

Introduction

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With the post-1968 ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’,¹ the idea of a single, or universal, history had been displaced by a multi-perspectival pluralism of historical approaches projected from different points of view. Thus, for the last few decades, feminist and lesbian studies, trans and queer studies, cultural and ethnic studies, critical race and anti-racist studies, and postcolonial and decolonial studies have been engaged in a systematic analysis of coercive and disciplining modes of representation stored in the archive in order to combat a series of erasures and to recover the traditionally marginalized, or silenced, subject. Various strategies emerging from these interventions and epistemologies critique dominant institutions of knowledge and power, both real and symbolic, which control, shape and reproduce structures – the archives – whose very assembly and organization, as is forcefully argued today, occlude certain historical subjects.² This occlusion draws attention to the irresolvable tension between *recovery as an imperative*, which is fundamental to historical writing and research (an imperative infused not only with the cognitive values that solidify the practice of history in the academe, but also with political urgency by scholar-activists), and *the impossibility of recovery*, because the very assembly and organization of the archive dematerializes, not to say, excarnates, historical subjects.³

Consequently, how should the history of theatre be written today? How could it be written to reveal the tensions between and contradictions in the past and present imaginations shaping the events and the objects? How could it accommodate different, often contradictory, historiographic strategies currently in circulation? The first methodological

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

² Laura Helton, Justin Leroy, Max A Mishler, Samantha Seely and Shauna Sweeney, ‘The Question of Recovery: An Introduction’, *Social Text*, 33:4 (2015), 1–18.

³ Kathleen Biddick, *Make and Let Die* (Middletown: Punctum Books, 2016), p. 30.

challenge this volume presents, then, is inherent in the selection of a title. Should this be *A History of Polish Theatre* or *A History of Theatre in Poland*? If the former, then how should Polishness be delineated, and in which ways might contributors intervene into problematic discourses of ethno-nationalism that have dominated historical studies of national identity that fail to include ethnic and religious minorities? If the latter, *where* exactly is Poland? And when or how might historical phenomena be interpreted as *Polish*? Poland has been a testing ground for the limits of nationhood, political autonomy and geographical integrity through multiple occupations and partitions (1772–1918) and wars (1914–18, 1939–45). Borders have been drawn and redrawn. Populations have migrated and have been expelled and transferred. ‘Poland’ as a signifier is nevertheless instructive, allowing one to ask a range of questions of a broad geographical landscape that moves from former German territories such as Breslau (now Wrocław) to Polish Wilno (now Vilnius in Lithuania) and Lwów (now Lviv in Ukraine). For this reason, it would be reductive to limit Polish theatre to the Polish language and to ignore such significant performance histories in, for example, German, Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian and Yiddish. Poland remains a conceptual tool that allows contributors to consider and reflect upon its changing and developing historical articulations, spatial configurations and cultural constructions. Siding with the title ‘Polish theatre’ recognizes that Poland as a nation was erased from the map of Europe at significant moments in the proposed historical trajectory, and also places pressure on identifications of Polishness as singularly ethnically or linguistically produced.

Because of multilayered historical circumstances, which often resulted in either the marginalization of national culture or its heavy dependence on foreign influences, Polish history has frequently been totalized through a claim to solidarity and shared identity, written from the assumed position of ‘our history’ (*nasza historia*) or ‘our theatre’ (*nasz teatr*). Such a slippage is profoundly exclusive. The forms of historiography in which the editors are invested do not seek to find closure through adherence to a particular and substantive cultural identity that obscures precisely the exclusive demarcations on which they are grounded. Many of the chapters attempt to theorize broader historical trends, movements and case studies that extend the discursive limits of Polish national and cultural identity, placing at risk any implicit shoring up of ethno-nationalism that delimits, for example, the participation of ethnic minorities in the production of a national culture.

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Such methodological challenges inadvertently draw attention to historiography that poses questions regarding the status of history and its methodologies by perturbing the authorities which controlled the emergence, delimitation and specification of the objects of study. They also draw attention to historiography that cuts through the remnants of the metaphysics which have inhabited the structures of thought since the positivity of the Enlightenment, in order for us to engage with the archive – home of the articulation of the works of art and objects – and fully embrace archive trouble.⁴ Such historiography also engages postcolonial feminist Chela Sandoval's 'methodology of the oppressed', which challenges the racialized 'apartheid of theoretical domains' and recent postcolonial scholarship, which contests legacies of racism and exclusion in artefacts of colonial bureaucracy and imagination. It espouses decolonizing potentials of theory and history making by bringing dominant Western theorists into dialogue with those who have been historically marginalized.⁵ Polish history is pulled precisely through tugs-of-war between centres and peripheries; between national and multinational discourses.

The very awareness of the archive trouble, as spelled out by Jacques Derrida, since the late 1960s has reoriented historiography, which turned to the archive as a subject and not just a source. In this volume, the archive trouble does not only signify the difficulties with the very presence or absence of the archive due to its destruction by the occupying forces during the periods of partitions or world wars; its occlusions and disinvestments caused by the shifting of the borders; or because of political and ideological manipulations imprinting it. The archive trouble was at the very centre of the culture wars, staged on both sides of the divide, in defence of identity and history. In the post-1989 environment in Poland, the Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of New Files) gave access to official party files. Since 1992, many lists with the names of politicians and ordinary citizens, who had worked for the socialist government since 1945, circulated in the public sphere. The now famous list of Wildenstein (published in 2005) offered the names of some 162,617 people who had been collaborating with the Communist Party and its apparatuses of surveillance. The Polish process of lustration was aimed at the debunking of the official and arbitrary history by showing its flaws and imperfection. Irrespective of its design, it also gave voice to people who had been silenced in the archive. Consider,

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 90.

⁵ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 67. See also Helton et al., 'The Question of Recovery'.

for example, HyPaTia, the archive of women in Polish theatre, whose work was not duly registered in the annals of Polish theatre history; publications tracing queer culture in the official culture of the Polish People's Republic; or the proliferation of private archives challenging the heteronormative, phallogentric or ethno-nationalistic official narrations of the past as well as of the present. It is this archive fever and the awareness of the past archival violence that led to the opening of Warsaw's POLIN, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (in 2013), which made the choice to explicitly include Jews in the designation 'Polish', and Gdańsk's Museum of the Second World War (in 2016), which, at least initially, was committed to offering a global perspective on the war. These projects exemplify a powerful and capacious understanding of history's field of action on a micro-level and the archeology of the archive to exhume excarnated bodies.

Acknowledging that the archival form itself can both aid political violence and reproduce the racial hierarchies intrinsic to its construction, let us ask the following questions. How do these conceptual frameworks delimit objects in a place where political autonomy, geographical integrity and shifting ideologies have never been stable? How does recovery as an imperative for ethno-nationalism occlude the presence of minorities when the very organization of the archive dematerializes historical subjects? How are we to think about ways of housing the past (the archive, the event and the object)? How are we to think about the experience of the past, which is fragmented, whose different trajectories are simultaneously present, and which is striated by competing ideologies that legalize forms of exclusion from public life? How are we to think about the archive in Poland? How are we to think about the Polish archive?

If the archive is a site of formation, transformation and revindication of objects, then the object and its materiality intensify the inadequations between what the object is and what the status quo (historical or otherwise) wants it to be. Understanding this inadequation becomes an ethical, historiographic imperative. Historicism, according to Walter Benjamin, is linked to the notion of history defined as a meaningful narrative of progress in the West, which was described in detail by Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century. Benjamin calls Ranke's history an epic history. It is a history that promotes a contemplative attitude towards the object and the past. It places the object along the narrative itinerary, which infuses both the object and the past era into a linear totality that produces and justifies the present. Historical materialism is an antidote to this historicism. That is to say, works of art, or objects, in a historically dialectical

mode, illuminating a continuous process of change, demonstrate how their reception becomes a component of the effect that a work of art, or an object, has upon us today. If historicism presents the eternal image *of* the past, historical materialism presents a given experience *with* the past, an experience that stands unique.⁶

That is to say, historical materialism is connected with the experience of the present. If a Benjaminian constellation lets the object slip away from both the imperious presence of the metaphysical and the presence of the regulated historical temporality, today's historiographic and archival practice calls for the investigation of how the objects are thinkable, identifiable or rationalized. And this aspect of a constellation resonates with Henri Lefebvre's notion of spatial dialectics as discussed in *The Production of Space*.⁷ According to Lefebvre, the classical/Newtonian science of space cannot really tolerate contradiction or antagonism in the nature of space. It can accept dualities or dual properties of space only if there is a possibility of resolving these dualities so that a smooth surface of space can be constructed. Space, in geometry or topology, is the location of coherence or consensus. Only when the illusion of transparent, abstract or absolute space is completely dispelled will it be possible to see the degree to which the classical logic of space (or the science of homogeneous space produced by the Church or the State, by capitalism or socialism) did not allow the elucidation of social relationships positioned in it. Unlike dialectics based on an analysis of historical time and of temporality, spatial dialectics focuses on the contradictions that imply and explain contradictions in historical time without being reducible to them. In other words, the notion of contradiction is not restricted to temporality or historicity but highlights contradictions *in* space as well as contradictions *of* space, reminiscent of the contradictions engendered by spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces.⁸

This volume thinks through such contradictions. Consider the following example: the collapse of socialism in Poland, symbolically associated with the free elections on 4 June 1989, was material and visible proof of a discontinuity in Polish history, which interrupted a steady accumulation of knowledge about the socialist East and cracked open a smooth historical surface with a possibility that a different way of thinking about history is

⁶ See Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian', in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 225–69.

⁷ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell, 1991), chapter 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

available. For a brief moment, as was the case during the *Solidarność* (Solidarity) movement in 1980, it seemed that everything was possible, including the creation of a political and economic system that would herald a shift towards a new order of things aiming at a kind of cultural conversion to values, habits and attitudes considered ‘normal’ in the West – an example *par excellence* of contradictions *in space*.

The current historical moment, thirty years after the holding in June 1989 of the first democratic elections after the collapse of socialism in Poland, makes us consider a project of how to think about history in the context not only of the consequences of the desire for Western ‘normalcy’, but also of their accidental (or not so accidental) social aftermath of the liberal dream turned into the liberal nightmare: the disastrous failure of the emancipatory endeavours prompted by liberal democracy, neoliberal politics, a recurring utopian dream that it will still be possible to construct a rational order of things; or the convulsions within the country, the rise of nationalism, racism and right-wing politics in the Polish geopolitical space where Poland’s Law and Justice (PiS) party comfortably won the 2015 parliamentary elections, professing to promote traditional Catholic and patriotic values and serve the many Poles who feel left behind by the country’s transition from socialism to a democratic market economy.

Given these contexts, the editors propose a particular historiographic approach in the organization of chapters in *A History of Polish Theatre* that challenges synchronic or chronological approaches to theatre history. We wish to move away from strictly devised forms of periodization, and instead build historical narratives through ‘constellations’, a direct reference to Benjamin, who constructed novel conceptions of historical time and historical intelligibility based on the relationship not between the past and the present, but between the ‘then’ and the ‘now’; and to Tadeusz Kantor, who created constellations of entombed memory in his own artworks from the perspective of ‘here and now’. This volume also comes just as several texts that impacted theatre and performance studies in Poland have been translated into English and is in dialogue with these studies vis-à-vis history making, the performative turn, confrontations with canon formation, memory studies and new modes of interpreting Polish cultural phenomena.⁹

⁹ Dariusz Kosiński, *Performing Poland: Rethinking Theatres and Histories*, trans. Paul Vickers (Cardiff: Performance Research Book, 2019); Grzegorz Niziołek, *The Polish Theatre of the Holocaust*, trans. Ursula Phillips (London: Methuen Drama Bloomsbury, 2019); Dorota Sajewska, *Necroperformance: Cultural Reconstructions of the War Body*, trans. Simon Włoch (Zürich and Warsaw: DIAPHANES and Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, 2019). Additionally, see chapters on Polish theatre history

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Each constellation engages a theatrical tradition or historical form to bring the present into a critical state. Any one of these constellations is deserving of a full book-length study. These are necessarily fragmentary and incomplete. However, for that very reason, we hope that they offer a richness of thought that ignites curiosity. The multiplicity of approaches to individuals, companies and theatres challenges narrow or singular forms of historiography. What one scholar might read as a dissident, another will read as a collaborator; where one writer sees plagiarism, another finds innovation. Authors point to multiple moments when theatre critics did not yet have the identifying categories by which to interpret work in their own historical moments. Certain artists appear in multiple sections, but the interpretation of their work differs in relation to the scope and historical focus of the constellation. For example, Juliusz Osterwa's Reduta Theatre is differently interpreted through Christian (Kris Salata) or aesthetic (Martynas Patrikas) frames of analysis, and the interwar era in which Osterwa lived evokes a 'state of unrest', to use a Benjaminian phrase, referring to major changes in class systems and social structures. This period of the state of unrest is also interpreted as a time of tremendous innovation in theatre practices that remain/repeat today (Krystyna Duniec).

The opening constellation brings together two essays that address the questions 'Where is Poland?' and 'What is Poland?' Krzysztof Zajas argues with force that there is no such thing as one Polish culture, while showing how constructions of the 'centre', be it in the form of 'Polishness' or 'cultural achievements', not only homogenize, but mask the work of Polonization and colonization in its attempts to subordinate Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Belarusian lands. Dorota Sajewska shows how after 1989 two narratives re-emerge simultaneously, the harmed Slavic subaltern and an interest in multicultural heritage paired with colonial influence in the borderlands. While she uses Stanisław Wyspiański to constellate the local and transnational in order to position Poland within a global cultural archive, Sajewska's primary focus is on racialized forms of violence and the sideways or peripheral glance at European history that allows one to acquire new understandings of epistemological traditions in historiography and to carry out the decolonisation of knowledge production. Theatre historiography must recognize the legacy of Eurocentrism as the dominant

in Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska and Przemysław Czapliński (eds.), with the assistance of Agnieszka Polakowska, *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

model for political conduct, the writing of history and the interpretation of culture resulting from an unwillingness to reckon with European histories and racist politics, and with the place of Poland in this current historical order.

These two essays bring forth the dialectic between centre and periphery, which determines the apperception of Polish theatre history and the tensions that form between the concepts of national theatre and multi-ethnic as well as multi-lingual theatres in Poland. This dialectic is at the very centre of many constellations which underscore discordant temporalities and multiple spatialities perturbing reified historical continuity in Polish theatre. Thus, Mirosław Kocur defines 'Staropolska' as an umbrella term that is used to bring together multiple social, class, religious, ideological and aesthetic issues that signalled different cultural formations emerging in the period between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries in a territory which was not ethnically or politically homogeneous. In the same constellation, Agnieszka Marszałek approaches Staropolska from the perspective of spectators and diverse publics and argues that its theatre was 'a combination of changing ways of demonstrating belonging to various communities and representing specific particular interests, models of behaviour, as well as signalling one's own presence (and separateness) within what was then called the state, society or the nation' (p. 44–45). Piotr Olkusz and Dobrochna Ratajczakowa's Polish Enlightenment constellation not only discloses the processes contributing to the construction of modern Poland, but also shows how, in the atmosphere of postwar hopes, many Polish scholars focused on the eighteenth century, visibly expressing animosity towards the Romantic paradigm dominant in prewar Polish culture; it was much easier to set functionalism and political involvement against traditionalism and nineteenth-century realism in an atmosphere backed up by declarations of objectives shared by the authorities. Ratajczakowa links the theatre and the press as crucial processes of social transformation from the broader public sphere to 'concrete audiences present in physical places' (p. 84), and shows how Wojciech Bogusławski and dynamic forms of audience reception in the late eighteenth century paved the way for highly politicized and engaged forms of spectatorship in the twentieth century. Olkusz charts the clash between *public* and *national* theatre, articulated in the dialectical tensions between the Enlightenment outlook (the unfinished or utopian social project) and the Romantic paradigm (built on a constructed history and tradition).

Zbigniew Majchrowski argues that messianic Romanticism became a language of consolation that gave hope and promise of freedom and, at

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the same time, turned out to be a language of collective violence against individualist existential projects. And, as Włodzimierz Szturc adds, this negative dialectic was a fertile ground for one of the most important topics in the Polish drama and theatre, namely that of death and history, which can transcend the real decline of states, nations and their cultures only in the process of abstracting them, as will be evidenced in the works of many Polish playwrights and directors inhabiting other critical constellations. Understanding the rights and standing of the peasantry in contrast to the *szlachta* (nobility) reveals forms of national affiliation and patriotism and the problems presented in cultural nostalgia or sublimation of the past. This negative dialectics, which is essentially a critique of the given state of affairs, is a central category describing the tension between conservatism and modernization, between openness to the global and closure to exceptionalism, and, ultimately, between understanding statehood as the beacon of shared traditions and internationalism, cosmopolitanism or critical art/theatre. It is a central category framing modernism (Katarzyna Fazan and Dorota Jarząbek-Wasył), the *avant-gardes* (Agnieszka Jełewska and Anna R. Burzyńska) and the post-1989 transformation (Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska and Marcin Kościelniak).

The modes in which the *contemporary* – that is, the figural, not temporal relation of what-has-been to the now – is shaped across the volume challenge the notion of the univocal embedded in historical discourses. For example, Wyspiański, as Sajewska observes, positions the actor at the crux of this debate. The particularity of the embodied presence of a role carries its own historical significations, and this demonstrates both the challenge to and reinforcement of the universal in theatrical practice, as the point between the contemporary moment and its framing through the historical. Wyspiański's ideas of Monumental Theatre were used by Leon Schiller to promote a form of nationalism in the interwar period. Wyspiański returns as the patron of national theatre in the post-1989 transformation in the theatre of Jerzy Grzegorzewski to help explore the figments of national memory and the past (Fazan).

The further we go into the past the more transparent it becomes that Poland is a diverse, non-identical space. Poland's wider participation in Christian Europe shaped its identity, so the transnational was always crucial for the national as a formation or even as a coherent concept. From the religious spectacles in the sixteenth century, there are many shared languages and stories, moving from Latin in liturgical dramas to German, Russian, Italian and Polish. Court theatres in the seventeenth century were entirely European imports (opera, *commedia dell'arte*,

dramas) that were made for foreign guests to the court, and the only thing Polish about them was the location of the performance. Centuries later, Fazan sees the development of modernism as resulting from close contact and dialogue with Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Rome and St Petersburg. The archive is reliant on witness accounts written by non-Poles. Marszałek insists that theatre became 'Polish' only with the establishment of a public theatre (1765–7). Even then, a knowledge of foreign languages was crucial (French, Italian, German).

While these constellations outline the significance of foreign theatre makers and audiences in Polish theatre history, the two 'Mapping Theatre' constellations position Polish theatres in global and topographical networks of exchange. Polish Jews are not interpreted as foreign to or outside of what we interpret as 'Polish' culture. Alyssa Quint and Michael Steinlauf weave a vibrant and mutually informed history of Jewish theatre in Polish lands that has strong resonances in the contemporary moment and consider the mode in which the Yiddish language and culture engages with and co-defines a Polish public sphere. This constellation brings us from the arrival of Jews in Poland through to the nineteenth century; the explosion of Jewish culture after 1905, when Russia relaxed its laws on cultural production; and the Second World War, when the Jewish population was decimated in the Holocaust. While some histories ignore postwar Jewish theatre in Poland, this essay demonstrates its continued presence despite waves of emigration in response to multivalent anti-Semitic social and political factors and the re-engagement with Jewish history and identity in the new millennium.

Bringing together an analysis of Polish theatre in Vilnius, a city that Petrikas argues was central to the formation of mythogenic narratives for Lithuanians, Poles, Belarusians and Jews, we witness a dynamic interweaving of performance cultures. Difference is seen as internal to the state rather than as an external or threatening concept. The multiple forms of translation and adaptation of Shakespeare over the centuries are not positioned as a purely 'foreign influence' or 'cultural sociability'. As Aleksandra Sakowska demonstrates, Shakespeare has not been passively received by Polish culture, and the process of translating Shakespeare into Polish has complicated and enriched plays such as *Hamlet* and made them generative of new meanings, both within Polish territories and abroad. In her analysis of acting and actors, Beata Guzalska traces the importance of Russian theatre in Poland, pointing to the clandestine nature of artistic influence from a country that is seen as a political enemy and when forced Russification meant the rejection of imposed cultural norms and forms.