

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH, YOUTH AND SPORT

UNIVERSITY OF ARTS TÂRGU-MUREŞ

PHD SCHOOL

**Poetic versus Political. Alternative Theatre in Poland
(1954-1989)**

- Abstract of the PhD Thesis -

Coordinator: Prof. Univ. Dr. Sorin Crişan

PhD Candidate: Anda Cadariu

Târgu-Mureş

2013

Table of Contents:

Foreword.....	3
I. The Social and Political Context in Poland (1954-1989).....	6
II. Artistic Trends and Aesthetic Directions in Communist Poland. Theatre and its Connection to the West	8
III. The Landscape of Mainstream Theatre	9
IV. No Applause: A Short Chronicle of Apartment Theatre.....	11
V. Polish Alternative Theatre between 1954 and 1989: Aestheticism and Political Engagement (a Diachronic Perspective).....	12
VI. The Two Directions of the Polish Alternative Theatre during Communism:.....	13
VI. 1. Poetic, Aesthetic, Experimental Theatres.....	14
VI. 1. 1. Great Directors: Kantor, Grotowski, Szajna.....	15
VI. 1. 2. Student and Other Poetic Alternative Theatres: From Bim-Bom to Grupa Chwilowa.....	15
VI. 2. Political, Ethical, Social Theatres - From Studencki Teatr Satyryków (STS) to Pomarańczowa Alternatywa	16
Conclusions.....	17
Addenda: Polish Alternative Theatre after the Fall of Communism	19
Appendix.....	20
Selected Bibliography.....	21

Motto: “My conception of poetics
is inseparable from ethics and politics.”
- Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life* –

Foreword

The phrase from the title of my thesis (“Poetic versus political”) is a linguistic licence; the term “poetic” is used here metonymically, its meaning being that of “aesthetic”. (This term does not refer to poetry theatre, which is also a part of the Polish alternative theatre movement during communism.)

I owe a debt of gratitude for the distinction between “poetic” and “political” alternative Polish theatre to Tadeusz Kornaś, who separates the independent theatre groups in Poland (even the contemporary ones) into two directions: the anthropological direction on one hand, and the applied, student direction on the other¹. Kathleen M. Cioffi’s research², which represents an important starting point for my thesis, also includes references to the above-mentioned directions.

The phrase „Poetic versus political” refers to the polemic relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical, a relationship which the world’s greatest thinkers (from Plato to Kierkegaard, from Aristotle to Susan Sontag) have been preoccupied with.

For some of the Polish student theatres (which became professional theatres in the 1970s), the ethical aspect (i.e. the subject matter) was more important than the aesthetic aspect (i.e. the means of expression). For other alternative theatres, aestheticism was the leading principle. Therefore, I categorized the most important alternative theatres that were active in Communist Poland according to the criterion they each valued most. Thus, I took into account the polarity between aestheticism and political engagement, between the aesthetic and the ethical; this polarity is one of

¹ see Tadeusz Kornaś, *Between Anthropology and Politics – Two Strands of Polish Alternative Theatre*, translated into English by Caryl Swift, revised and edited by Virginia Preston, editor Katarzyna Szustow, published by Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Warsaw, 2007;

² see Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland (1954-1989)*, Harwood Academic Publishers, s.l., 1996;

the points my thesis is trying to make. Another objective of my thesis is to underline the social impact of Polish alternative theatre during communism; its influence and energy dissipate after 1989, when the independent theatre movement takes a different, more diffuse turn (see Addenda).

*

I aimed at a solid theoretical foundation for my research; therefore, beside briefly analyzing the thorny and long-term relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic, I also dealt with the origins and attributes of alternative theatre.

Although this type of theatre originated at the end of the 19th century, alternative theatre only became a worldwide movement during mid-20th century. Some interpreters even claim that this kind of theatre was born at that time. There is also a certain ambiguity concerning alternative theatre, a term which designates instances of theatre known as “independent theatre” or “fringe theatre”.

The social strand of Polish alternative theatre had a clear purpose: the artistic reflection of a deficient lifestyle; it also aimed at changing the social attitude towards the ideology of the Communist government. This type of theatre does not lack aesthetic quality, but its stakes are mostly ethical.

The situation changes when we speak of the experimental strand of Polish alternative theatre. Here, the ethical generally takes second place. (The exception is Teatr Ósmego Dnia and its performances, which offer a well-balanced combination of the experiment and the preoccupation with the politicized reality of Communist Poland.)

Patrice Pavis and Christine Shantz approach experimental theatre (in general), claiming that the term “experimental theatre” competes with expressions such as “avantgarde theatre”, “laboratory theatre”, “*performance art*” and even “modern theatre”; all these are opposed to conventional, commercial and bourgeois theatre, the foremost purpose of which is financial profit and which is built on established artistic formulas; experimental theatre is also opposed to the idea of repertory theatres, where either classical works or plays by established playwrights are staged. Experimental theatre is more than a genre or a historic movement; it refers to the artists’ perspective on traditions, institutions and commercial operations. According to Pavis and Shantz, this type of theatre is marginal. Mainstream theatre is attractive to the public, creating

stars, bringing in liquidity and being a part of an institutionalized theatre, whereas experimental theatre is very visible (due to its excentricity), and, at the same time, marginal (because of its budget and public)³.

*

The Polish student theatre was, at its beginning, a political one, seemingly following Piscator's idea that politics is playing an ever greater role in the life of individuals, therefore, we need a political art⁴. Thus, Polish alternative theatre was not propagandistic, but "agitational"⁵. Therefore, one can notice a tight, organic association between the social and political context in 1954-1989 Poland and the theatrical productions of the time. From the "thaw" in Poland in the 1950s and until the fall of communism in 1989, the alternative theatre had been playing a major part in the community.

The next chapter deals with aesthetic tendencies of the art in general and of theatre in particular during Polish communism. Another chapter deals specifically with the state of mainstream theatre. I found this second section necessary because, when looking at alternative theatre in the larger context, one finds that it has always been connected to what is happening „on the other side“, to which this type of theatre (i.e. independent, fringe) represents an alternative.

The chapter entitled „No Applause: A Short Chronicle of Apartment Theatre" is tackling briefly upon a phenomenon which is at the antipodes of mainstream theatre, both from the viewpoint of its subject matter and its means of expression.

The hereby thesis includes two ample chapters („Poetic, Aesthetic Experimental Theatre" and, respectively, „Political, Ethical, Social Theatre"), which present, chronologically, the outstanding theatres and directors which fit in the two

³ see Patrice Pavis, Christine Shantz, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, University of Toronto Press, pp. 133-134, available online at URL www.books.google.ro on January 27th 2011;

⁴ see Erwin Piscator, *Teatrul politic*, Editura Politică, București, 1966, p. 325;

⁵ The difference between these two types of theatre is underlined by Zygmunt Hübner: „The propagandistic theater is an official theater, a court theater, a state theater. Propaganda embellishes reality; agitation wants to change it". – see Zygmunt Hübner, *Theater and Politics*, Northwestern University Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 139;

directions of Polish alternative theatre: the poetic one and the political one. The methodology of my research includes elements of history, theatre history, cultural anthropology, aesthetics, sociology and philosophy.

*

The conclusions of this thesis are based on a bibliography in Romanian, English, French and Polish, but also on my experience as a cultural adviser at the Polish Institute in Bucharest and as an Erasmus placement beneficiary at the Institute of Polish Culture within the University of Warsaw. I am grateful to the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw for most of the sources and bibliography I benefited from.

*

The thesis “Poetic versus Political. Alternative Theatre in Poland (1954-1989)” aims at analyzing the independent theatre in Communist Poland by taking into account two concepts polemically interrelated: the ethical and the aesthetic. Taking into account the Jungian statement that there are no pure forms, I chose to underline the way in which these tendencies manifest themselves in Polish fringe theatre.

I. The Social and Political Context in Poland (1954-1989)

Although the Polish were one of the go-as-you-please nations in the communist block, their liberties were also restricted. The adverse conditions in mid-20th century Poland were of a political nature: at the beginning of the ‘50s, the Communists had completely taken over the country. This suffocation of Poland’s freedom would relax though, what with the denunciation of Stalinism by Nikita Khrushchev and the growing opposition in the country. October 1956 remained in history under the name of “Polish October”, marking the beginning of the political thaw and Władysław Gomułka’s coming to power. He did not keep the reformist promises he had made; therefore, at the beginning of the ‘60s, communism was flourishing again in Poland.

The next period in the country's history is known as Gomułka's "Little Stabilization". The idea that theatre was strongly connected to the everyday life of the Polish individual is enhanced by the fact that the expression "Little Stabilization" comes from the title of a play: *Świadkowie albo nasza mała stabilizacja* (*The Witnesses or Our Little Stabilization*), written by Tadeusz Różewicz. This period, which lasted up to 1970, was characterized by unsuccessful politics and a dull daily life. The only colorful events – baleful ones for that matter – were the 1968 student protests, which came up as a consequence of the authorities' ban on a performance based on *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), a play written by Adam Mickiewicz and staged at the Warsaw National Theatre by Kazimierz Dejmek. The anti-Russian scenes were thoroughly applauded, and this was followed by street protests.

In 1970, the government raised the prices of the basic products, which led to new uprisings and also to Gomułka's fall. His successor was Edward Gierek, who doubled the prices in 1976, repeating his predecessor's mistake. Strikes burst out and the oppositional activities increased. Thus *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (*KOR*) was born. It was an organization the purpose of which was to help those workers who were oppressed by the authorities.

In 1978, Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope. His visit to his native land coalesced the Polish society even more, becoming a starting point for the change that was yet to come.

On July 1st 1980, the government raised the prices again. Strikes started anew, especially on naval yards. In Gdańsk, Lech Wałęsa became the leader of the strike and so *Solidarity* (*Solidarność*), the first free legal trade union in communist Europe was born. *Solidarność* became legal in September 1980.

The next leader after Gierek was Stanisław Kania, and in February 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski became Prime Minister. Due to the increasing conflicts between the people and the government, and to an apparently imminent Soviet military intervention, Jaruzelski declared martial law on December 13th, 1981⁶. *Solidarity* again became illegal, operating underground, but before 1984, the arrested members of the trade union were freed and martial law was lifted.

In 1989, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a close friend of Wałęsa's, had become Prime Minister, and there was talk of not how to reform communism, but of how to make

⁶ see *Ibid.*, p. 265;

the transition to capitalism smoother.

Thus, in 1989, like many other Central and Eastern European countries, Poland was on its way to become free from communism; the road was paved with the people's discontent with those in power and it was built by the solidarity among workers, intelligentsia and the Church.

II. Artistic Trends and Aesthetic Directions in Communist Poland. Theatre and its Connection to the West

Connected to European aesthetic trends, but also influenced by the Soviet Socrealism, the Polish have successfully passed through the stages of Modernism and Postmodernism between the '50s and the '90s. From 1949 and up to 1955, the state ordered the artists to express themselves in the style of Socrealism and to promote the national and socialist "values". After Stalin's death, during the thaw, the time came for those works of art (such as Kantor's visual art) which combined surrealism and abstract expressionism.

Modernism and Postmodernism, the two large cultural umbrellas under which Polish alternative theatre can also be included, are tightly connected to the eras in which they appeared, i.e. the Modern and Postmodern ages. Matei Călinescu claims that Postmodernism is a mask of the Modern age⁷, but according to Terry Barrett, Modern age starts at the same time with Illuminism, while the beginning of the Postmodern age is marked by the 1968 protests in France. While Modernism was influenced by Newton, Descartes or Kant, among others, Postmodernism has its roots in the philosophy Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger or Rorty⁸.

Brecht, Artaud, Lee Strasberg, Pirandello and other outstanding personalities influenced European and Polish theatre between the 1950s and the 1990s. Brecht was gone in 1956, the year in which John Osborne and Arnold Wesker were starting to raise in the field of British drama. The initiation of the European career of names such

⁷ see Matei Călinescu, *Cinci fețe ale modernității*, translated by Tatiana Pătrulescu and Radu Țurcanu, afterword by Mircea Martin, Editura Univers, București, 1995, p. 259;

⁸ cf. Terry Barrett, *Modernism and Postmodernism: An Overview with Art Examples*, in James Hutchens & Marianne Suggs (eds.), *Art Education: Content and Practice in a Postmodern Era*, Washington, DC: NAEA, 1997, p. 18, available online at URL http://www.terrybarrettosu.com/pdfs/B_PoMo_97.pdf, on September 4th, 2013;

as Beckett, Pinter, Heiner Müller followed. Playwrights such as Ionesco, Sartre, Tennessee Williams became more and more well-known in Europe and in the world. In Poland, plays of the Theatre of the Absurd were staged, some of them even before having been staged in England or in France. The most precocious theatre in this respect was an alternative one: Teatr 38.

Steven Connor⁹ wrote at large on Postmodern theatre, underlining its increasingly technological traits and the propensity towards the performative, while Hans-Thies Lehmann, in his book – *Postdramatic Theatre*¹⁰ - spoke about one of the foremost transformations of theatre in the Postmodern age – the postdramatic, which overtook the “drama” paradigm.

Postmodernism is a reaction to Modernism and it is its continuation, salvaging it and transforming it into the object of parody; thus, it remains in a permanent relation to Modernism.

Witkiewicz and Gombrowicz played a crucial part in Poland’s transition to Postmodern culture. After the ‘60s, one could acknowledge the appearance of *pop art* and conceptual art in the field of visual arts. Music was, just like alternative theatre, one of the more unhindered means of expression against communism, especially due to festivals attended by many Central and Eastern European participants.

Among theatre creators, Kantor and Grotowski, two alternative theatre directors, were the most open-minded towards the West. They both left their country after having started their careers in Poland. When the authorities were more lenient, student groups also organized and took part in international festivals.

Thus, Polish theatre, especially its alternative branch, was tuned into Western aesthetic trends and artistic directions. Even though these penetrated Communist countries with difficulty, Poland was a crucible for Central and Eastern Europe due to the artistic open-mindedness of its people. The part played by the Polish alternative theatre in connecting to these trends will become obvious in the following chapters. But before analyzing this movement at large, I would like to briefly look upon mainstream theatre:

⁹ see Steven Connor, *Cultura postmodernă*, translated from English by Mihaela Oniga, Editura Meridiane, București, 1999;

¹⁰ see Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Teatrul postdramatic*, translated from German by Victor Scoradeț, Editura UNITEXT, București, 2009;

III. The Landscape of Mainstream Theatre

After the Second World War, theatre had become even more important in Poland than before. Although Polish theatre's institutional model had been the Soviet one, during the "Polish October", Social Realism was given up and the censors allowed theatres to produce plays that used to be banned. Political messages appeared in productions of completely non-political plays. But no matter how obvious these half-words were, they remained allusions. The '50s mainstream theatre never talked about political issues¹¹.

Theatre had always been a refuge for the Polish. And during communism, just like in Romania, the artists and intellectuals who did not want to leave their country were faced with a *tertium non datur* situation: they either had to make a pact with the regime, entering thus a „velvet prison“¹², or they had to fight the oppressing powers by all means.

Sociologist Jeffrey C. Goldfarb underlines the fact that, as a consequence of the 1968 protests, the control of the Polish Communist Party over the intelligentsia's means of political expression had intensified considerably¹³. In theatre, the authorities were intervening decisively. In 1967, censorship closed Teatr Rapsodyczny. This is a telling fact when it comes to this type of oppression. As for the above-mentioned repression, the 1968 banning of the performance with *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)*, based on Adam Mickiewicz's play of the same name, is the best-known culturally oppressive step the authorities of the time had taken¹⁴.

After Gomułka's fall and Gierek's coming to power, the Party's control became more subtle: the artists were offered awards, medals and contributions in kind¹⁵.

¹¹ see Kathleen M. Cioffi, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 – 22;

¹² The expression "velvet prison" belongs to Miklos Haraszti, a Hungarian politician, and it refers to the situation of those intellectuals who would sign a pact with the regime and, as a consequence, were spoiled by it. (*apud* Kathleen M. Cioffi, *op. cit.*, p. 17);

¹³ see Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *The Persistence of Freedom: The Sociological Implications of Polish Student Theater*, A Westview Replica Edition, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1980, p. 34;

¹⁴ see Kazimierz Braun, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66;

¹⁵ cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67;

In mainstream theatre, the '70s were not as prolific as the '60s. The most prominent plays were written by playwrights who had started their careers in the '60s: Sławomir Mrożek and Tadeusz Różewicz. During this period, Polish theatre became better known for its directors than for its playwrights¹⁶, while Poland turned into a center of visual theatre *per se*¹⁷.

After martial law was declared, in December 1981, the Polish actors started a boycott on the media, refusing to appear in any radio or tv show. Theatres were trying to produce performances that would talk about repression. In order to avoid censorship, theatrical productions were using metaphors, allusions and historical situations that were similar to the odds faced at the time by *Solidarity*¹⁸.

During the '70s and the '80s, a new generation of directors was being born. Krystian Lupa would become its most prominent member. Around him, the constellation was formed by names such as Janusz Nyczek, Andrzej Makowiecki or Krzysztof Babicki. The experiment was starting to dominate the Polish stage¹⁹.

The stakes at which mainstream theatre in Communist Poland was playing were more related to the aesthetic than to the ethical. This is why I consider it to be a part of what I call "poetic" theatre, as opposed to another movement that can be traced at the antipodes of mainstream theatre, i. e. a phenomenon which was a part of the underground theatre: apartment theatre, which comes under the category of political theatre.

IV. No Applause: A Short Chronicle of Apartment Theatre

Apartment theatre can be placed at the opposite pole of the mainstream. A phenomenon strongly linked to the feeling of dissent, it flourished especially during martial law. Apartment theatre has a long and sinuous historical course, linked especially to constraints of a political nature. For the Polish, apartment theatre is almost a tradition.

¹⁶ Among the outstanding directors of the institutional theatre at the time, we can find Swinarski, Wajda and Grzegorzewski. (see Kathleen M. Cioffi, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102);

¹⁷ cf. Kazimierz Braun, *A History of Polish Theater, 1939-1989: Spheres of Captivity and Freedom*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1996, p. 71;

¹⁸ cf. Kathleen M. Cioffi, *op. cit.*, p. 147;

¹⁹ see *Ibid.*, pp. 117-120;

Zygmunt Hübner includes this type of theatre in what he calls “conspiratorial theatre”: “Conspiratorial theatre – isn’t this a contradiction in terms? A negation of the very essence of theater, which is a public activity? One can write for the desk drawer, paint in the attic, but can one give performances in secret?”²⁰ The answer is “yes”. In Poland and abroad, due to the adverse social and political conditions, performances were also held in secret.

Kazimierz Braun argues that apartment theatre promoted in Communist Poland humanity and morality. The aesthetic values were not a goal. In this type of performance, theatrical form was not the one that came first²¹. This is why I think that this kind of theatre is closer to the political than to the poetic. Completely opposed to mainstream theatre, which was grounded in the poetic, in the allusive, in the metaphorical point of view, apartment theatre, being preoccupied with ethical problems, worked in the framework of underground, conspiratorial, political theatre, due to its straightforward approach and the oppositional contents of its performances.

V. Polish Alternative Theatre between 1954 and 1989: Aestheticism and Political Engagement (a Diachronic Perspective)

In student productions of 1954, the allusions to Poland’s political situation became less and less subtle, especially in what was to be the first wave of Polish alternative theatre.

At the beginning of the Gierek regime, Polish student theatre went through a resurrection, combining the aesthetic experiments of the ‘60s with the interest in politics generated by the 1968 events²². In the ‘70s, the young intelligentsia “began to turn to student theater not as a refuge from political debate, as had been the case in the sixties, but as forum for political expression, as had been the case in the mid-fifties”²³. Thus, student theatres of the ‘70s aimed at transforming their art into the voice of their generation, in the same way in which the alternative theatres of the ‘50s

²⁰ Zygmunt Hübner, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166;

²¹ see Kazimierz Braun, *The Underground Theater in Poland under Martial Law during the Last Years of Communism (1981-1989)*, in *The Polish Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1993), University of Illinois Press, p. 183;

²² cf. Kathleen M. Cioffi, *op. cit.*, p. 104;

²³ Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *op. cit.*, p. 37;

had been the voice of the Polish October generation. As the members of student theatres felt that an overt attitude towards the political was compulsory, they also thought they had to create a kind of theatre that would speak up about everyday Polish reality. That reality being highly politicized, they had to create a political theatre²⁴. The impact of the new student theatre wave on Polish theatre, on political attitudes and on artistic issues the youth were preoccupied with was a major one²⁵.

In the '70s and the '80s, the groups the Polish alternative theatre landscape is composed of increase their numbers. The coalescence of the movement, however, declines. This is a consequence of the change in the professional status of these groups, as well as an aftermath of changes in the aesthetic views of those already in existence, but mostly, it is a consequence of the public's views on this kind of theatre.

I have introduced this short chapter which offers a diachronic perspective on the three waves of Polish alternative theatre during communism (political-poetic-political) in order to create a time frame for this movement. What follows is a separation between political and poetic theatres, and a detailed analysis of the two directions and of the artists who created them:

VI. The Two Directions of the Polish Alternative Theatre during Communism

I have identified two main directions in Polish Alternative theatre between 1954 and 1989: the poetic, aesthetic, experimental direction on one hand, and the political, ethical, social direction on the other hand.

Following a thorough research, I consider that political theatres were more preoccupied with *what* they were saying, while the groups and directors concerned with the aesthetic side or their work were interested more in *the way* they expressed themselves.

The aesthetic aspect is foremost for the artists I consider as a part of the poetic direction of the phenomenon analyzed in this thesis. These artists range from Bim-Bom to Grupa Chwilowa, from Kantor to Szajna. As for the theatres in the political

²⁴ see Kathleen M. Cioffi, *op. cit.*, p. 106;

²⁵ cf. Juliusz Tyszka, *Student Theatre in Poland: Vehicles of Revolt, 1954–57 and 1968–71*, in *New Theatre Quarterly* (2010), vol. 26, nr. 2, p. 164, Cambridge University Press 2010, available online at URL <http://journals.cambridge.org> on January 21st, 2012 (the article was rented for 24 hours), p. 170;

direction, from STS to Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, the contents of their performances is more important. Often, aestheticism and ethicism fuse in certain performances, but what I have based my classification upon is not the *genus proximum*, but the *differentia specifica* of the groups and directors I had in view. Hence, their belonging to two directions: some artists create a poetic, aesthetic, experimental theatre, and others – a political, ethical, social theatre.

VI. 1. Poetic, Aesthetic, Experimental Theatres

“Should the theatre be political?

Absolutely not.

The job of the theatre is to investigate the human condition.”

- David Mamet, *Theatre* -

Interpreters have established for a while the fact that the terms “experimental” and “alternative” are not interconditioned. One can notice though the fact that, although there are exceptions to this, experiment was tackled upon especially in the alternative theatre. Among the great directors whose performances and principles my thesis discusses, there are Jerzy Grotowski (who, although working in a state theatre in the beginning, is considered in Poland an alternative theatre director), and Józef Szajna (who, although experimental and working himself in repertory theatres, is not considered an alternative theatre director in his native country).

I consider Kantor, Grotowski and Szajna to be a part of the poetic trend of the Polish alternative theatre because their work qualifies them as being both experimental and alternative. My thesis does not deal with Polish “independent” theatre during communism, but with “alternative” theatre. Although critics, essayists and theatre reviewers consider that independent = alternative, I did not take into account the project funding of these three directors (funding was problematic and unclear during communism – see Grotowski’s case). Instead, I approached their method of work and the type of art they were creating. For this reason, I also wished to include in my paper the work of Szajna, who can also be considered an experimental artist.

As for the theatres who are “poetic” and not political, several specialists, both academics and journalists, consider them alternative companies as well.

Therefore, the poetic strand of Polish alternative theatre during communism was shaped by three great directors (Kantor, Grotowski and Szajna) and by more than nine theatre companies (Teatr Bim-Bom, Teatr 38, Scena Plastyczna, Gardzienice, Pleonazmus, Akademia Ruchu etc.).

VI. 1. 1. Great Directors: Kantor, Grotowski, Szajna

I chose to present here Kantor, Grotowski and Szajna, by means of a few essays which are not as much argumentative but rather descriptive, trying to cast light on the part they played in the artistic world of communist Poland. Due to his anti-illusionist nature, Kantor is different from the other two. Grotowski’s theatre has deep roots in Cultural Anthropology, while Szajna is a very unusual director, concentrating his vision on the visual aspect of theatre.

These three artists give shape to one of the brightest constellations of Polish directors. I included them in the category of those interested more in the *how* than in the *what* because none of them advocates for transforming the external reality of the public, but they each aim in their own way at enriching the inner reality of the spectators. Therefore, in Kantor, Grotowski and Szajna’s work, the primary criterion is not the ethical, but the aesthetic.

VI. 1. 2. Student and Other Poetic Alternative Theatres: From Bim-Bom to Grupa Chwilowa

The “poetic” student (and other) theatres in communist Poland mainly aim at aesthetic achievements. From Bim-Bom to Grupa Chwilowa, they mean to move the spectator’s inner world, and their artistic strategy has an important entertainment component.

While Bim-Bom artists carried their public in the world of childhood, other theatres (Galeria, Cyrk Rodziny Affanasief, etc.) were concentrated on the visual aspects of theatre. Others, as it is the case with Grupa Chwilowa, migrated from cabaret to theatre. Scena Plastyczna, Leszek Mądzik’s theatre of images, Gardzienice,

a group which glided between the ethnical and the anthropological aspects of art, and Akademia Ruchu, a company whose artists were true masters of the performative event, complete the landscape of the "poetic" direction in Polish alternative theatre.

What all these groups have in common is the fact that they were all apolitical. Some of them (the famous company Gardzienice, for example) were even accused by their colleagues that they were too silent when they should have protested the communist oppression.

The way in which the artists in these groups chose to express themselves mattered more than what they had to say. Hence their aestheticism, which was compensated by the political engagement of the theatre groups which aimed at tackling ethical issues.

VI. 2. Political, Ethical, Social Theatres - From Studencki Teatr Satyryków (STS) to Pomarańczowa Alternatywa

“The artist who engages in political activities by defending the higher ethical values in social and national life or in international relations remains consistent with his mission and implements the morality of the artist upheld by age-old tradition.”
- Zygmunt Hübner, *Theater and Politics* -

In the “Political, Ethical, Social Theatres” section I speak of those groups, companies and alternative theatres that are more focused on their message, on the contents of their performances and on ethical values, rather than on form and artistic values. This means that the concern for theatre aesthetics was shifted towards theatre as a vehicle for ethical questions and problems, as well as one for social and moral change.

This section does not include “great directors”; unlike the chapter before, this one only deals with groups that work as a team. Maybe because the kind of political, oppositional theatre practiced by this part of the Polish alternative theatre is work *within* the community, *for* the community, and it is not so centered on the individual.

Some of the Polish alternative theatre groups which developed during communism placed themselves in loud opposition to the government. This is the strand which made this type of theatre famous worldwide. Not many had heard of Scena Plastyczna, but the entire Western world had learnt that Ósmego Dnia was one of the top Polish theatre groups.

Thus, in Communist Poland, the groups that were known for their political performances were, among others: Ósmego Dnia, Provisorium, Teatr STU, Teatr 77, Teatr Kalambur or Pstrąg. From Studencki Teatr Satyryków to Pomarańczowa Alternatywa, political theatre groups have always dealt with the ethical aspects of Poland's social reality. No wonder that the landscape of the poetic theatres seems more eclectic, while the portrait of the alternative theatre political movement is more unified.

Conclusions

Polish alternative theatre during communism is renowned especially for its oppositional stance towards the regime. I also aimed at discussing in the hereby thesis another side of this movement: the one that was less politically concerned.

The thesis starts from the consistent and long-term debate on the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic. I have identified several views on these concepts and on the way in which they are interconnected. The considerations I took into account belong to outstanding thinkers. The poles-apart positions on this matter are aestheticism and ethicism. Relying upon the opinions of Susan Sontag, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Cain Todd or even Plato and Aristotle, I reached the conclusion that, in order to apply this (still on-going) debate to an analysis of Polish alternative theatre, one cannot ignore the differentiation between the aesthetic and the ethical, between aestheticism and political engagement. That is why I separated Polish alternative theatre into two categories: the poetic and the political.

It was necessary to introduce two chapters that would place the „poetic“ and the „political“ in a context. Thus, a quite ample section of this thesis is dedicated to Poland's political context (from Gomułka to Jaruzelski), while a more concise chapter underlines the aesthetic tendencies in Polish art and alternative theatre (Modernism, Postmodernism and subsidiary cultural trends).

The poetic and political aspects in Polish theatre (and not just in the alternative

theatre) can be noticed in other forms of theatrical art which I analyzed in two separate chapters: mainstream theatre, on one hand, and apartment theatre – which can be found at the antipodes of the mainstream – on the other hand. While in mainstream theatre the artistic form (the aesthetic aspect) was prominent, mostly due to censorship, in the case of apartment theatre (a type of underground theatre) performances were more focused on the contents, on the ethical aspect. Mainstream theatre became complacent and then politicized, but apartment theatre always remained defensive, being a means of fighting for free speech.

The chapter which deals with the „poetic“ direction of alternative theatre identifies several student groups and three great directors, while the section which deals with the political propensity of this kind of theatre in Poland contains seven groups. It would be, of course, oversimplifying to think, only on the basis of such statistics, that aestheticism is leading in Polish alternative theatre during communism. The political theatres of prestige and impact are equally important. Moreover, as I have mentioned above, the theatres which were politically involved in the opposition against communism made alternative theatre in Poland famous.

Starting from the detailed list of theatres analyzed here, as well as from the three waves of Polish alternative theatre during communism (political-poetic-political), I gather that this movement was based both on aestheticism and on political engagement. The extent to which these two directions were combined is shown by the performances, companies and directors analyzed in this thesis.

I infer, as a conclusion of this research, that alternative theatre in Poland during communism combines aesthetic values with ethical ones in an exemplary manner, being thus a multi-faceted movement.

From Bim-Bom to Scena Plastyczna, the poetic alternative theatre groups have offered the public remarkable aesthetic experiences, sometimes blending this dominant trait with raising social issues (e.g. Akademia Ruchu's case). Unlike the above-mentioned groups, political theatres, from STS to Provisorium, aimed at sending out into the world an ethical attitude and *message* through aesthetic means. Some political theatres are known both for their social concerns and for the high aesthetic quality of their performances (e.g. Ósmego Dnia).

The three great directors connected to the experimental and the alternative sides of theatre (Kantor, Grotowski and Szajna) are less political, counting more on the aesthetic side of their work. Just like the groups I included in the aestheticist

direction of Polish alternative theatre, these great theatre directors worked creatively not to change the outer reality of the public, but to enrich the inner one.

Between 1954 and 1989 there were more waves of the alternative theatre movement in Poland. None was purely aesthetic or purely ethical. That is why I infer, at the end of this research, as a definite conclusion of this thesis, the fact that alternative theatre in Communist Poland was both poetic and political. It was not an eclectic phenomenon (as it would seem *prima facie*), but a dual and perfectly coalesced one.

Addenda: Polish Alternative Theatre after the Fall of Communism

Magdalena Gołaczyńska identifies three tendencies within Polish alternative theatre after the fall of communism: there are those groups whose performances involve social critique, groups who are more interested in the personal, existential level, and “collective creators”, whose purpose is to push the boundaries of theatre at an aesthetic level²⁶.

The alternative theatre of present days is flowing in parallel with mainstream theatre, contributing to the latter rather than being tributary to it. Moreover, it is shaped by many generations and professions. Akademia Ruchu, Ósmego Dnia or Provisorium are still active, forming the „old guard”, while the next generation includes groups such as Cogitatur, Porywacze Ciał or Komuna Otwoc (today Komuna//Warszawa). The two generations coexist harmoniously, and they even coproduce performances. One cannot find so-called masterpieces among contemporary alternative theatre productions, but the quality of this kind of theatre is comparable to the achievements of professional theatre. Thus, Teatr Kana and Teatr Bióro Podróży received in the ‘90s Fringe First and Critics’ Awards at Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Gołaczyńska claims that artistic life in Poland has decentralized after 1989, underlining the fact that while most alternative theatres were financed by student organizations during communism, nowadays they take the form of

²⁶ see Magdalena Gołaczyńska, *The Alternative Theatre in Poland since 1989*, in *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 17 / Issue 02 / May 2001, Cambridge University Press, pp 186-194;

associations (Teatr Kana, Teatr Cogitatur), private theatres (Teatr Cinema) or foundations (Klinika Lalek)²⁷.

The political engagement of ethical theatres during communism has turned nowadays in a critique of consumerism, producing performances that offer a pessimistic view on post-industrial society.

Theatre directors such as Grzegorz Jarzyna, Krzysztof Warlikowski or Jan Klata have reformed mainstream Polish theatre after communism. In the field of alternative theatre, the poetic aspect is prominent and the political one has been almost completely abandoned. Among post-communist alternative theatres we can count: Gardzienice, Studium Teatralne, Teatr Węgaity, Ósmego Dnia, Akademia Ruchu, Scena Plastyczna, Provisorium, Kana, Bióro Podróży, Teatr Strefa Ciszy, Proywace Ciało, Komuna Otwoc (Komuna//Warszawa), Teatr Cinema, etc.

I think that the tradition of Polish alternative theatre (even though this looks like a contradiction in terms) was firmly established and continued by groups such as Akademia Ruchu, Teatr Kana or Ósmego Dnia. The younger generation has built on this foundation, continuing to maintain high aesthetical standards for Polish alternative theatre. Nowadays theatre, the theatre that is alive, can be felt in Poland especially in the world of independent theatre, which is now free from the constraints it used to face during communism.

Appendix

This section consists of three interviews with theatre people who were active in Polish alternative theatre during communism. They are: Ewa Wójciak (Teatr Ósmego Dnia), Krzysztof Żwirbils and Janusz Bałdyga (Akademia Ruchu) and Dariusz Mikuła (Teatr Kana). The interviews focus on the poetic and, respectively, political dimension of the performances created by the three groups.

²⁷ cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-188;

Selected Bibliography:

- **Barrett, Terry**, *Modernism and Postmodernism: An Overview with Art Examples*, in James Hutchens & Marianne Suggs (eds.), *Art Education: Content and Practice in a Postmodern Era*, Washington, DC: NAEA, 1997, also available online at URL http://www.terrybarrettosu.com/pdfs/B_PoMo_97.pdf, on September 4th, 2013;
- **Braun, Kazimierz**, *A History of Polish Theater, 1939-1989: Spheres of Captivity and Freedom*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1996;
- **Braun, Kazimierz**, *The Underground Theater in Poland under Martial Law during the Last Years of Communism (1981-1989)*, în *The Polish Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1993), University of Illinois Press;
- **Călinescu, Matei**, *Cinci fețe ale modernității*, translated by Tatiana Pătrulescu and Radu Țurcanu, afterword by Mircea Martin, Editura Univers, București, 1995;
- **Cioffi, Kathleen M.**, *Alternative Theatre in Poland (1954-1989)*, Harwood Academic Publishers, s.l., 1996;
- **Connor, Steven**, *Cultura postmodernă*, translated from English by Mihaela Oniga, Editura Meridiane, București, 1999;
- **Goldfarb, Jeffrey C.**, *The Persistence of Freedom: The Sociological Implications of Polish Student Theater*, A Westview Replica Edition, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1980;
- **Golaczyńska, Magdalena**, *The Alternative Theatre in Poland since 1989*, in *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 17 / Issue 02 / May 2001, Cambridge University Press;
- **Hübner, Zygmunt**, *Theater and Politics*, Northwestern University Press, Chicago, 1992;
- **Kornaś, Tadeusz**, *Between Anthropology and Politics – Two Strands of Polish Alternative Theatre*, translated into English by Caryl Swift, revised and edited by Virginia Preston, editor Katarzyna Szustow, published by Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, Varşovia, 2007;

- **Lehmann, Hans-Thies**, *Teatrul postdramatic*, translated from German by Victor Scoradeț, Editura UNITEXT, București, 2009;
- **Pavis, Patrice; Shantz, Christine**, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, University of Toronto Press, pp. 133-134, available online at URL www.books.google.ro on January 27th, 2011;
- **Piscator, Erwin**, *Teatrul politic*, Editura Politică, București, 1966;
- **Tyszka, Juliusz**, *Student Theatre in Poland: Vehicles of Revolt, 1954–57 and 1968–71*, în *New Theatre Quarterly* (2010), vol. 26, nr. 2, Cambridge University Press 2010, available online at URL <http://journals.cambridge.org> on January 21st, 2012 (article rented for 24 hours).