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Theatricality as Medium of The Political

Árpád Schillings *The Party* (2014) and the Contemporary Hungarian Theatre Scene

Since the publication of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999/2006) the political dimension of theatre has mostly been discussed in post-Brechtian terms. As a result, the politics of theatre is widely considered to consist not in topics but rather in the forms of perception and in the manner of sign usage. Lehmann goes as far as to formulate "the merely apparent paradox that theatre is political precisely to the degree in which it interrupts the categories of the political itself". It is probably not by chance that this shift coincided with a re-reading of Brecht's early theoretical works by theoreticians like Andrzej Wirth or Lehmann himself, as well as by theatre practitioners like Rimini Protokoll or René Pollesch. Focusing primarily on the *Lehrstück* as a theatrical "experimental arrangement" they managed to point out the conflictual relationship between the two basic elements of Brecht's concept: the fable and the *Gestus* that is supposed to function as an interruption of the dramatic universe. Thus the epic theatre turned out to be more complicated than it had been conceived before, namely as a transparent medium for conveying political messages.

But how can we theorize the relationship of theatre to the political in a theatrical landscape like that of Hungary, which is historically so deeply defined by the dramatic tradition that it virtually stayed unaffected from post-dramatic influences? What happens, when theater is again forced to define itself as a "new theatrical ersatz site of a political public sphere"? This paper tries to elaborate on some aspects of the strained relation between politics and the political in a Hungarian context, with a special emphasis on Árpád Schillings performance *The Party* (2014), which is considered to be a contemporary implementation of Brecht's theory of the *Lehrstück*.