

Eliza Szymańska: *Interkulturelle Theaterstrategien. Polnisches (E)Migrantentheater in Deutschland*. Gdańsk, Sopot: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2021, 360 S.

Theatre has always been an important issue for Germans, writes Eliza Szymańska in the first sentence of her book *Interkulturelle Theaterstrategien. Polnisches (E)Migrantentheater in Deutschland* (Intercultural Theatre Strategies Polish (E)Migrant Theatre in Germany). However, this is not a publication strictly about German theatre; nor is it a story about Polish theatre written in the spirit of Polish theatre studies which deals mainly with masterpieces of professional mainstream theatre. As an important factor in German culture, theatre is shown here in a very broad social context, with special attention paid to intercultural studies.

Dropping a broad hint into Polish theatre community, the author draws attention to the problem of migrant theatre which in Poland has remained outside the mainstream of theatre research for years<sup>1</sup>. However, the hint is likely to go unnoticed<sup>2</sup>. The author rightly places her work at the interface of several branches of research, facilitated by intercultural German studies. This is where the starting point for exploration of the theatre of migrants is located, as Eliza Szymańska writes: “a phenomenon which in its nature is often, ephemeral, multifaceted” (Szymańska 2021: 25) and she recognises the impossibility of researching certain theatrical phenomena, groups, performances. This “specifically Germanic thematisation of interculturalism”, as Szymańska points out, thus became an excellent basis for developing research aimed at reflecting on contemporary theatre (here I emphasise that the author takes into account the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, as well as the semantics of the term itself) but in an overarching intercultural context.

In her analysis of the theatre activities of Polish migrants in Germany, Szymańska begins with the fairly well-developed issue of migrant literature (contemporary and recent). As a Germanist and literary scholar, she is fully competent to follow the path of such research. After all, this is currently the only possibility for conducting scholarly discourse on the issue of migration in Polish theatre. As I have already mentioned, research on contemporary (post-1989) theatre and drama of Polish migrants does not exist. In contrast, among the four new tasks of intercultural German studies, Ernest Hess-Lüttich points precisely to theatrical activities. Intercultural studies are described in Szymańska’s publication, among others, from the perspective of Alois Wierlacher, the founder of intercultural German studies; she also uses the concepts by Ortrud Gutjahr, Maria Katarzyna Lasatowicz and Jürgen Joachimsthaler as

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<sup>1</sup> The last monograph dealing with this problem, *Teatr i dramat polskiej emigracji 1939–1989* (The Theatre and Drama of Polish Emigration 1939–1989), was written in 1994, eds. I. Kiec, D. Ratajczakowa, J. Wachowski.

<sup>2</sup> As an example, I give the list of publications of the Polskie Towarzystwo Badań Teatralnych (PTBT, Polish Theatre Research Society) from 2021, where E.S.’s publication is not included despite the fact that the Author is a member of the PTBT.

a platform of reference in the search for a definition of interculturality and the tasks of this concept. Therefore, in my opinion, the author in her monograph realises Ewa Domańska's (2010) postulates of building a practical methodology in the humanities – in German scientific discourse this would probably be an applied methodology.

The publication *Interkulturelle Theaterstrategien Polnisches (E)Migrantentheater in Deutschland* is a comprehensive multifaceted work that provides an overview not only of the intercultural strategies of Polish migrant theatre but also of the subsequent phases inherent not so much in the development as in the perception of theatre in Germany, including the theatre of Polish migrants in German society. The presented analysis guides the reader from the theatre's unrealised support of society just after reunification in 1990, through the social changes resulting from the development of technology, to questions about who the theatre is actually for, and who goes there.

The subsequent sections of this monograph reveal the author's precise analytical inclination in constructing her narrative. In the crucial fourth chapter, *Das Polnische (E)migrantentheater in Deutschland* (The Polish (E)migrant Theater in Germany), she starts from the observations and interviews to build a detailed description and propose a segmentation, or rather the classification, of the phenomenon. Szymańska researched six theatre companies, including the structure of the ensemble and analyses of the interviews and media reports, where she paid particular attention to the self-identification of the group in question (also the name of the theatre). Conducting empirical studies in several cases, she evaluated references to Polish and German theatrical traditions. Finally, she also focused on the repertoire and the language in which the plays are presented as well as the reception among audiences.

The first to be described is Henryk Baranowski's theatre "Transformtheater" which was active in Berlin in the 1980s. Henryk Baranowski was a political emigrant who moved to West Berlin in 1980, where he created a theatre that was a critique of the totalitarian system then prevailing in Eastern Europe. The author has reconstructed Baranowski's theatrical activities, including seventeen stagings, using not only Baranowski's autobiography *Spowiedź bez konfesjonatu* (*Confession without a confessional*, Warszawa 2013), scholarly literature on Polish-German relations, but also her materials, namely an interview she conducted in 2010 with Baranowski himself. It is worth noting that the emigrant activities of this director were not reported by the professional press in Poland in fact until 1992. It was only after the artist's return to Poland that articles appeared reporting on the last years of the Transformtheater's work.

Another theatre is the "Polnisches Theater Kiel" by Tadeusz Galia – also created in the early 1980s as an expression of opposition to the political system. This line of theatre is considered by the author to be part of Polish emigrant culture<sup>3</sup>. The evidence of the important role that theatre played in the Polish emigrant community is, among other things, the mention in the Parisian "Kultura" in 1983 of the activities of Galia's "Polnisches Theater Kiel".

<sup>3</sup> The author explains in the introduction why she separates the notions of emigrant and migrant. Nowadays, researchers of the Centre of Migration Research of the University of Warsaw postulate a unified notion – migrants – used in the most recent research as a common category for the heterogeneous Polish community abroad. It consists of temporary emigrants, Polish citizens permanently living outside the country, citizens of other countries of Polish origin, the Polish diaspora and the Polish minority. cf. (Nowosielski, Nowak 2017). <http://www.problempolitykispolecznej.pl/images/czasopisma/37/PPS-37-73-89.pdf> [10.09.2019].

Significant successes, also in mainstream German theatre, were recorded only by Andrej Woron's Kreatur theatre. Kreatur Theater – a fringe group of artists of different nationalities, languages and theatrical experiences, was active in Berlin in the 1990s and was the first fringe company to be invited to the Berliner Theatertreffen in 1993. The author of the monograph defines this theatre in a typology built from an intercultural perspective as the theatre of exoticisation (Theater der Exotisierung), pointing to several deliberately presented elements, e. g. symbols of the Christian Orthodox religion or Judaism, which gave a specific character to this theatre: the transmission of emotions or the Slavic soul, as Andrej Woron reported in interviews.

Michał Nocoń's "Actor's Studio Pulheim", which operated from 1991 to 2004, was an initiative focused more on the acting work with a multinational ensemble performing in German. Szymańska qualifies this artistic initiative as a model of intercultural dialogue, which involved the confrontation of two different working techniques that could be reduced to the opposition of physical theatre versus the theatre of the word. This is where actor Michał Nocoń saw the space for his intercultural work. A very intriguing artistic initiative, which was overshadowed by other theatres – groups focused on presentation alone and not, as Szymańska points out, on dialogue. In his work Nocoń performed the task of a typical intermediary, taking part in numerous initiatives aimed at bringing Polish theatre to German audiences. The author of the monograph stresses that Nocoń was a precursor of intercultural activities aimed at building a New Europe in 1994 (cf. the *Spurensuche I* project).

To this day, Janina Szarek's and Olav Münzberg's "Teatr Studio am Salzufer. Tadeusz Różewicz Bühne" still operates in Berlin. It is a literary theatre that grew out of the tradition of the "Transformtheater", which focuses on Polish literature, in fact mainly on the dramatic works of Tadeusz Różewicz. Szymańska describes each of its performances, i.e., seven stagings including the famous *Weisse Ehe* (*White Wedding*, 2004). The theatre had hit its stride and had become an intermediary between the Polish and German theatres. It had achieved a good position (in terms of infrastructure and subsidies) in Berlin, and Różewicz himself regarded it as a promoter of his art in Germany.

In my opinion, the most interesting – because it escapes all categories and attempts at categorisation – is Berlin-based Manfred Olek Witt's theatre called "Theater der Migranten!". Established after 2008, it shows the development of society, cultural policy and also the theatre itself, in line with the thesis by Wolf-Dieter Ernst (2009: 57), according to which contemporary theatre is losing its contemplative character in favour of a joint discussion, exchange of information or simply a meeting. Witt is less interested in creating a theatre of high artistic quality than in exposing artistic potential through his theatre – mostly an initiative of young and non-professional actors. Witt's Theatre responds to the peculiarities of the city itself, drawing artistic potential from its immediate surroundings and involving people from the neighbourhood in joint theatrical or rather performative projects. Eliza Szymańska was the first to describe this artist's work in detail. She believes that Witt's theatre is linked to the idea of community dance, where the outcome of the work should not be the performance itself, but rather about working together on a project that should, in the long term, change the attitudes and behaviour of those involved. The author conducted several interviews with Witt, from which she concludes that she senses in his artistic work the conviction

– fundamental to theories of both transculturalism and hybridity – that “no culture remains untouched by the global circulation of people, things, signs and information.” (Szymańska 2021: 299) She also draws attention to Witt’s motto, which he sums up in the formula “We are all migrants”. He thus understands the term “migrant” very broadly and emphasises the extraterritoriality and homelessness of this liminal migratory state (Szymańska 2021: 299). Szymańska reconstructs Witt’s subsequent projects beginning with *Oppelner Straße – eine theatrale Reise auf den Spuren von Emin Pascha und anderen Wandervögeln* (2008) and ending with happenings *Rettungs/Flucht/Aktion 015* (2015) and *Herz der Finsternis. Eine Expedition auf Berliner Gewässern* (2015).

In the final, fifth chapter, which is a kind of résumé, the author attempts to relate the studied material to contemporary trends in theatre, stating already at the beginning that this is difficult, if not almost impossible. The concept of heterogeneity, proposed by Manfred Brauneck, which defines many aspects of theatre life in Germany, becomes key to the further argument. This heterogeneity is a good starting point for the presentation of the typology of the theatre of Polish migrants in the last subsection. The author points out that: “in this context, what is decisive is not how two theatrical cultures and two theatrical traditions relate to each other, but how a given director sees this relationship and how they understand their theatre accordingly” (Szymańska 2021: 349); she delineates, therefore, a range of strategies for dealing with the category of foreignness. Putting transcultural universalisation at one pole, she goes on to (double) intercultural mediation, mediation, exoticisation, ending with alteration and transculturalisation. It seems necessary, however, to refer to the times in which Baranowski, Woron, etc. created their theatres, i.e., to the conjuncture that allowed them to exist. For example, at the time of the Kreatur Theater, there was no notion of migrant theatre. Woron referred to the tradition of fringe, anti-regime theatres (it was about the situation during the communist period) and the tradition of artistic theatre, i.e., theatre created by one artist who has a certain mission to convey. I believe that as far as Woron’s work was concerned, the driving force there was the rise of the plastic theatre known in Germany thanks to Tadeusz Kantor’s theatre – that is, the rightly diagnosed exoticism.

Eliza Szymańska’s publication is a long-awaited one, and I, therefore, call for it to be translated into Polish as soon as possible. When *Teatr i dramaty polskiej emigracji 1939–1989* (*The Theatre and Drama of Polish Emigration 1939–1989*) was published in 1992, professor Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, in her introduction, expressed hope that this was only the beginning of research that would allow “to see the phenomena and processes that make up the everyday theatrical life of Polish emigration” (Kiec, Ratajczakowa, Wachowski 1994: 9). Unfortunately, thirty years later it is just as unknown. Thanks to such an initiative undertaken by Szymańska the reader receives not only a review of historical phenomena within the theatre life of Polish emigration, but also they may observe something more than the everyday processes of creating theatre; they become aware of the challenges faced by contemporary theatre (including mainstream theatre) – that is, the performance of an intercultural society.

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Karolina Prykowska-Michalak

Uniwersytet Łódzki, Europa-Universität-Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)

Hannah Speicher: *Das Deutsche Theater nach 1989. Eine Theatergeschichte zwischen Resilienz und Vulnerabilität*. Bielefeld: transcript 2021, 288 S.

Es gibt nach 1989 nur wenige Monografien, in denen die Tätigkeit einer einzigen Bühne analytisch untersucht wird. Wahrscheinlich, weil man sich leicht dem Vorwurf aussetzt, dass die Perspektive auf die gesamte Theaterlandschaft dadurch eingeengt werde. Diesem Vorwurf versucht Hannah Speicher bereits in der Einleitung ihrer Monografie zu begegnen, indem sie suggeriert, dass es in ihrer Studie zwar um eine Institution (das Deutsche Theater Berlin) gehe, diese jedoch stellvertretend für die Gesamtlandschaft der deutschen Bühnen (das deutsche Theater) stehe. Der Frage, ob dem so ist, wird in dieser Rezension nachgegangen.

Mit der die Monografie eröffnenden Einleitung unter dem Titel *Das D/deutsche Theater nach 1989 (Problemabriss)* deutet die Autorin, wie oben erwähnt, ihre ambitionierte Absicht an, anhand des Deutschen Theaters in Berlin als eines Fallbeispiels all die Fragen zu beantworten, die nach 1989 für die gesamte deutsche Theaterlandschaft von großer Relevanz waren. Es sind Fragen zu Produktion, Theaterstilen, konkreten Stücken und Ästhetiken, die als Teil des nationalen Gedächtnisses fungieren könnten, zum Einfluss ost- oder westdeutscher Biografien auf konkrete Personalentscheidungen, letztendlich auch die Frage, ob das Deutsche Theater ein dezidiert Ost-Berliner oder doch ein gesamtdeutsches Nationaltheater werden sollte. Das Deutsche Theater als ein Brennglas für ökonomische, soziale und künstlerische Nachwende-Diskurse betrachtend, nimmt sich die Autorin in den weiteren Teilen der Publikation der Beantwortung dieser Fragen an. Im Mittelpunkt ihres Interesses stehen die Transformationsprozesse im Deutschen Theater der Jahre 1989–2008. Sie werden