage. **Dorit Yerushalmi** turns her attention to three performance projects of the Tel Aviv University Theater Department, in order to examine the poetics that transform the performers into speaking subjects, and how the creative power of writing non-dramatic texts is revealed through reading.

The last part, entitled “*Mediascape Alterities*,” poses the biggest challenge to the return to the text which is the central theme of this volume. The papers included in this section, without becoming directly polemical or hostile to the dramatic text, openly prioritize, most energetically, the potentials of the variously technologized and mediatized stage and, if anything, they promote a hybrid, intermedial textuality, in which the “postdramatic” is certainly understood as the partial (if not the full) eclipse of the dramatic text. This part opens with **Johannes Birringer’s** and **Angeles Romero’s** essay which first tackles notions of interactivity, wearable space, participatory design, postdramatic textuality and choreography, bilinguality and translation, as well as political concerns, and then turns for substantiation to their new play, *Puntos de Fuga* (Vanishing Points). The Wooster Group’s intermedial production of *Hamlet* is the exclusive focus of **Johan Callens’s** contribution. Callens shows how the Wooster Group’s production thrives in theatrical simulation, which jeopardizes the Shakespearean text and also plays with the spectral quality of the performers’ live presence. On another level and in a very complex, imaginative manner he illuminates his cross-media discussion of textuality by using Warhol’s *mise-en-abyme* method of visual art as a meaningful, equally mournful postmodern aesthetic. The last essay of this section comes from **Jaime del Val**, who explores the issue of textuality and performativity at the crossing point between theater and the media technology. Maintaining that contemporary technology globally controls the possibilities of our imaginary by offering standardized choreographies of the body, he then analyzes the recent experimental work of REVERSO which aims at dismantling this global conformity of body anatomy and affect, by producing instead a post-anatomical relational body.

The volume concludes with a review essay by **Savas Patsalidis** and a review section (**Lissa Tyler Renaud**, **Thomas Irmer**, **Freddy Decreus**, **Marianne McDonald**).

As editors of the volume we are aware of the fact that this collection

cannot provide (and it was not intended to do so) a full coverage of the issues involved. From the very beginning our ambition was to put together a volume that would offer one more tool for the better understanding of the latest developments in drama, a field that is constantly in a state of crisis and flux. As Lehmann reminds us, and these essays make it clear, theater has become all the more an art of signifying rather than mimetic copying of everyday reality.

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