

Editorial Board

Post-Theatre and Its Allies: New Experiments
in Polish Theatre

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In distinction from its previous editions, this issue of *Polish Theatre Journal* comprises three subjects, not just one.

First, the issue presents an extensive section of articles concerning the latest generation of Polish theatre: artists in their thirties and forties who have been leaving a distinctive mark on theatre in Poland over recent seasons, bringing to the table new sensibilities and new working strategies. It's telling that their roads to theatre have been far from simple: almost nobody in this group holds a degree in theatre directing, learning the ropes of the profession away from the institutional mainstream – away from Poland, in multiple cases. As Tomasz Plata puts it in the opening essay of this section:

‘One might say, somewhat provocatively, this is the first emerging generation of Polish theatre artists in years who have managed to be successful without being shaped by the influential Polish director Krystian Lupa. When searching for the context informing their work, one must move away from the local setup and closer to achievements among Europe’s major dance and experimental-theatre artists.’¹

In the *PTJ* call for papers inviting writers to collaborate on the present issue, our editors proposed calling this new formation ‘post-theatre’. At the same time, we identify several features which, in our analysis, are essential to the work of theatre artists of interest to us: reducing the level of theatrical fiction (an aversion to constructing self-contained fictitious worlds on stage), a predilection for self-referential or autobiographical narratives, along with sophisticated, usually critical approaches to the concept of spectacle – both in the narrow understanding of the term, relevant to theatre studies, and in the broader sense introduced at one point by the French Situationists – along with a fondness for minimalism on stage. We wanted to see if the suggested name for and the characteristics of the new phenomenon might provide *PTJ* with a useful analytical

1 Tomasz Plata, ‘Post-Theatre: Escaping from Theatre, Escaping to Theatre’, trans. by Joanna Błachnio, in the present issue of *Polish Theatre Journal* 1:5, 2018, www.polishtheatrejournal.com, [accessed on 27 April 2018].

framework, which is to say if they could be borne out by more detailed descriptions of individual productions or actions.

There are several main people in the picture we have ultimately come up with. The directorial works of Anna Karasińska, Wojtek Ziemilski, Marta Górnicka, Ania Nowak and Marta Ziólek are our primary concern. Other theatre artists sharing similar beliefs and harbouring similar ambitions will appear in supporting roles. These include Weronika Szczawińska, Agnieszka Jakimiak, Anna Smolar, Grzegorz Laszuk, Justyna Sobczyk, Michał Buszewicz, Paweł Sakowicz, Maria Stokłosa, Romuald Krężel and members of the Dead Baitz ensemble. Their practices are placed within a broader context – especially that of relations that theatre, dance and performance of today have with pop culture and the reality of new media. A resulting theme emerges in this entire section of the theme of spectacle and the spectacular as main mechanisms in contemporary culture (or main modes in which it operates), a principal throughout. Post-theatre artists are shown to be exceptionally sensitive to the growing dominance of spectacle – yet they never renounce the structure of a performance, persisting in the belief that theatre grants them access to the situation of an encounter like no other art medium – the embodied exchange between spectator and performer – thus providing them with an opportunity to weaken the restrictions of the spectacle, if only for a moment.

Education for theatre is another theme of this *PTJ* issue: problems it grapples with and tasks it is faced with in a time of rapid changes in theatre practice, the labour market and the European system of schooling alike. Published in this issue are major papers delivered at the conference ‘Giessen and Others’ (July 2017, the Department of Theatre Studies at the National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw). As implied by the conference’s title, it took as its main reference point the achievements of the renowned Institute for Applied Theatre Studies in Giessen, Germany – an innovative entity which, since the 1980s, has daringly combined the teaching of theatre theory and practice. The eminent contemporary theatre director Heiner Goebbels, a Giessen professor of many years’ standing, recounts his teaching experiences. Marijke Hoogenboom of the Amsterdam University of the Arts, along with Richard Gough of the University of South Wales in Cardiff, examine the challenges of interdisciplinary approaches to theatre teaching from Dutch and British standpoints, respectively. It’s no coincidence that a selection of essays appears in a single issue of *PTJ* on the emerging generation of theatre-makers in Poland alongside another set concerning current tendencies in drama schools across Europe. After all, the majority among the post-theatrical formation have been shaped ‘in the spirit of Giessen’, often in similar institutions, with deep-seated awareness of both the significance of the model of teaching and thought about theatre that have been arrived at in Giessen.

Finally, the third theme of the present issue of *PTJ* arises: the future of performative arts in a time of profound crisis. We reprint the speech Prof. Richard Schechner delivered on 16 October 2017, when a honorary

degree was conferred on him by the National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw.

A professional of unassailable skills and expertise in the subject he chose, Professor Schechner comes across as at once a pessimist and an optimist. His assessment of the present day is bleak in the extreme. But his vision of the future – with the ‘fourth world’ of aesthetics project as its inherent part – offers hope that all is not lost. In this respect, Schechner’s thought is not removed from what we find in works by representatives of Poland’s post-theatrical formation: theatre or, more broadly, performance art, continues to be an excellent mechanism for probing the rules of a world of injustice and inequalities: mapping them out, explaining them and searching for alternative solutions.

Translated by Joanna Blachnio

ABSTRACT

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Post-Theatre and Its Allies: New Experiments in Polish Theatre

The fifth issue of *Polish Theatre Journal* is concerned primarily with the works of an emerging generation in Polish theatre: theatre-makers in their thirties and forties who have been leaving a distinctive mark on theatre in Poland over the past few seasons, bringing new sensibilities and new working strategies to the table. We identify features their works have in common, perceiving them as a formation of distinct boundaries and quite uniform views, while proposing the term ‘post-theatre’ as a terminological framework intended to specify the analysis. In addition, keynote addresses delivered at the academic conference ‘Giessen and Others’ (held in Warsaw in July 2017) are published in this issue, as is the speech made by Prof. Richard Schechner on 16 October 2017, when a honorary degree was conferred on him by the National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw.

