

## Performance and the public sphere in the age of post-truth politics

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Facts are not what they used to be. Once they could be proven or disproven. Shortly after the election of Donald Trump but we were informed by the, senior adviser of the President of the United States, Kellyanne Conway, that there also exist 'alternative facts'. This statement represents 'official' confirmation that there exists in the White House an alternative epistemological system that runs parallel to the one most of us occupy. It is the philosophical world of the alternative right and can be summarised with the formula: what you want to know is what you see. The parallel or alternative worlds of conspiracy theorists have been around for a long time but now they occupy key positions in the US administration. The world constructed around the principal of alternative facts is highly subjective and unstable (because it is mainly beholden to the president's twitters), - but clearly it is one that the world will need to get used to. It is constructivism at its most simplistic but also effective and it will I am sure have far-reaching effects on the public sphere, the realm where opinions are debated, and formed and where intersubjective agreement on facts are a crucial component of the political and ethical opinion formation process. The public sphere is/was? a keystone of liberal democracy, so all opponents of this political system (and there are many) have a vested interest in destabilising its very foundations.

'Alternative facts' are the logical consequence of a broader development within the media landscape, which is being increasingly dominated by fake news disseminated through social media. It is another variation of the destabilising strategy popular amongst lobby groups opposing the idea of climate change, globalization, free-trade agreements or many

other projects, especially of a transnational nature, including the European project.

My intervention asks how theatre can position itself in a media landscape conditioned by social media-driven fake news, the new norm of 'post-truth' and 'post-factual' politics, and state-funded internet trolls. Post-factual was judged Germany's anti-word of 2016. If the distinction between fact and fiction, truth and untruth is no longer of importance for holders of high political offices, if the main point of political statements is affective, to 'fire up voters', rather than to propose or argue evidential statements, then where does this leave the public sphere, the arena of reasoned debate? And for theatre makers perhaps the more pressing question: if post-factual politics have now colonized the realm of the fictional, where does this leave us and them? Can the response be a shift towards post-fictional performance? I will argue that the traditional institutional split between private and publically financed organisations devoted to the 'fictional', and media organisations devoted to the 'factual', has become obsolete. We need to rethink theatre and performance in terms of the 'post-fictional' and thereby reformulate their relationship to the public sphere.

I shall do this in three steps. In the first section I will discuss the status of the fictional and the post-fictional in the context of theatre and performance. In the second part of the paper I will look at some recent examples of post-fictional theatre and in the third part, I will discuss the institutional implications this move has or may have.

**#What do I mean by Post-Fictional?**

There exists a long-standing relationship between theatre and the fictional, although the latter term is seldom used in reference to theatre. Fiction normally refers to imaginative prose writing, where 'any relationship to persons living or dead it is entirely coincidental'. Fiction is

utilized by several media and art forms where it refers to the epistemological status of the world and characters represented, whether in a novel, play or film. Almost all theatre we see, whether drama, Opera or ballet, belongs to the realm of the fictional. Even if the subject is historical or documentary the fictional mode of perception still usually pertains. Nevertheless, we do not use this term but prefer cognate ones such as illusion, mimesis, as-if, or play, the cognitive process by which spectators agree to enter the fictional world: the willing suspension of disbelief.<sup>1</sup> Fiction and illusion are the Siamese twins of aesthetics, with the former applied to writing and the latter to performance. In both however imaginative diegetic worlds are created that the reader/spectator agrees to inhabit.

The fundamental distinction between the fictional stories represented in plays and the factual ones in histories goes back to Aristotle who introduced the famous distinction between things that have happened (history) and those that could happen (poetry), between the particular of history and the universals of poetry.

The famous passage reads:<sup>2</sup>

For the difference between the historian and the poet is not in the presenting accounts that are versified or not versified (...) The difference is this: the other the kind of things that can happen. And in fact that is why the writing of poetry is a more philosophical activity, and one to be taken more seriously, than the writing of history; for poetry tells us rather the universals, history of the particulars.

Less often cited, but more pertinent for our question is the next passage:

#But nevertheless the fact remains that even among our tragedies some have one or two familiar names and the rest fictitious, and some have none, for example Agathon's *Antheus*; for in that play the names are as fictitious as the happenings, and it is none the less enjoyed.

In his commentary Gerald <sup>3</sup>Else remarks that this indicates 'Aristotle's awareness of a fundamental fact: that in Greek tragedy the action was likely to be partly or wholly fictitious even if the names were known' and suggests that in fact in most tragedies 'the plot is almost entirely *pepoiηmenon*, (*πεπποιημένον*) i.e. made (up) or invented, the root word being [ποιέω](#), *poiéo*, i.e. *poiesis*.

This distinction has remained largely unquestioned in theatre. But the term fiction has another, broader meaning beyond the creation of imaginative worlds of story-telling. In this context fiction is the opposite of the factual and the truthful. Indeed it is difficult to think about the category of the fictional without its 'other', the factual and the truthful in order to define and demarcate it. The OED defines fiction as 'invention as opposed to fact'. It cites the 18<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher Lord Shaftesbury: 'Truth is the most powerful thing in the World, since even Fiction itself must be govern'd by it.'<sup>4</sup>

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But must it? Art has always enjoyed the privilege of creating and defining truth after its own fashion, especially since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Once art (which I define here in all-encompassing terms to include theatre) freed itself from the obligation to represent nature mimetically, it redefined its

frames of reference and value: art is only beholden to truth, not nature, and in the world of art truth is fundamentally subjective, defined by the artist him or herself. All the art-isms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century - expressionism, Dadaism, surrealism etc - follow this principle.

This principle defined the place of art in a highly specialized modern world: it created an autonomous sphere for itself where its own truths reigned supreme. In other realms or systems - politics, science, education - the concept of truth became marginalized or more precisely conflated with the factual: agreement on basic facts was essential in these fields and this process was enacted in both scientific communities and in the wider public sphere of the media. This division of responsibility led ineluctably to a marginalization of art within the wider public sphere. This is a key argument in my book *The theatrical public sphere*. As theatre in Western societies gained increasing autonomy and freedom from censorship (because its fictional worlds were answerable only to subjective truth not objective facts) so too did it lose its function as an interlocutor in the public sphere where facts matter.

This division of tasks in highly differentiated societies has now been upset. Politicians of the alternative right have clearly colonized the artistic realm of subjective truth, following the artistic principle of: la vérité, c'est moi.

So how can a politically inflected art and theatre respond to this new state of affairs? Where is their proper sphere now? I want to argue that theatre has already begun to leave the subjunctive realm of illusion, mimesis and as-if and is beginning to occupy a new domain that I want to term the post-fictional. That this process is already well under way can be gleaned from a brief glance at any experimental theatre festival in Europe.

Post-fictional theatre can be seen as outgrowth and radicalization of what Hans-Thies Lehmann described as Postdramatic Theatre at the end of the last century. Postdramatic theatre includes, however, the fictional, albeit under different conditions of representation. The real, or nonfictional, in Lehmann's understanding, is something that 'erupts' into the performance, destabilizes our perception, rather than framing it entirely: 'an overcoming of the principles of mimesis and fiction'.<sup>5</sup>

Lehmann also argues that liveness of theatrical presentation per se tends to counteract and destabilize the construction of dramatic fictions; postdramatic theatre in this sense is a radicalization of something which is inherent in the medium but which under normal circumstances only manifests itself in isolated moments and 'mishaps' (101).

Because postdramatic theatre usually eschews clear coordinates of narrative and character it often requires considerable effort on the part of spectators to decode meanings and even make sense of what they see. In other words, postdramatic theatre seeks to shift the production of coherent meaning from the performance to the spectator. The main protagonists of postdramatic theatre are familiar, - Robert Wilson, Tadeusz Kantor and Heiner Müller represent a first wave; groups and artists such as the Wooster Group, Jan Fabre, Jan Lauwers, and Forced Entertainment became a dominant presence in the late 1980s and 1990s. Their work has pushed and blurred the boundaries of theatre and performance art so that today a sharp distinction between the two genres is becoming obsolete. All these artists, however, still work or worked within a fictional frame.

Post-Fictional Theatre on the other hand dispenses entirely with the cognitive apparatus required to process theatre in a fictional mode. The real does not 'erupt' into it but forms the cognitive frame to begin with. It emphasizes knowledge acquisition, not aesthetic experience or it

redefines aesthetic experience to include, even privilege knowledge acquisition. Alternatively, it might define an ethical predicament and play this through in a counter-factual manner.

Most of Rimini Protokoll's work falls into this category, as does the work of Milo Rau and all the so-called lecture-performances, discourse theatre, docu-theatre, and perhaps verbatim theatre? The names proliferate. Much of this work is discussed with categories such as 'the real' or 'authenticity', as if either termed could be adequately grasped. As Lehmann would argue: all theatre is real, always, it just that we have evolved a use of it that privileges the construction of dramatic fictions. It is the systematic deconstruction of the fictional frame that describes much recent work and which is therefore the more productive term to 'worry' about.

To illustrate what I mean I shall briefly reference three recent performances I witnessed at the Munich Kammerspiele. The fact that they took place there, although they were not always conceived for that theatre, is important in respect to the third section of my talk, the question of institutional aesthetics.

## 2. Examples

#My first example: Rimini Protokoll's Mein Kampf Volume 1&2

RP needs no introduction. Their concepts have been extensively described but they are various, multi-faceted and cannot be reduced to one form or format. Nevertheless what links their various projects is a concern with eliminating illusion or what I would call fiction. There are many ways they do this; perhaps the most famous is the device of inviting 'experts' to be the main performers: They are non-actors who have some kind of expertise for the topic in hand.

In this case: Sibylla Flügge, oldest expert, professor of law, women's rights, Anna Gilsbach, also a lawyer specializing in copyright law, Matthias Hageböck, book restorer, Alon Kraus, a lawyer from Tel Aviv, Christian Spremberg, who is blind and gives braille readings (A braille version of the book was produced), and Volkan T error, a Turkish hiphop artist.

The performance consists of these experts explaining their relationship to the book, which on the eve 2015 was about to be released into freedom from copyright, in the possession of the State of Bavaria, expired.

## VIDEO

One review: Das ist keine große Schauspielkunst, aber das Thema dieses Abends ist ja auch die bebilderte Erzählung der Recherche, die das Ensemble gemeinsam unternommen hat.<sup>6</sup>

Theatre performance as collaborative research project is a fairly accurate description of what you see.

We learn a lot in the course of the evening, for example, Dabei kamen erstaunlich viele Exemplare des Buches zum Vorschein. Hitler war auch ein Bestsellerautor, der durch seine frühe Kampfschrift zum Tantiemen-Millionär wurde. Über zwölf Millionen Exemplare wurden bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs gedruckt, später gab es illegale Ausgaben in Deutschland und Übersetzungen in viele andere Sprachen, auch Hebräisch. Der Theaterabend spürt in vielen kurzen Szenen der Frage nach, was die Faszination dieses Buches ausmacht, von dem immer behauptet wird, es sei zwar besessen, aber nicht gelesen worden. Mit Analysen hält sich der Abend zurück. Rimini Protokoll will nicht belehren, sondern schickt das Publikum gemeinsam mit den Akteuren auf eine Gedankenreise. Und es ist den Theatermachern kein bisschen peinlich, wenn sie die Neugier wecken, sich selbst mit diesem Buch auseinanderzusetzen. Kurz vor dem Ablauf der Urheber-Schutzfrist wirbt dieser Abend für Gelassenheit: Die Lektüre von „Mein Kampf“ kann helfen, Geschichte zu verstehen. Neue Nazis wird sie nicht rekrutieren.

At the Kammerspiele in repertoire in the main theatre.

My second example also deals with Germany's Nazi past. It is an example of 'documentary theatre' called *Stolpersteine*, Stumbling Blocks, directed by Hans-Werner Kroesinger, an early graduate from Giessen, like Rimini Protokoll. It was a guest performance from the State Theatre in Karlsruhe, a production that was invited to Theatertreffen 2016. It will tour to China this year. The title references a long-term artistic project by Gunter Demnig where small brass paving stones are put into the street

outside the houses where Jews who were deported to the concentration camps or were forced into exile once lived. It is controversial and some cities oppose it, including Munich, where the most vehement and influential opponent is Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Jewish community in Munich and Bavaria. This performance, however, concentrated on the biographies of 4 former Jewish members of the theatre who were either deported and killed or managed to escape into exile. The audience sits around a large table with the actors surrounded by documents which are passed around: The shocking accounts of marginalization and persecution are recounted mainly through the documents themselves: letters and personnel files are read out by the actors, interspersed with German folksongs:

## VIDEO

The audience witnesses a piece of local history, but one of course which repeated itself countless times throughout the country. The only special aspect is the fact that it pertains to theatre people: actors, prompters, singers. The final section of the performance references the current Pegida demonstrations, a xenophobic rightwing movement originating in Dresden but which has since spread to West Germany.

Discuss immersion in factual evidence, and response, problem of *Betroffenheit* (consternation and dismay leading to what I might call response paralysis). Remains unvaried.

Any notion of fictionalization which is often used in documentary theatre, seems out of place here. Yet the performances by the actors shift from the factual to the fictional by virtue of the actor's craft. Whereas the non-acting of the Rimini Protokoll piece functions to distance the audience to the point of criticism, rejection, here the opposite is the case. The

reader/actors shift into enactment mode and we are back in the world of the Nazi era.

How we view this theoretically is an important question when it comes to distinguishing between older forms of documentary and verbatim theatre and what I would call post-fictional theatre.

The third example, also from the Kammerspiele, is post-fictional theatre in its purest form.

#SITUATION WITH SPECTATORS was created by an independent, Munich-based group called Hauptaktion. Calling itself itself an essay-performance, it confronts the audience with the ethical dilemma, whether to watch or not the notorious ISIS video in which the US journalist James Foley is beheaded in front of the camera. Three performers sit at desks in front of a tryptichon showing a desert landscape which has been extracted from the video itself.

#Speaking alternately they first outline the question – one speaker discusses whether one should watch this video or not. Another provides examples from theatre history in which humans have been executed or tortured for the delectation of spectators – for example a performance of Oedipus in the Roman theatre, or the faked but effective blood-thirsty excesses of the Grand Guignol theatre in Paris which caused collective fainting. The third speaker describes the 4 minute video frame by frame so that by the time the video is about to be played the audience knows what it will see. At this point the doors open and the audience is given the decision to remain or leave.

## VIDEO

Afterwards A POST-PERFORMANCE discussion takes place in another room. Whether one stays or leaves, the performance discusses a range

of questions: violence, voyeurism, the gaze, and whether the theatre is perhaps the only cultural legitimate space in which one can/should watch such a video.

As we can see, the video is carefully crafted propaganda and not just a piece of gratuitous violence. It advances an argument, that Foley's impending death, is the direct result of Obama's authorization of airstrikes against ISIS and that here retribution is being exacted on the basis of an eye for an eye. It is a politically not religiously motivated execution. It is a horrific, if not effective engagement with the mediasphere in as much as its main argument achieved the maximum exposure.

It is not my intention to discuss at this point the performance and the ethical dilemmas it raises further in any detail but to take it as an example of what post-fictional theatre can do. Its creator, Oliver Zahn, trained as a theatre director at the Bavarian Theatre Academy, where he learned presumably how to direct plays – anything from the Greeks to Heiner Müller. This performance breaks radically with that practice.

What implications do such performances, and there a growing number of them, have for theatre as an institution.

#Institutional aesthetics: theatre as a medium:

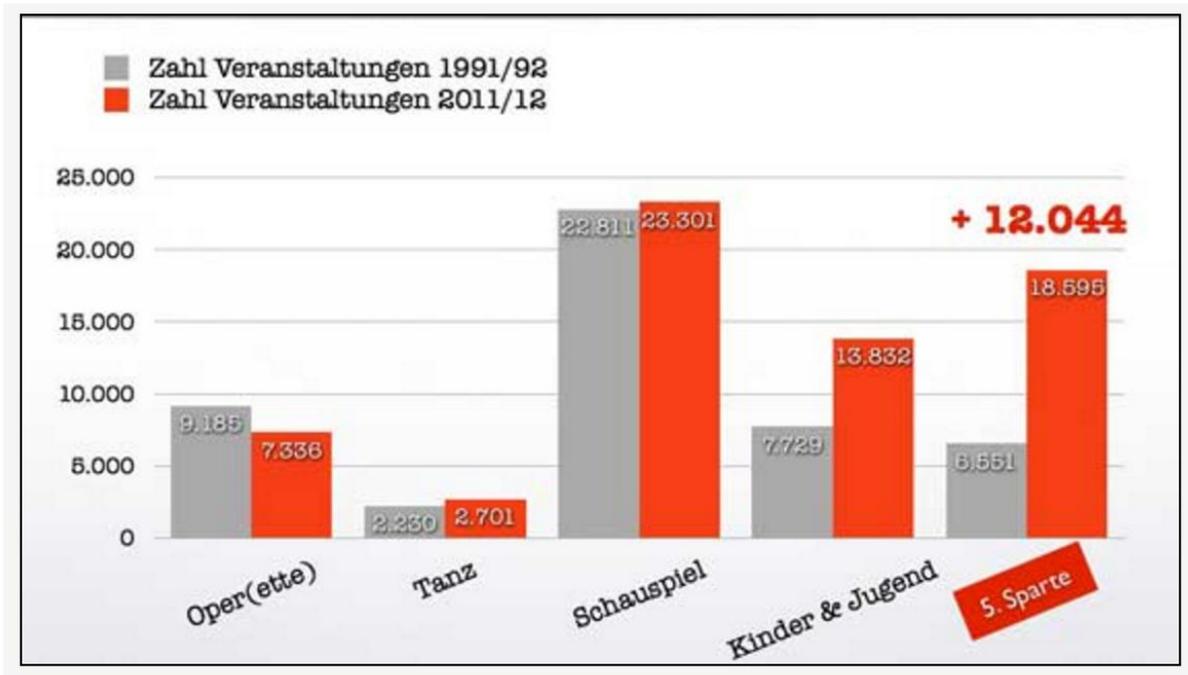
Theatre seems to be changing its function from a place of empathic identification to knowledge acquisition

#, „ You wouldn't go to Macbeth to learn about the history of Scotland- you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul.“ (Northrop Frye, quoted in Geertz 1982).

In his essay on the Balinese Cockfight, Clifford Geertz cites Northrop Frye's analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics* in order to highlight how the paradigmatic universalism of literature, as opposed to the particularity of history, can also be played out within the experience of the cockfight.

Yet, today it seems, this almost unquestioned assumption of literature's function to fashion morally instructive, paradigmatic tales, is being questioned. Today we might indeed go the theatre to learn about the history of Germany in the Third Reich, the legacy of its most famous book, or indeed the about political context of a recent infamous video.

Like most post-fictional theatre, these performances proceed from the basic assumption that the theatre is a medium, like television, radio or the internet. Just as the mass media utilize a wide variety of formats of which fictional drama is just one, so too does post-fictional theatre assume that the theatrical apparatus can be employed for a much greater variety of activities than just representing fictional stories. In Germany theatres are increasingly often used to hold lectures, organize discussions, host conferences, activities more familiar in the university or on television. These activities are now termed the 'fifth division' (die fünfte Sparte), after drama, opera, dance and childrens' and youth theatre, and their importance is growing by the year.<sup>7</sup> This area of theatrical activity is now second only to drama in the German subsidized theatre system.



This remarkable increase in nonfictional formats is a clear indication that theatre is being increasingly seen or even redefined as a medium which can host various forms of communication.

Within these various formats post-fictional theatre occupies a liminal position between drama (Schauspiel) and the fifth division. Although it may use discussion and lecture among its devices, it is not simply a symposium with good lighting. Of crucial importance is the 'theatre' in post-fictional theatre. This is why I insist on/emphasize the term 'theatre' rather than the more amorphous 'performance' or the tautological epithet 'performative theatre' that has become popular in Germany.

Post-fictional theatre does not just employ the stage as a space. At its best it makes use of the framing power of the theatre, the patterns of behavior that theatre has evolved and which spectators expect to employ when they go there. We can see post-fictional theatre as a laboratory in the terms the German philosopher Ernst Bloch expounds in his essay on Brecht's theatre theory. Here Bloch defines progressive theatre in terms

of a laboratory for exploring what it means to be human in which different models of behavior can be tested: an experimental preview (Vorschau-Bühne) of possible things to come.

Laboratories are somewhat closed insular spaces where hypotheses can be tested, replayed and varied in controlled conditions. In this sense they are not part of the public sphere. Therefore we should see post-fictional theatre as a kind of public laboratory which is part of the theatrical public sphere, albeit on a small scale. Here questions of truth and the interrogation of facts can be tested under laboratory conditions but in public view.

This redefinition of theatre's function does not come, however, without a cost. Although the trend is perceptible in many places its most radical institutional enactment is currently happening at the Munich Kammerspiele, the city's prestigious municipal theatre, which has been subjected to intense criticism from press and public alike; the situation becoming so polarized that the theatre organized a public discussion where the main critics and representatives of the theatre shared a stage to articulate their views.

#The new intendant of the Munich's municipal theatre, the Munich Kammerspiele, Matthias Lilienthal, has embarked on a radical transformation of the organization of the theatre with a heavy emphasis on postfictional formats.

In the 2000s Lilienthal had operated very successfully the Hebbel am Ufer, or HAU, a combination of three venues. On a shoestring budget (well in German terms) and without an ensemble he had curated, the right term, numerous 'events' and created a forum for Berlin's vibrant independent theatre and performance scene. He had also been tipped to succeed Frank Castorf at the Volksbühne where he had worked as a

dramaturg in the 1990s. He probably declined because the Munich Kammerspiele was a much more challenging institution for his concept of and preference for an understanding of theatre, which can be termed, for want of a better word, postdramatic, even postfictional. After six to eight months in office, a shitstorm has erupted.

The once famous ensemble of the Munich Kammerspiele, arguably the finest collection of actors at any German theatre, has been relegated to a marginal role. Instead of high profile productions directed by charismatic directors, we are seeing a series of smaller performance events, mostly from the independent scene.

The theatre's subscriber audience cancelled their subscriptions in their droves and when it was announced that one of the leading actresses was not going to renew her contract because she was underemployed, then a tipping point was reached. In early autumn 2016 the head theatre critic of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Christine Dössel, published a scathing assessment of Lilienthal's first year in office which generated even more protest. Lilienthal organized a debate in the theatre with himself, Dössel, another theatre critic, and an actress. This event was a sell-out with standing room only and a live feed into the adjoining bar for those who could not get a ticket. Lilienthal won on points, although the audience was stacked in his favour. The main point of contention is the side-lining of the acting ensemble and director's theatre. It has been partially replaced by a kind of venue management for independent groups and postfictional theatre: Gob Squad, Rimini Protokoll and SheShePop now have regular slots, and an opera director David Marton has begun to direct experimental opera productions at the Kammerspiele.

#Institutional Aesthetics

From what I have been saying, it has hopefully become clear that the current crisis are not just a replay of the old question of a 'crisis of representation', which usually means a preparation for a new aesthetic paradigm or style. While aesthetic questions do play a role—dramatic versus post-dramatic theatre for example—the institutional aspect predominates, or we could say that the institutional and the aesthetic are so intertwined is to be almost inextricable. If this is the case, then we need a way of analysing the interplay of these two dimensions.

Arts disciplines such as art history, music, theatre and film tend to focus almost exclusively on the artistic products and producers of their respective art forms past and present including self-fashioned ones (meaning here practice as research). Much academic inquiry attempts to translate aesthetic response into scholarly, intersubjectively verifiable categories of analysis. This work-centered approach has, not surprisingly, led to a high degree of specialization and particularization within disciplines, which are usually organized around epochs and geocultural regions.

In place of a work- or artist-centred approach, the concept of Institutional Aesthetics proposed here, and which the trend towards post-fictional theatre forces us to consider, seeks to investigate the crucial effect of institutions in the production, distribution and reception of artistic products on a collective level. Although interest in institutional questions is not in itself new, their application across the different artistic disciplines differs considerably. Whereas art history has successfully integrated questions of patronage, and latterly museum studies, into research paradigms, this has been less pronounced in the performing arts, although the institutional focus would seem to be particularly relevant for the latter because of their traditional reliance on labour-intensive

organisations and usually expensive, purpose-built buildings for reception.

There is little doubt that institutional questions are coming into focus and that scholars across disciplines are beginning to explore ways to investigate these complex relationships. # Shannon Jackson's book, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (2011), investigates the need for "support" in the production of performance and explores amongst other things how institutional critique manifests itself as a way of reflecting institutionality within the work itself. #My own work on the theatrical public sphere is also institutional in focus in as much as the theatre itself – more than individual works – is the object of the many debates the book deals with.

#A recent special number of *Performance Research* entitled 'On Institutions', offers an intriguing exploration of the question how performance scholars could engage with institutions beyond the usual pejorative understanding of constraints, restrictions and limitations. Perhaps the key insight is that institutions are themselves performative, even self-reflexively so: they quite literally institute themselves. The editors proceed from the premise that institutional structures are formed through repeated sets of practices, patterns and relations. #They call for "a performance studies lens that approaches the figure of the institution as a verb", which asks "how institutions are performance and in turn how performance practices may enforce, destabilize and initiate new modes of organisation."

The idea that institutions are performative rather than fixed and unchanging is not a new but corresponds with one strand of neo-institutionalist theory that has been discussed since the 1990s but has been generally ignored by theatre and performance scholars. # NI theory is highly attentive to the importance of human actors in creating,

stabilising and ultimately changing institutions and is particularly interested in historical perspectives on these processes. In the words of a major exponent, #Paul di Maggio: “an institution can only become enacted and active if it, like a garment or a house, finds someone who finds an interest in it.” If institutions are enacted, then they are not immutable. Nevertheless they are often hard to change. #Neo-institutionalist theory employs the concept of 'path dependency' to refer to the perceived or actual inflexibility and immutability of institutions and organizations. Path dependency refers to decision-making constellations in which the realm of possibility is curtailed by the unforeseen consequences of earlier decisions. Change and reform therefore are difficult but not impossible. Paths that have been entered on can only be deviated from at a very high cost or left at specific "critical junctures". Moments of succession, I would argue, the instantiation of new leaders, can be seen as just such critical junctures when well-trodden paths are deviated from and new institutional trajectories defined.

The apparent crisis engendered by a new understanding of theatre, not as the place where a permanent ensemble performs a repertoire of fictional plays old and new (in Germany mainly old), but as a forum, a market stall for a changing program of debates, independent often postfictional performances and even events outside the hallowed black boxes of the theatre building itself. A theatre institution consists not only of its management, technical staff and performers, but also, as neo-institutional theory argues, of a wider environment (see Powell 2007), which also includes the supporting public (to use Shannon Jackson's phrase) and the political consensus across parties that this system is necessary. When however, one key part of this institutional environment, the management, radically questions another part, the repertoire, and yet another part, the supporting public, the loyal subscription audience, feels

deprived of its entitlement, then the whole configuration may become destabilised. Crises are configurations of elements, not single factor cause and effect problems. It is, I argue, our task as scholars to engage more precisely and analytically with such configurations. The crisis of succession can only be met with a theory and methodology of institutional aesthetics.

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## Conclusion

Compared to the 'spectacle' of a Trump press conference, whether conducted by the Donald himself or his press secretary, theatre is a fairly controlled affair. Its real fictions, i.e. the dramas and operas it stages, are absolutely clear in their framing and their position vis-à-vis the demarcation lines between fact and fiction. As politics occupies the fictional realm, as it turns George Orwell's fictions into official discourse, theatre can/must redefine its own position in the mediascape. By employing post-fictional strategies it can re-establish the theatrical public sphere as a realm where the complexities of mediated reality can be interrogated and debated. Yet this reorientation will not happen without a struggle; institutional resistance will be fierce both inside the organisations themselves and on the part of the supporting political decision-makers and the audiences.

As theatre-makers attempt to reclaim theatre's place as an interlocutor in questions of public interest, it runs the risk of making itself redundant in its current institutional form: the ensemble-based repertoire theatre. For all its aesthetic appeal and ability to engage with burning questions of

the public sphere – the renaissance of rightwing extremism on the one hand, and the appeal of Islamist propaganda on the other, - postfictional theatre may also be destabilizing the very institutional framework that is currently nurturing it...On the other hand, it may establish itself as the place where the public sphere can be enacted.

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<sup>1</sup> See Theresia Birkenhauer: „In der Theatertheorie ist der Begriff (..) eher marginal“ (109. ‚Fiktion‘ in Metzler Lexikon Theatertheorie, .We discuss the same questions on the basis of terms such as ‚play‘, ‚illusion‘, mimesis, ‚as-if‘.

<sup>2</sup> Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill

<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 1708 Ld. Shaftesbury *Let. conc. Enthusiasm* 7

we are talking about a *theatre of perceptibility*. Postdramatic theatre emphasizes what is incomplete and incompletable about it, so much so that it realizes its own ‘phenomenology of perception’ marked by an overcoming of the principles of mimesis and

<sup>5</sup> fiction. The play(ing) as a concrete event produced in the moment

<sup>6</sup> Die Gruppe „Rimini-Protokoll“ setzt sich in Mannheim mit „Mein Kampf“ auseinander Von Johannes Breckner, 17.11.2015 / Wiesbadener Kurier.

<sup>7</sup> See Ulf Schmid. Auf dem Weg zum agilen Theater.

[http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9072:debatte-um-die-zukunft-des-stadttheaters-viii-ulf-schmidts-vortrag-zum-agilen-theater&catid=101&Itemid=84](http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9072:debatte-um-die-zukunft-des-stadttheaters-viii-ulf-schmidts-vortrag-zum-agilen-theater&catid=101&Itemid=84).