

POST-TRUTH AND THE BARBARIAN THEATRE

Fake news, fake art

The summary

Lecturer PhD. Arch. Cosmin Ardeleanu

This thesis investigates the post-truth and its influences in the theatrical arts, more precisely, on the territories of the ideological theatre, that fights aesthetics and contemplation, such as: documentary theatre, “everyday” or factual theatre, non-fiction, real theatre, “social” theatre, verbatim theatre, devised theatre, autobiographical, social, community, educational or political theatre.

"Many accounts of Greek etymology observe that theory and theatre share a common ancestry in *theos*, the Greek word for God"¹. The first chapter of this paper discusses the conception of the deity whose supremacy rests on being able to see both inside and outside its own frame of reference, a double spectator, or *theoros* — just as a director, which is, during rehearsals, both the architect of the show and the spectator of its staging, dramatizing the written text of the play according to the audience's reference, depending on the effect of his attempts on the stage verified from the spectator's chair. As a deity, the director is in this case a double spectator (*theoros*) — on stage, in the middle of the action, among the actors, and in the hall, outside his work, among the spectators — which, "in logic, is called *second-order* awareness: One not only plays a language game but also knows that the game is only one of many that she might be playing."² Likewise, the “stage manager” not only knows that he is participating in a game, but he also knows that this is his job; that after the first night, he will continue to play a new one, then another, and so on. In what follows, this chapter associates this awareness with the post-truth mentality, announcing the following pages, which aim to debate as objectively as possible the significance of aesthetics - strange as it may seem - without passion, even if ardor is one of the obligatory conditions of the artist.

¹ Michael A. Peters, Sharon Rider, *Post-Truth, Fake News, Viral Modernity & Higher Education*, Singapore, Springer, 2018, p. 16

² *Ibidem*

The second chapter of the thesis examines the post-truth and the forms of the knowledge in a "politically correct" world. The notion of "truthiness" and the prefix "post" of post-truth are reviewed, which does not proclaim that the truth refers to the past — as it does in the word "post-war", for example — but that the truth is crossing today an eclipse, during which it became irrelevant. So is post-truth a simple lie? A political pirouette? Or an irreducible norm? Or an expression of the concern of those who cherish the concept of "truth", at a time when it is deeply tested? What about, in the latter case, those concerned with "the other side of the story", with "alternative facts"? It seems that we can discover the answers to these questions if we formulate another new one: what does "knowledge" refer to, today, "in modern times"? Knowing the facts? Recognizing a "feeling"? Knowledge of the arts and sciences? Of virtue? Or an ability to think, as Plato said, "divine"? The "divine" knowledge and the knowledge reserved for daily occupations and skills resulting from the habits that can be acquired through experience are presented below; also to these belong both the technical knowledge and the virtues of the soul. From this perspective, the "feeling" to which the "truthiness" refers looks like another version of the knowledge of "the truth", the "divine thinking" metamorphosing — by political diversion — in a "second-order awareness", manifested by the consideration enjoyed today of "the other side of the story", the "alternative facts", all the "many" truths that replaced the single one that Plato was talking about. The Greek difference between the two types of knowledge has also changed today into the antithesis between the "fetishization of aesthetics" — by the "value judgments" of the "fascists" — and the political correctness, which the latter ones oppose through a "constellation of reactionary political attitudes". The novelty that the post-truth calls into question does not refer — as most people are tempted to believe — to the knowledge of reality, but *to reality itself*; the post-truth questions *the very existence* of reality. Being no longer unique, "feeling" differently from one to another, the reality can no longer support what we used to call "truth", causing (by its extinction) to evaporate the truth. Finally, the post-truth is not so much concerned with the disappearance of the truth as with the interpretation of the facts, which it subordinates to the various (political) points of view.

The next chapter examines the excesses of modernity — what Horia Roman Patapievici calls the "absence of the unseen" — and the "recent, horizontal man". Disregarding the richness of the meanings, annoying like a revolutionary song, in the post-truth era, the art of "modernity" has lost its very own truth. Eventually "fashionable" and "cool", the post-truth has finally established itself in a world of flawed reasoning, composed of judgements that are chained in an endless series of syllogisms. The only "reactionaries" captivated by transcendence are the

artists who live in the past. Postmodernism - the father of post-truth - has risen from the ashes of tradition, just as the theatrical categories of "real facts" bypass all traditional theatrical resources with the tenacity of barbarians who demolish history. In the end, the tradition was slandered, and the reactionaries, admirers of the values enshrined for centuries, thrown into the dock.

The fourth chapter of the thesis investigates how it appeared and what the post-truth is. "Unsurprisingly then, the twentieth century has been largely a story of philosophers gradually falling out of love with this scenario, which in turn has animated the post-truth sensibility. Indeed, there is a fairly direct line of intellectual descent from the logical positivists and the Popperians to contemporary social constructivism in the sociology of scientific knowledge, contrary to their textbook representation as mutual antagonists."³ One hundred years later, we are facing a series of "evolutions" that we sense are dangerous, but whose contours are still unclear. Then it stands out the supremacy of feelings, which sometimes matters more than the facts. The question that arises is when does this tilt of the balance occurs, and when does it not. A secondary thesis then takes shape: the truth stated by someone is nothing but a reflection of his political ideology. In post-truth era, all claims to knowledge are in fact statements of authority. That is why the professor who today insists on knowing and practicing the compositional principles of the arts is thus lightly — and irrevocably — labeled fascist.

The roots and types of cognitive bias are explored in the next chapter. The ignorance of our own senses — when our beliefs are not in harmony with those around us — is explored throughout this chapter, as well as the "source amnesia", the "repetition effect", the "backfire" and "Dunning-Kruger" effects.

The sixth chapter deals with the documentary theatre from the perspective of the imperative of movement and of the transient systems. It is noticeable how contemplation — which risks sprouting in any intermission — is today rejected, while mysticism is also forbidden. The "pursuit" of the guilty — who are never understood, only chased — can not be suspended in any way, but only excited. The genres of militant theatre are then reviewed and explained, on the theatre stages where the fragments of reality — documented by lucid and responsible artists — are "selected" and collected "only for inspiration", the questioned and "restructured" reality being immediately "adapted" entirely to a certain "concept of reality", proper to the accusers, a new "certainty", legalized by the "modernism" of our times, governed

³ *Ibidem*, p. 19

by the “feelings”. "Active art" of this kind, although proclaimed as "art", forbids any "artistic" reflection, remaining focused only on the "action" on the world that it aims to renew, to "change" it by *reforming* it, *reorienting* it towards a "specific purpose". This type of theater declares itself as nothing more and nothing less than an itinerary of manipulation. The whole discussion of this chapter is not so much about the staging of a "credo" on the theatre stage, as about *the method*: how could an (ideological) staging be made to be entitled to be called "theatre"? In conclusion, the same “horizontal” concern for "the surface" is found, the preoccupation for the large areas, “for the working class, for the peasantry, for the intellectuals, for all the working people”. It seems like everything needs to be covered. The meaning in ideological "art" claims the same horizontal rush as the art of barbarians.

The next chapter dwells on the implications of the post-truth and the barbarians' appetite for spectacular. We first notice the contemporary luxury of choosing our own selective interactions, as well as our tendency to affiliate with groups of people who already agree with us, under the pressure of which our opinions are shaped accordingly. The research then reveals that the urgency of joining an ideology has its origins — especially among artists — not so much in the thirst for truth or justice, but in a substantial lack of self-confidence. Relentless, this state of affairs is predestined for any artist. But it should be valued by each of them. For the bravery full of pride — imposed on any artist — breathes only when it is contradictory accompanied by vulnerability. The stage designer of any theatre show must be accustomed to the danger, to the same extent as to the anxieties of the searching, the terror of full responsibility — before the public, as well as in front of all his collaborators —, the risk of failure, the fear of the unknown. However, the ideological affiliation puts the “real” artist in the shelter, all these dangers (truly “real”) — in the midst of which the rest of the artists live every day. In addition to suspending the status of "artist", the study further exposes other dangers of ideological conformity.

The eighth chapter, entitled "fake news, fake art", closely investigates the methods of making the fake informations that contribute by their indecent spread to the artificialization of the theater, thus falsifying the products of this art.

The penultimate chapter analyzes the contradiction between the prosecution of aesthetics and the barbarians' nostalgia for "art", their longing for poetry — formulated with the same subtle guilt complex with which "progressives" proclaim themselves "artists" — a melancholy aspiration we notice even in the title "The Art of Denunciation". Then, some

Romanian combative theatre shows are commented, which recombine the fragments of the brilliant, “vertical” aesthetics of the past in the transient systems of the “horizontal” surface flight.

The tenth and final chapter seeks solutions to the ideological turmoil in contemporary theater. To combat the post-truth, we could first aspire for more critical thinking. We can only hope that universities and colleges are already engaged in this mission. Then the thesis exposes a few "tricks" — so simple that they can be taught in primary school — necessary to navigate a world of fake news, of deception. Culture further proves to be a real protective support by putting values back in place while accompanying us with the respect for them. Moreover, especially in the case of an artist, a creator, the last chapter shows that living among the masterpieces of humanity, absorbing and digesting their light, heals him and orients him in a sense that is not necessarily poetic. Because the "light" to which such an artist is exposed is not just "what pleases God," the context of good and beauty — in other words, the pious, which Euthyphron, questioned by Socrates, is in no way able to define; the light of knowledge is also that of “enlightenment”, that is of understanding, of real and integral understanding of those discovered, of their untiring assimilation, until beauty becomes the second nature of the artist. The tenth chapter shows us why — in the post-truth era — we must challenge even the most insignificant attempt to disregard the facts, why it is appropriate to bring to light every untruth, before it intoxicates in any way. The disregarded facts will thus regain their luster. However, this strategy must be implemented carefully; the delicacy is claimed.