

**„DRAMA” AND „POST-DRAMA”: CHANGE OF PARADIGM****„DRAMA” ȘI „POST-DRAMA”: SCHIMBAREA PARADIGMEI****VICTORIA ALESENKOVA<sup>1</sup>,**Ph.D. in Art Criticism, Senior Researcher,  
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*The purpose of the article is to review some aspects of reforming the historical framework, the prerequisites and prospects for the development of European theater art. The attempt to consider the evolution of theater as a natural cyclical process of myth transformation through the phase of dramatic form constitutes a reasonable addition to the theory of the German scientist H.-T. Lehmann.*

**Keywords:** *drama, post-drama, post-dramatic theater, theatrical art, theater studies*

*Scopul articolului este de a trece în revistă câteva aspecte teoretice ale reformei cadrului istoric, ale premiselor și perspectivei dezvoltării artei teatrale europene. Încercarea de a urmări evoluția artei teatrale ca un proces ciclic natural de transformare a mitului prin faza unei forme dramatice constituie o completare rezonabilă la teoria cercetătorului german H.-T. Lehmann.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *dramă, post-dramă, teatru post-dramatic, artă teatrală, studii de teatru*

**Introduction**

The concept of post-drama, presented at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the monograph *Post-dramatic Theater* by H.-T. Lehmann opens the prospect of expanding a traditional theoretical model of drama theater by introducing new concepts based on the study of natural trends and properties of modern European theater practice. Lehman's research touches on one of the important theoretical questions widely discussed in modern theater studies: what should the term „drama” imply as opposed to the scope of the „post-drama” paradigm, and what is the relationship between drama and theater, text and theatricality. According to Lehmann, the distance between theater and drama continues to increase in favor of theater that is not based on „drama” [1].

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### Interpretation of the concepts

When studying the processes that determine the state of European art in general and theatrical art in particular, it should be borne in mind that they are subject to the same universal laws of Nature like other processes, for example, like the development of history and civilization, or the development of a particular person in the context of his life. The principle of intersection of spaces is the basis for the emergence of new forms and meanings, just like the principle of crossing is the basis of selection. The close and understandable three-part division of any evolving matter that has the beginning, the middle and the end, reflected in the famous Sphinx riddle about a man, as a metaphorical division of his life into morning, day, and evening, is firmly fixed in the European cultural consciousness. The signs of development, flourishing, and decay can be observed in any form of life, including the theater. It is therefore not surprising that H.-T. Lehmann, on the basis of this universal formula, divided the entire existence of Western theater into three periods – „pre-drama” (the Ancient theatre and the Medieval theatre, mainly ancient Greek tragedy), the actual „drama” (the theatre of the Renaissance until the mid-twentieth century, first of all Racine’s drama) and „post-drama” (contemporary theatre starting from the 1970s, particularly the visual dramaturgy of R. Wilson)

The fact of such three-part division, which Lehmann uses as a defining term for the modern theatrical process, builds up the logic, following which pre-drama corresponds to the origin of drama, drama to its flourishing, and post-drama to the decay of the life cycle of what is understood as „drama theatre”. Obviously, assessing the theatrical process, Lehmann considers it as a linear one, in a horizontal plane, not taking into account that the same universal model of three-part division can be applied vertically, adding new parameters for a more objective study of reasons and prospects for the qualitative development of theatrical art.

Spaces interact with each other being subject to the law of attraction and repulsion, alternately changing one cycle to another. At the same time, a result of compression is an active process of maximum concentration of matter in space, which leads to a smooth, slow movement with the inevitable „dead point” (phase fixing the generally accepted uniform standards and canons), and the subsequent action of the revolutionary forces, blowing up a space for the opposite movement – the extension in which the tension between the spaces creates potential conditions for new connections of elements, a new group of creative forces, subsequently diminishing again as the distance between the poles grows.

It is assumed that any intersecting spaces in the vertical plane have changeable upper and lower limits, similar to the upper and lower blood pressure in a living organism, which, when transferred to the object of theatrical art:

1) define the boundaries of aesthetic norms of „high” and „low”, which in the period of Antiquity were reflected in the polarity of the genres of tragedy and comedy, described by Aristotle in „*Poetics*”;

2) indicate the vital state of an object proportionally to the qualitative distance between the categories „high” and „low” in the cycle in three phases – **(a)** critical values of the upper and lower limits on the verge of breaking ties, **(b)** state of harmonious balance or „Golden mean” and **(c)** the state of maximum alignment („dead point” phase or loss of life).

No doubt, the beginning of a new cycle is accompanied by an increase in tension, which turns into an energy impulse, a kind of explosion that stimulates the movement to a new state of harmonious balance. Thus natural sequence of phases is as follows **(a)-(b)-(c)-(b)-(a)**.

Consequently, the Ancient theatre, named by Lehmann „pre-drama” taking as a basis the material of architectural, archaeological and literary artifacts of the time, is an example of a harmonious distribution of powers and functions between the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the ugly, and corresponds to the notion „the Golden mean” **(b)**, and hence to the phase of flourishing in the horizontal dimension, while the period that Lehmann counts down from the Renaissance, or more exactly from the canonization of the drama laws by French Classicism, is in fact the phase of the „dead point” **(c)**, the end of the cycle.

The „Poetic art” („Art poétique”) of N. Boileau, which instilled the dry recommendations of the Abbe d’Aubignac on the living ideas of Horace and Aristotle, was turned into a dogmatic prescription. Theater art, in its attempt to revive archaic ideals of beauty, reflected only the shadow of Hellas, restoring the heritage of Antiquity through the interpretation and re-interpretation of recommended (mostly mythological) subjects, more and more immersing the concept of drama as theater in the concept of drama as a genre. Against the background of this immersion, the absorption of the ancient myth by the Christian one was imperceptibly taking place, which in its turn led to inevitable substitution of sacred forms for profane ones. In fact, the semantic space of a myth shrank into a word.

It becomes obvious that the period defined as „drama” is the point of complete „enslavement” of the theater to the text, the end of theatricality, the dead point of theatrical action, which is opposed by the flourishing of literature (narrative) and the subordination of the stage presentation to the literary work. As a result, it seems natural that the concept of „drama” broke away from the original meaning of „action”. In many European languages it merged with the concept of the verbal and visual realization of the play, and temporarily acquired the meaning of the theater as such. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a German theater critic E. Fischer-Lichte in the famous work „*Semiotics of theater*” even uses the term „translation” of a literary text into a stage one: „*We define the transformation of a drama into a performance as a process of translation, < ... > words are ‘translated’ into gestures*” [2 p. 193].

It does not just „*indicate a close relationship and exchange between theatre and text*” [3 p. 29], but is an evidence of mutual immersion and uniformity of semantic spaces of text and theatre, words and actions, which allows to consider the post-dramatic tendency not as a shortage of dramatic action stated by Lehman, but as the use of the new quality theatre actions for the destruction of the framework which has been prescribed for accurate transcriptions of original texts from literary language into stage language; as an impulse to divide the semantic spaces of text and theater by contrasting the director’s and the author’s semantic spaces.

Theatre existence and development is not a linear process. It can be represented graphically by means of a cyclic intersection of sinusoidal curves, where theatricality is related to the text the same way the action is related to the word, and the way directing is related to drama. The pre-drama period is characterized by the convergence of the concepts of action and word, the drama period is a phase of maximum convergence that led to the replacement of action with a word, and the post-drama period corresponds to the reverse process of concepts’ re-polarization, when the word is not only duplicated, but also completely transformed into action.

Studying the ancient theater, the Russian art critic Adr. Piotrovsky noted that „*the theater <...> contains contradictions that cause constant displacements, interactions, collisions, and struggles of its various elements*” [3 p. 14], which allows viewing the revision of some generally accepted facts as a completely natural process. In general, it becomes obvious that the historical reference point of the theater’s existence is not the ancient Greek theater. Thus, the period of pre-drama can be considered as a long process of crystallization of the mystery forms of the theater into dramatic ones, as a gradual compression of the transcendental myth to the framework of the plot. Therefore, during the post-drama period, we can assume a tendency to expand the dramatic myth into the sacred forms of the new mystery. At the same time, „*involution reversals*” towards neo-drama will inevitably take place, and the path of evolutionary expansion will necessarily be accompanied by the action of opposing forces – the constructive and destructive aspects of the post-drama theater, expressed by modernist and postmodernist trends.

Lehman’s identification of the beginning of the post-drama period with the 1970s seems to be the result of a certain shift in the natural course of theatrical art development, caused by the two world wars and other socio-ideological cataclysms. It is obvious that „*such an internal division, such*

a split” [4 p. 400] of classical forms in art and science, which, like volcanic eruptions, threw into the world a firework of contradictory, bright and short-term trends and directions, coincides with the feeling of a deep crisis of European culture and creativity at the rise of the century, described by O. Spengler and N. Berdyaev as „the decline of Europe”, the end of the Renaissance and the change of epochs. Therefore, the European theater art of the first half of the last century, marked by the director’s laboratories of E. Piscator and M. Reinhardt, G. Craig and Vs. Meyerhold, the ideas of Russian symbolism and opposed to them experiments of surrealism and Dadaism, reflected in the metaphysical anticipation of the theater of the future by A. Artaud and the revolutionary ideas of the theater of the absurd, should certainly be considered as a powerful potential that contributed to the formation of the modern post-drama theater.

According to the Russian poet and philosopher Vl. Solovyov, the art that has reached the point of perfection in its development, no longer needs to be improved, like ancient Greek sculpture, for example. Doesn’t it mean that the drama, which has passed the point of flourishing, should redirect creative energy to the development of new kinds of art? In the “*General sense of art*” Solovyov writes: „*Art in general is the area of the ideas’ embodiment but not the place of their initial origin*” [5 p. 89] which means that the embodiment of ideas in the predominantly non-verbal form of post-drama theater can be considered as a natural development of theatrical art in the field of directing.

### Conclusion

According to Lehman’s interpretation, the theater has been dying in the drama for about four hundred years, but the revival of theatricality by the creative forces of the director-artist (as opposed to the director-playwright and the director-interpreter) leads to the formation of the art of directing as an independent multi-faceted phenomenon, which can be seen in the European theater as a certain trend of qualitative interaction between directing and other types of art. There are known examples of a director-scenographer (from T. Kantor to D. Borovsky and D. Krymov), a director-conductor (from K. Marthaler and R. Wilson to the idea of musicalization of all theatrical expressive means), a director-choreographer (the development of plastic drama from P. Bausch to J. Thierree, A. Holina, and many others) and, of course, we should mention such representatives of the post-dramatic vector in directing as P. Brook, E. Nekrošius, A. Vasiliev, S. Purkarete, R. Lepage, A. Zholdak, and other masters of syncretic forms of expression. „*The growing importance of directing is an irreversible phenomenon*” [1 p. 83], confirms Lehman himself.

Thus, the relevance of the revision of the historical framework, prerequisites and prospects of the theatrical art development in the curriculum of higher education institutions teaching subjects connected with the history and theory of the theater as well as theater criticism, can be considered overdue. Professional terminology, updated conceptual basis and an objective perception of the problems of the modern theater contribute to an adequate study of creative processes.

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