***Theater in a Post-Truth World: Texts, Politics, and Performance* edited by William C. Boles.**

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The twin political shocks of Brexit and Trump in 2016 led to fevered speculations that the world had entered an era where power is now gained by emotional narratives and media spectacles where appeals to fact and reason expressed through intellectual debate are seen as elitist showmanship. 'Post-truth' encapsulates the elasticity of truth-based claims to reality in an era characterized by hyper-mediatisation and intensely tribal political cultures manifesting in the anglophone world.

Theatre's long history of disrupting the lines between the artificial and the authentic and the representational and the real should make it the ideal form to investigate the structure of feeling post-truth politics creates in contemporary society and the consequences for social relations when the concept of an objective, shared understanding of the difference between the real and the fictional becomes meaningless. Yet this stimulating anthology of essays offers no easy answers for those who desire to return to what the Republican Karl Rove ominously called the 'reality-based community' in the lead up to the Iraq war. The majority of the nine chapters look at work from America with an especial focus on documentary theatre and Trumpian politics. Other chapters discuss Australian biographical theatre, performance art's entanglement with the QAnon conspiracy theory and more mainstream culture war discourse, and the post-truth realities in Caryl Churchill's plays.

The introduction makes a convincing argument that the phenomena post-truth politics describes is not exceptional and mistaking the present crisis of democracy as unprecedented blinds artists to the historical and cultural forces that have led us to the present juncture. The editor William C. Boles traces the origins of post-truth to the tobacco industry's highly effective use of public relations and marketing to sell products that kill by turning smoking into a glamorous leisure activity in the 1950s. The same strategy was later adopted by climate denialists who continue to frame scientific consensus as merely one opinion amongst many, giving equal credence to all sides of an argument regardless of its factual merits.

Boles sees a correlation between these corporate strategies and postmodern thought entering the academy which turned the concept of the truth into a mere narrative amongst countless others that we are all free to pick and choose. Treating postmodernism as a singular system of critical analysis inevitably leads to generalized statements about the 'postmodern turn', which in Boles's reading upended previously stable categories of fact and fiction with dire consequences. It is worth asking why rightwing politicians and commentators work extremely hard to turn poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault into shibboleths who substitute moral philosophy for nihilistic relativism. Understanding how reality is structured through language is a crucial step to investigate the power of theatricality in modern politics, for it is through public discourse, and the performances for control over the mechanisms that engender this discourse, which enables a critical analysis of the post-truth phenomenon. The anthology's key contribution to this field is the positioning of theatre as a meta-reflexive device to make explicit the performative and theatrical tools that audiences unconsciously rely on to formulate a perception of the real.

Heidi E. Bollinger and Helen Georgas discuss verbatim theatre's capacity to act as an arm of journalism by investigating real events by framing recorded testimony as a more authentic record than media narratives. Bollinger uses Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* to examine how a theatrical treatment of the LA riots allows for different perspectives on the history and politics of race in the USA to be placed in dialogue with each other. Editing fragments of interviews with eyewitnesses, police officers, politicians and protestors is a creative intervention that reveals the falsity of verbatim being a neutral theatrical medium untarnished by external authors. Any truth to be determined about the riots and the police killing of Rodney King that sparked them can only be arrived at by experiencing the insecurity of narratives like 'post-racial’ America. Who decides when a culture has entered a new phase? Who gets to contest these truth claims? Similarly, Georgas highlights how the heightened theatricality in Tina Satter's *Is This A Room* provides important perspectives into how truthfulness is constructed in media and politics through narrative devices. The performance is based on a recorded transcript of three FBI officers interrogating the government analyst Reality Winner in 2017. Satter fuses fact and fiction through the visual dramatization of real speech. The real transcript acquired new meanings as a script by suturing Winner's story to the socio-political reality of Trump's America.

The danger of believing a historical document or political event yields a single truth is the subject of Victoria Scrimer's highly engaging and penetrating chapter on a live reading of the Mueller report. The production's very lack of overt theatricality was signalled as 'a marker of truth' (120) whilst paradoxically relying on the representation of the text through the actor's live embodiment to reveal truths that were obscured in the document. Scrimer makes a compelling case that it is an illusion to think of theatre as the means of returning to an imagined time when political culture was not subject to narrative manipulation. If theatre were to become the sole source of facts then it would be no more trustworthy than Fox News for it would inspire a cultish paranoia about those who lacked the intellectual or moral capacity to understand what the *real* truth is. Scrimer highlights the fallacy of thinking that post-truth politics describes a clear break with an emotionless public discourse, when in fact Brexit and Trump may have revealed the theatrical mechanisms that have always shaped collective perceptions of events. Believing that such mechanisms do not exist, and any given political ideology or system is a naturally occurring phenomenon independent of human control represents the much greater threat to democratic freedom. This theme is explored further by Susanne Thurow in her chapter on an intermedial staging of Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. The unstable reality created by the interaction of technologies and live actors embodies a Brechtian dialectic by never settling into a harmonious or synchronous whole, thus inviting the audience to reflect on the 'image regimes that serve rival objectives of subjugation and domination' (185) in today's digital culture. There is no one truth to politics lying dormant beneath its performance.

*Theater in a Post-Truth World* makes an excellent case for making performance literacy a key part of digital citizenship and deserves to be read by policymakers, political analysists, and media scholars. Academics and practitioners specializing in documentary performance practice will find fresh perspectives on the risks of embracing anti-theatrical aesthetics as a means of presenting an 'authentic' factual account. The book is sure to become an imperishable source for students interested in political theatre.

**Dr Joseph Dunne-Howrie**

Joseph is a theatre lecturer based at Rose Bruford College where he teaches performative writing, live art, postdramatic theatre, and digital performance. His research specialisms include archives and performance documentation, audience participation, online theatre, the performativity of rightwing culture war discourse, and theatre’s role in supporting and opposing far-right movements. His work has been published in *Performance Research*, *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media, Studies in Theatre and Performance*, and *Stanislavski Studies*. He also writes on politics and culture for *HowlRound Theater Commons* and *Yorkshire* *Bylines*.