

The text will address some issues that substantially determine contemporary thinking about European drama and theatre. Thus, for example, the idea of fragmentary dramaturgy will be considered in relation to the first case of such writing, namely, the comedies of Aristophanes. The fundamental questions that should be taken into consideration are the following: relative to what idea of the "whole" (or "totality") is a certain dramatic work fragmented, and according to what logic are these fragments connected to a certain unified "whole"? Another important aspect refers to our belief that we live in an exclusive moment in history and that performativity is a distinguishing characteristic of our time. This assumption seems to be neglecting the long-standing tradition, dating back to Plato, which considered spoken language as an act in itself.

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Self-Determination Anxiety and Signs of Crisis – Fragmentation, Performativity, Postdramatic

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Fragmentation

In his renowned books, *Manierismus in der Literatur* (Mannerism in Literature) and *Die Welt als Labyrinth* (The World as a Labyrinth), Gustav René Hocke demonstrates that two tendencies in European literature can be distinguished: the *classical* tendency, which assumes an ordered Cosmos in which art forms articulate the fundamental truths of this world and the human being living in it, and the *mannerist* tendency, dominant during historical epochs when no consensus regarding these fundamental truths can be achieved, and when, consequentially, art forms become self-oriented lacking a firm and transparent world-image (*Imago Mundi*). Following Hocke's line of thinking, Dževad Karahasan argues in his essay *Mannerism in Dramatic Literature* that mannerism is characterised by subjectivism, individualism and the logic of *Phantasia*, contrary to the classical tendency determined by objectivity, a high-level of *mimesis*, with accents given to logical order of events and the sociability of the characters (9–25). According to Hocke, three epochs were dominated by mannerist tendencies in art and literature: the second half of the 5th and first half of the 4th century BC; the second half of the 16th and first half of the 17th century; and the first half of the 20th century. In Karahasan's opinion, Euripides and Aristophanes (first period), Shakespeare and Racine (second period) and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (third period) are typical representatives of European mannerism (Ibid. 10).

While classical drama remains open to the world's totality, mannerist drama closes itself to its own artistic reality. Unlike classical epochs, when drama and theatre provided knowledge of the world's reality, the epochs of crisis give birth to dramatic and theatrical works that question their role as artworks in society. It is not accidental that the first question regarding the place art occupies in society and the world is found in Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* (Βάτραχοι), in which a discussion about the role of tragedy and theatre in the lives of Athenians takes place. Based on the travel-to-the-

other-world motif, the story of Aristophanes' play is constructed to indicate that the whole can be achieved only in the form of a mosaic-like structure. Nevertheless, this construction is not mechanical but rather founded upon the totality of understanding. At the same time, the abundance of topics in the comedy suggests that Aristophanes may have anticipated the becoming of what today is called "fragmentary dramaturgy". One may assume that the status of fragmentation in the drama of our millennium could help us to articulate certain relevant questions about the state of things in contemporary drama and theatre. Notably, the tensions that had contributed to the development of fragmentation in the works of Heiner Müller, by far the most important author of fragmentary dramaturgy, are no longer existent.¹

In *The World as a Labyrinth*, Hocke argues that mannerism is not only an expression of a crisis of spirit but a coming to awareness of the fact that the world is misbalanced, that what we have is an epochal crisis (71). Even though the political circumstances during the Renaissance and after were far from idyllic, Hocke reminds us that mannerism belonging to this period was rather indifferent regarding artistic possibilities for social criticism (Ibid.). Heiner Müller was a dramatist insistent upon the sociocritical power of his art, consistently drawing parallels between art and politics. We can find an example supporting this observation in his reflections on theatre published in the book *Theater ist kontrollierter Wahnsinn* (Theatre is Controlled Madness), in which Müller repeatedly elaborates that art as the *impossible* opposes politics as *the possible*.

Commenting on the fact that Müller, as a writer coming from East Berlin, was awarded the prestigious Georg Büchner Prize for literature, Vlado Obad wrote in his "Introduction" to the special issue of the journal *Prolog*, dedicated to Müller, that the East had given the writer freedom to move around and an attractive job with a lot of spare time, while the West had given him a bank account and opened the doors of its theatres, which is the reason why Müller is often called "the German-German author" or "Deutschland Müller" (8). Obad observes that the split in the German national being can be recognised in Müller's way of life as much as in his plays (Ibid.). Furthermore, in "Poetika fragmentarnosti" (Poetics of Fragmentation), Obad says that Müller came out of Brecht's overcoat and that this explains Müller's persistent insistence on fragmentary dramaturgy (33). In Müller's words:

No dramatic literature is as rich in fragments as German. This is related to the fragmented character of our (theatre) history or with the always interrupted links between literature, theatre and the audience (society) that had resulted therein. The dissolution of a certain event into fragments sheds light on its contingent nature, hinders the loss of production in a product and commodification, and makes a field for an experiment from a copy in which the audience can cooperate. I do not believe that a story which has

¹ No other writer articulated the heritage of fragmentary dramaturgy in German and European tradition of drama as clearly and conscientiously as Heiner Müller. Besides the references presented here, we recommend considering also an article by Max Harris titled "Müller's *Cement*: Fragments of Heroic Myth".

a “head and tail” (a plot in the classical sense of the word) can still overtake reality (qtd. in Obad 33).

Studying a fragment and the phenomena of fragmentation, as Vahidin Preljević demonstrated in his book *Estetika fragmenta* (Aesthetics of the Fragment), is to beg the question of how an artwork exists as a whole since it necessarily involves the problem of a fragment’s relation to totality (47–51). We could infer that the fragmentation of the story in Aristophanes’ comedy was possible only because “the noble sister” tragedy provided it a notion of totality. In this sense it is perhaps reasonable to pose a similar question. To which totality Müller’s fragmentary dramaturgy is opposed? Vlado Obad writes about how Müller “rips” the *synthetic fragment* from the totality of reality and history and then reshapes it through montage to create new meanings and relations. Given that we now find ourselves at the “end” of a seemingly unending historical development, it is perfectly understandable that Müller does not refrain from using ruins and old monuments as building material since history can be seen as an inexhaustible quarry (Obad, “Poetika” 35).

Today, disunited Germany and the divided city in which Müller lived and worked, as the most concrete factors determining the conditions under which his plays were performed, no longer exist. Neither do the past century’s ideological, economic, political and cultural divisions of Europe exist, at least not *officially* or according to how Müller experienced them. Can thus the question of fragmentation in today’s drama help us understand the totality, whether real or imagined, standing in opposition to such an idea? Concerning the relationship between the fragment and the whole, Preljević mentions a possible categorisation of fragments that might benefit us in articulating the question of Müller’s heritage when it comes to European dramaturgy, as well as even provide a basis for a specific typology of fragmentary dramaturgy (an ambition that unfortunately surpasses the limits of this essay). The first category would, as Preljević explains, include fragments as parts of a particular totality whose integrity remains unquestionable; the second category would be reserved for those fragments that no longer belong to a particular whole but represent it, so to say – *metonymically*. The fragments of the third category would be those that have lost all relations with their original whole, so they can no longer be considered its parts (50). In addition, the fragmented character of contemporary European drama could be related to today’s insistence on novelty in terms of content, a tendency that Mikhail Bakhtin considered the most severe symptom of a crisis in aesthetic creativity. Since this crisis often manifests as perpetual self-questioning regarding the place and the role that art occupies within a culture or in life (215–216), it is worth pointing out a very important connection between Müller’s fragmentary poetics and G. R. Hocke’s understanding of mannerism.

Namely, the fragmentary dramaturgy of Heiner Müller is characterised by the au-

thor's affinity for catastrophic images, such as the Madonna suffering breast cancer in *Hamletmachine*. A stage indication in the play *Quartet* describes that the action can take place either in a salon before the French Revolution or in a bunker after World War III. Subsequently, we have a whole repertoire of postapocalyptic imagery in plays like *Verkommenes Ufer Medeamaterial Landschaft mit Argonauten* (Despoiled Shore Medea Material Landscape with Argonauts). As if the sheer abundance of these images is reason to consider Heiner Müller the most emblematic representative of mannerist drama in our age. In his book *The World as a Labyrinth*, Hocke writes that the fragmenting in our contemporary art seems to resemble the same processes in arts and literature occurring between 1550 and 1650:

“Atomisation”, this dishevelled image of our social circumstances, this higher sense of catastrophic possibilities, this greater scepticism towards traditions of teachings about redemption, this alienation of artists in our mass societies, and his soliloquies which lead to even more isolation – this is what represents that basis for necessary differentiation. It would be wrong to see “shallowness” in contemporary modernity or a fatal decay! The intensity of the ontological relationship today is undoubtedly more intensive in the spiritual sense and even less conformist in the social sense. Now, a somewhat frenetic tendency to radically break with the old forms (although not so cautiously as before) for the sake of at least sensing the absolute, the *unutterable* absolute, since it can neither be expressed nor rendered visible, most definitely originates in this genuine distress that only the guardians of the most diversely constructed world-views refuse to see, “under a make-up of empty words” (144).

Performativity

The ideas of Erika Fischer-Lichte, presented in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, also stand in relation to the general comparability of tendencies in contemporary art to the tradition of European mannerism. Fischer-Lichte's book may be treated as an attempt to define a recent reversal in European art, a reversal explained in terms of a fundamental change in how the artist and the audience relate to each other within an aesthetic experience. Art in the epochs marked by a crisis was always occupied with its framework, considered the border where art encounters reality. It is worth mentioning here that Aristophanes had once again pioneered this form of problematising the framework of the play by having the god Dionysus address the priest of his cult sitting in the audience.

Appertaining to this, Erica Fischer-Lichte writes about the change that occurred in theatre once it emancipated itself from the need to legitimise its existence by claiming to be mimetically depicting “another world”. As opposed to that, this profoundly changed theatre constitutes itself as something happening *between* the actors and the

audience. This action, dubbed *auto referential*, is what Fischer-Lichte defines as “performative”, following John Austin’s understanding of the term (14). The coincidence that Fischer-Lichte recognised the performative reversal in the arts during the same period when Austin introduced his notion to the philosophy of language suggests that the contemporary intellectual climate, marked by eager attempts to radically reformulate the long-standing bond between drama and theatre in European culture, is oblivious to the fact that European thinking about drama had always considered speech to be a form of action. In fact, from Plato to Wilhelm Von Humboldt and Mikhail Bakhtin, we can trace the persistent conviction that language is a dramatic phenomenon and that speaking means doing something to someone.

In any case, it is evident that Fischer-Lichte associates all the important notions related to the so-called “performative turn” precisely with *the framework* within the bounds of which the roles of the audience and the actors have so thoroughly changed. Marina Abramović’s performance, taken as a point of departure in reflecting the general nature of performative art, is actually an attempt to reveal the possibility of life penetrating art and vice versa.² Her famous performance, when the artist inflicted wounds on herself by cutting her skin in front of an audience to provoke action, is a showcase example of the difference between this type of art and classical art since the nature of classical aesthetic emotion is such that it annihilates itself within itself. Contrary to this aesthetic rule or principle, the performance aims to accomplish exactly the opposite: the moment when the audience rushes to save the artist from the consequences of her own artistic concept, the frame of the artwork becomes destroyed, and this (destruction) is what Fischer-Lichte takes to be a fundamental characteristic of performative art, naming it the *feed-back* that the actors and spectators create with their spontaneous yet collaborative actions. The de(con)struction of the framework implies physical contact, touch in particular, as the expression of intimacy, which always remained excluded from illusionist theatre. The same can be said of all the other notions elaborated by Fischer-Lichte, such as *corporeality*, *spatiality*, *tonality*, *temporality*, which are essential to the act of breaching and destroying the frame of an artwork. Considering what we previously thought concerning the poetics of mannerism, the conclusion is that performativity in contemporary theatre can be associated with the long line of mannerist tendencies in European art, given that mannerism always implies obsessive questioning of the limits of art.

The impact of performative art, that is, the consequence of the auto referential function regarding the recipient, confirms that performativity is a trick developed within the “school” of mannerist artistic thinking. As Fischer-Lichte argues, the abrupt change happening during a performance focalises the observer’s attention on the

² Fully conscious of the fact that there is a field of hugely diverse performing practices, here we are considering only Marina Abramović’s performance, nonetheless rightfully, since this is an example also used by Fischer-Lichte to explain the very concept of performativity, and in the words of J. M. Lotman, “to explain a concept is to point to its origins”.

very process of their perception and its dynamics. The observer begins to perceive themselves as an observer, and this produces new meanings that influence the dynamics of perceptual relationships (184). The notion of *liminality* is associated with this act of rendering the frame problematic, and the same goes with the issue of the limits of the *mise-en-scène*:

Thus I shall define staging as the process of planning (including chance operations and emergent phenomena in rehearsal), testing, and determining strategies which aim at bringing forth the performance's materiality. On the one hand, these strategies create presence and physicality; on the other, they allow for open, experimental, and ludic spaces for unplanned and un-staged behavior, actions, and events. The *mise en scène* provides a strong framework for the performance and the feedback loop's autopoiesis but is nonetheless unable to determine or control the autopoietic process. The concept of staging thus always already includes a moment of reflection on its own limits (Fischer-Lichte 188).

Violation of a taboo, in this instance, the taboo of inflicting wounds on oneself, or using animals such as snakes and coyotes, also serves the purpose mannerist art was always fond of. Excess, shocking the audience, surprising the observer – all of this was always a feature of mannerist poetics. The notion used by Fischer-Lichte to describe performativity as the “re-enchantment of the world” (Ibid. 207) is, in fact, one of these features as well, having in mind that concepts like *fascinating* and *wonderful* are deeply rooted in the very same tradition of mannerist poetics. The central idea proposed by Russian formalists, namely, that an artwork finds its purpose in *estranging* our everyday experiences and perceptions, developed through intimate contact between literary theory and the practice of Russian avant-garde, is also an essentially mannerist standpoint concerning what art is supposed to be. When Erika Fischer-Lichte concludes in the final pages of her book that the aesthetic of performative art is a “poetics of contesting”, it is an indirect evocation of an understanding of the avant-garde once proposed by Aleksander Flaker. Besides the obvious fact that art and literature of the avant-garde consider themselves in radical opposition to everything classical, it is worth reminding, for instance, that the Russian avant-garde was the first to introduce the idea of involving authors' privacy into the realm of artistic creativity. Furthermore, performative art, as understood by Fischer-Lichte, “asks everyone to act in life as in a performance” (Ibid. 207). Similarly, as Hocke demonstrated in the concluding chapters of his book, man was a privileged topic for the older tradition of mannerist art, always prone to conceiving him as an “artistic fiction”.

The Postdramatic

Explaining his idea of postdramatic theatre, in a chapter of his book named “Synesthesia”, Hans-Thies Lehmann states:

It can hardly be overlooked that there are stylistic traits in the new theatre that have been seen as attributes of the tradition of mannerism: an aversion to organic closure, a tendency towards the extreme, distortion, unsettling uncertainty and paradox. The aesthetic of metamorphosis, as it is realized in Wilson’s work in an exemplary manner, can also be read as an indication of a mannerist use of signs. In addition, there is the mannerist principle of equivalency: instead of contiguity, as it presents itself in dramatic narration (A is connected to B, B in turn to C, so that they form a line or sequence), one finds disparate heterogeneity, in which any one detail seems to be able to take the place of any other (84).

The very fact that Lehmann is conscious of the possibility that the postdramatic could be included in the tradition of mannerist poetics but, in the end, decides against considering this “continuity in discontinuity” is a confirmation that he is not interested in drawing similarities between the postdramatic and the mannerist, but rather pointing out the differences between the postdramatic and the classical. For instance, mentioning his favourite author, Robert Wilson, Lehmann uses the expression “postanthropocentric theatre”, also opposed to any classical idea of art, bearing in mind that in classical poetics, as Mikhail Bakhtin recognises, man can be nothing other than the very centre of artistic perspective (Ibid. 200), always represented in his most concrete existence. One could notice that throughout his book Lehmann attempts to conduct a thorough analysis of those elements by which the post-dramatic theatre can be clearly distinguished from the classical theatre, insisting on *dance, slow motion, sculpture, animals, use of media, virtual presence, video-installation*, essentially the concepts that took over the role drama used to occupy in European theatre. In the manner in which Euripides had blended elements of different genres, introducing thereby extremely comical images in the noble tragic form, but also insisting on the use of machines (*Deus ex machina*) for the sake of *dénoûment*, this particular mixture of various media may be a general feature of mannerism of our own epoch.

The ancient Greek religion provided the contextual framework within which the performances of Aeschylus’ and Sophocles’ tragedies were taking place. After the collapse of this world-image that enabled the Cosmos to vitally transform itself through means of tragic *mythos* and man, on the other hand, to acquire knowledge of himself and his position in the world, what appeared was actually the first mannerist poetics in search of a new artistic framework. As Friedrich Nietzsche recognises in his famous work *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music), Euripides appears on the scene as the culprit of tragedy’s death,

being the author whose work was followed by the rise of the “theoretical man”, seeking not only to know what Being is but also wanting to correct it. As a result of this anti-Dionysian spirit, as Nietzsche argues, what appeared on the scene was the image of a character. Instead of an eternal type, the individual took over the scene; instead of myth – the artist’s force of imitation; the phenomenon triumphs over the principle, and a theoretical world arises in which scientific knowledge will eventually become more important than the art reflecting the *nomos* of the world (Nietzsche 92–106). Perhaps, this symptom of the “theoretical” in what Lehmann named *the pre-dramatic theatre* is today indeed present in what we have as our *postdramatic theatre*, especially because this theatre is also the heritage of 19th-century modernity in which the figure of the stage director appeared to guarantee the totality of the artwork without taking part in it in any material (corporeal) sense as if *meta-physically*?

Elaborating on the difference between the dramatic and the postdramatic, Lehmann argues that drama always constituted a framework for itself more than it required something else to provide a certain framework for it (213). Postdramatic theatre, according to Lehmann, cannot, therefore, use a framework enabling a reflection of a certain *Imago Mundi*. Instead, postdramatic theatre reaches out toward a strategy of *multiplying frameworks* (Ibid. 214), a feature also associated with the art of mannerism, given that *the labyrinth*, being one of Hocke’s important metaphors, can be treated as a kind of self-sufficient multiplication of frameworks.

In an important part of his book, where he discusses the relation to the *mythos* and prepares his *panorama of postdramatic theatre*, Lehmann states that postdramatic theatre is the theatre of dynamical scenes which do not present any action whatsoever (88). Reminding us of the fact that theatrical practice always included an aspect of ceremony, Lehmann argues that an important feature of the postdramatic theatre is actually the emancipation of the formal element of the ceremony from all religious and cultural connotations, emphasising the aesthetic quality of the theatrical *for its own sake* (90). Taking the ceremony as one of the distinguished expressions of the postdramatic theatre, Lehmann establishes a connection between Jean Genet as the advocate of transforming the theatre into a ceremony and Heiner Müller as the most important representative of postdramatic writing. This connection can be observed in Genet’s favourite topics as well – the double, the mirror and the triumph of sleep over reality (Ibid. 91), which are also symptomatic of mannerist poetics: the mirror can be considered a central motif of mannerist art; Hocke emphasises that the primacy of sleep over reality is an essential principle of all mannerisms. Yet, perhaps the most important characteristic common to both mannerism and the postdramatic theatre, as defined by Lehmann, could be recognised in that which motivated Jean Genet to reach out to the authors such as Müller – the idea that theatre is a kind of a “dialog with the dead” (Ibid.) Beginning with Aristophanes’ play *The Frogs*, in which

we have a competition between two dead tragic poets at the end of Dionysus' travel to the other world, it seems that in mannerist drama the dead characters have a more significant place than the living.

In his *Uvod u suvremenu teatrologiju II* (Introduction to Contemporary Theatre Studies II), Boris Senker argues that Lehmann's division of the history of theatre on the beginning (pre-dramatic theatre), the middle (the dramatic theatre) and the end (post-dramatic theatre) suggests that the postdramatic theatre is the last stage in the long history of western theatre (358). As Jeleazar Meletinski states in his work *On Literary Archetypes*, the myth of creation is the fundamental myth – the myth par excellence – while the eschatological myth is merely an inverted creation-myth, narrating the temporary triumph of chaos (by means of flood, fire, etc.), the end of the world or the end of a cosmic epoch (21). According to that, perhaps the myth so fundamental to the European theatre, telling the story about death and rebirth, still determines the character of our theatre. Corresponding to the ambivalence of the god Dionysus, are we perhaps witnessing a transformation into another “mask” that covers “the image of man” in today's theatre?

Today it is perhaps reasonable to ask the question: have the concepts such as *the fragmentary*, *performativity* and *postdramatic* passed from the stage of mere description to forming somewhat normative poetics?³ Despite the rare appearance of voices who question the meaning of these concepts, the repertoires of regional and European theatres indicate that these concepts are beginning to have connotations of self-evident value, especially if the attitude of these theatres towards drama authors is to be considered. In the first chapters of his book *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*, Robert Weimann writes that today “both the institution of authorship and the stability of the text have become controversial issues”, adding immediately that:

“Performance” has advanced to something like an ubiquitous concept which we use either to sound, or intercept our discontent with, the epistemology of representation. But even though “performance” and the “performative” have come close to constituting a new paradigm bridging several disciplines, the study of theatrical performance has, somehow, remained in the doldrums (1).

Moreover, what we perhaps need today is to conceive an alternative history of European theatre, which would include forms such as *mym*, *atelana* and *Commedia dell'arte*, all of those theatrical forms that do not necessarily take performance to be merely staging of drama nor do they see dramatic plays as fundamental to performing arts. In this way, as suggested by Florence Dupont in her book *Aristote ou le vampire du*

³ To emphasise, the concepts are here considered merely as symptoms indicating the possibility to associate “our” crisis with other crises, which serves as a modest invitation to re-examine them in a broader historical context.

theatre occidental (Aristotle or Vampire of Western Theatre), a theatre director could be a *chorodidaskalos* and not a dramaturg (174), enabling thereby a reassessment of the relationship between literature and theatre, or creating a possibility for us who desire theatre as a holiday to find a truly artistic theatre (176). Perhaps this could make us capable of thinking about our contemporary theatre as one of many examples of that irregular mannerist line of European theatre, belonging to an epoch not as exclusive as it may seem to us at first sight. Or, should we conclude that for a better understanding of our present, we still lack a firm framework provided by a historical distance? Perhaps it is the bond between theatre and life that prevents us from defining our contemporary state precisely, given that both theatre and life take place within the present moment. And as we know from experience, the present cannot be reflected but only lived, even though our understanding of it arrives "last of all".

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