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Contemporary Drama and Theatre in German-speaking Countries in a European Context. Report on the Project and the International Academic Conference *Spaces of Humanity: Contemporary Drama and Theatre for a Sustainable Future – Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft* (Kraków, 3rd – 5th October, 2024)

Abstract: This text presents the findings of an international interdisciplinary research project conducted at the Institute of Neophilology of the University of the Commission of National Education in Kraków, Poland. The project addresses contemporary issues pertinent to the understanding of German-language drama and theatre within a European context. Specific focus is placed on the matters discussed at the academic conference held in October 2024, which addressed the topic of human beings/humanity (humanum) in contemporary literary drama and theatre in the context of the issue of sustainability.

Keywords: drama, theatre, scientific project, Poland, conference, networking.

“A theory can be pseudo-science, even if it is very plausible and everybody believes it, and it can have scientific value, even if it is not believable and nobody believes it. A theory can be of the highest scientific value, even if nobody understands it, let alone believes it.”¹ Imre Lakatos also claimed that when writing a history of internal transformations in science it is essential to take an objectivist stance. However individuals gain a certain understanding of the essence of the social structure they live in, there will always exist a discrepancy between the structure and functioning of society, and their distorted reflection in the minds of individuals.²

This space between the structure and functioning of society or individuals, and how this functioning is reflected, in this case a theatrical reflection, has become the basis for deliberations and academic analysis, ultimately leading to a research project, whose core it forms together with the literary text. The latter is, in a sense, a forum where all types of social dependencies and phenomena that characterise interpersonal relationships are presented; the same can be said of its realisation on stage, which is a platform on which the director can present his or her subjective interpretation of the text.

A number of independent research projects initiated by employees of the Department of German-language Literature at the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków (UKEN) gave rise to a desire to pool expertise and use it as a basis for joint research. Thus a thematically broad series of symposia came about, each of which discusses one central topic, opens up new avenues in other fields of scholarship and stimulates discussion. These symposia have taken place almost every year since 2014, apart from a non-productive period during the COVID pandemic. The papers and outcomes of the conferences are presented in multi-author volumes, which were initially published in the renowned series *Interdisciplinary Studies in Performance* edited by Mirosław Kocur, and since 2021 they have been published by Brill.³

As a result of ongoing work and research on individual topics, the project leaders (Prof. Martin Langner and Prof. Agata Mirecka) decided to start a book series published by Brill in Paderborn, Germany, with the title *Drama*

¹ Alan F. Chalmers, *Czym jest to, co zwiemy nauką?*, trans. Adam Chmielewski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Siedmioróg, 1997), 158.

² Chalmers, *Czym jest to, co zwiemy nauką?*, 159.

³ Cf. *Tendenzen der zeitgenössischen Dramatik*, eds. Paul Martin Langner, and Agata Mirecka (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2015); *Raumformen in der Gegenwartsdramatik*, eds. Paul Martin Langner, and Agata Mirecka (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2017); *Zur Funktion und Bedeutung des Chors im zeitgenössischen Drama und Theater*, eds. Paul Martin Langner, and Joanna Gospodarczyk (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2019).

Between the Text and Stage (Drama zwischen Text und Bühne). The co-editor of the series was Dr Marta Famula, at that time a research assistant at Paderborn University and at present director of Bamberg Puppet Theatre. Marta Famula was involved in the project from the very beginning, taking an active part in all the conferences and expressing her opinion on many matters. The editorial board of the book series consists of respected professors from Poland and Germany, which is an honour for the series editors and means they have significant support.⁴

The scholars working on the project *Studies on contemporary drama and theatre in German-speaking countries and a European context (Forschungen zum Drama und Theater der Gegenwart im deutschsprachigen Raum und europäischen Kontext)* have allowed themselves a broad field which encompasses diverse topics and points to the interdisciplinary nature of the research undertaken. At the same time they use new methodological principles from various disciplines. Apart from theatre specialists and Germanists, those who take part in the discussions include comparatists, journalists, teachers, anthropologists, philosophers, sociologists and historians. This conception of the projects enriches discussions and joint academic endeavours, and also attempts to combine diverse points of view, while not denying the contradictions between them. Those involved in the project have followed this conceptual idea from the very beginning.

The project began in 2014 with an interdisciplinary academic conference on the topic *Creations in German dramatology in recent decades (Kreationen des deutschen Dramas in letzten Jahrzehnten)*, which took place in Kościelisko in the Polish Tatra Mountains and brought together scholars from Poland, Germany and Russia. The next conferences took place in 2015 with the topic *Dimensions of the present in contemporary drama (Raumdimensionen in der zeitgenössischen Dramatik)*, in 2016: *Repetitions in contemporary dramatic literature (Wiederholungen in der dramatischen Literatur der Gegenwart)*, in 2017: *On the function and significance of the chorus in contemporary drama and theatre (Zur Funktion und Bedeutung des Chors im zeitgenössischen Drama und Theater)*, in 2018: *The return of catharsis? (Wiederkehr der Katharsis?)*, in 2020: *Crisis in contemporary drama (Krise im Drama der Gegenwart)*, in 2023: *Futurity in contemporary drama and theatre (Zukünftigkeit im zeitgenössischen Drama und Theater)* and in 2024: *Spaces*

⁴ Editorial board of the series *Drama zwischen Text und Bühne* (Paderborn: Brill): Mateusz Borowski (Jagiellonian University in Kraków), Aleksandra Budrewicz (University of the National Education Commission in Kraków), Norbert Otto Eke (Paderborn University), Joanna Jabłkowska (University of Lodz), Friedemann Kreuder (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz), Franziska Schößler (Trier University).

of humanity: contemporary drama and theatre for a sustainable future (*Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft*). This latter conference brought together numerous academics from Poland, Germany, Russia, Austria and Switzerland, including Prof. Carola Hilmes from Goethe University Frankfurt, Prof. Friedemann Kreuder from Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Prof. Klaus Steinke from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Prof. Monika Tokarzewska from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Prof. Karol Sauerland from the University of Warsaw, Prof. Artur Pełka from the University of Łódź, Prof. Zbigniew Feliszewski from the University of Silesia in Katowice, as well as many others.

According to one of the creators of the project, Prof. Martin Langner, research on contemporary theatre from an academic perspective means “re-reading” what has already passed. Time is an explicit measure of the theatre, the ephemerality of the moment and its reconstruction become the essence and subject matter of academic research. If the present is a moment after which that which is written down belongs to the past, and that which is said disappears the moment it is said, then reconstructing what has just been lost is not inventorying, but a re-enactment of time, which demands an analytical juggling of factors, conditions and interactions. The result is a kind of retrospective view of what the present has just helped to reconstruct. Addressing the backlog associated with this does not require social, historical or mental arguments to be forgotten, but rather for them to be placated, explained and condensed. Visualising means stabilising the ephemeral, and thus reclaiming the past, which continually influences the present. Investigating this interaction from the perspective of contemporary theatre and drama is one of the essential aims of this project.⁵

Recently, an element of the project described here has been an international interdisciplinary conference with the title *Spaces of Humanity: Contemporary Drama and Theatre for a Sustainable Future* (*Spielräume des Humanen: Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft*). It took place between 3rd and 5th October 2024 in Kraków in the main building of the University of the Commission of National Education (UKEN). The organiser of the conference was the German department within the Institute of Nephilology, in collaboration with many research centres in Poland and abroad.

The purpose of the conference was to analyse the so-called human element in contemporary drama and theatre in the context of the challenges associated with shaping a sustainable future. The discussions focused on such topics as humanism, posthumanism, ecology and the role of the theatre in reflecting upon contemporary social and cultural issues.

⁵ Prof. Paul Martin Langner in 2018, in a report after four years' work on the project.

The theme of the conference was especially topical from an academic point of view because posthumanism is at present a key issue in the contemporary humanities, particularly in the context of technological changes, inter-species relationships, ideological influences and ecological issues. In drama and theatre, ecology is explored more and more often as a means of building environmental awareness and promoting actions for sustainable development. The interdisciplinary nature of the research, which combines areas such as literary studies, theatre studies, ecology and philosophy, is a response to the needs of contemporary humanities, which require a combination of various perspectives. At the same time, reflecting on humanism in the face of global challenges, such as migration, climate change, the alienation of the individual, and questioning rights which derive from Christianity, are currently some of the most important topics, not only in academic debates.

The proceedings lasted for three days and delegates had the opportunity to listen to exceptional papers and take part in inspiring discussions. The conference was opened by Prof. Andrzej Kuropatnicki (UKEN), the dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and Dr Piotr Majcher, the deputy director of the Institute of Neophilology for German philology. The keynote speech was given by Prof. Andreas Enghart (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) and the title was *Compassion for Gaia? Posthumanist Figurations in the Theatre and the Theatrical Text in the Context of Current Research on the Emotions (Mitleid mit Gaia? Posthumanistische Figurationen in Theater und Theatertext vor dem Hintergrund aktueller Emotionsforschung)*. The speech raised as yet unresolved issues regarding the possibilities and limits of representations of Gaia or quasi-objects in (performative) theatre and theatrical texts. The focal point is created by the emotions, which are figurations of what we call Gaia as understood by Bruno Latour, James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. Andreas Enghart is a renowned specialist in the field of contemporary drama and theatre, and his research focuses on topics such as the analysis of posthumanism, the ecology of the emotions and theatrical narratives. As the keynote speaker he set the tone of the whole conference, pointing out new directions for contemporary theatre research and underscoring the significance of an interdisciplinary approach to theatre and drama. Prof. Karol Sauerland (University of Warsaw) gave a paper on Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death, discussing the spaces of humanism in this form of theatre. The term Theatre of Death relates to a unique vision of the theatre, whose central motif is death, transience and confrontation with the inevitable end, without omitting the role of the individual, elements of history, memory and trauma. Transgenerational landscapes of the memory in the context of the drama *Środula. Maus's Landscape (Środula. Krajobraz Mause)* by Romuald Brzyk formed the subject matter of a paper given by Prof. Zbigniew Feliszewski

(University of Silesia in Katowice). On the other hand, Prof. Artur Pełka (University of Łódź) referred in his presentation to theatrical textophony, in which he put forward some reflections on the topic of multilingual sonority and musicality in contemporary drama.

According to Dr David Krych (University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna), the “post-humanist era”, or the overcoming of quasi-human domination, can be perceived as an exclusive narrative, especially in a theatrical and theatrical-historical context. During the conference he raised essential issues, posing the questions: What narrative and understanding of theatre and the theatrical person does the concept of posthumanism convey? Which theatre and which historical forms of theatre are left unaddressed in the concept of humanism? And consequently, how do they thwart this narrative of overcoming? What concept and what terminology can offer an alternative to such an exclusive understanding? The extent of what is human in theatre shows up the inseparability of what is non-human in such a way that the blind spot in theatrical discourse, which operates from the hegemonic present, becomes obvious.

The human condition in specific texts was the topic of the papers given by both Dr Julia Lind (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz) and Prof. Agata Mirecka (UKEN). Dr Julia Lind analysed the spaces of the human condition (humanum) in Jon Fosse’s works, while Prof. Agata Mirecka (UKEN) described the dystopian vision of the future and the role of human beings in it, using Marius von Mayenburg’s drama *Mars* as an example.

Dr Joanna Gospodarczyk (University of the National Education Commission in Kraków) discussed the dynamics between animality and humanism in the plays of Caren Jeß, while the paper given by Prof. Anna Majkiewicz (Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa) was devoted to an analysis of the most recent dramas of Elfriede Jelinek, which show the relationship between human beings and nature (*That which is Human between the Sun, Air and Ash in the Most Recent Dramas of Elfriede Jelinek (Das Menschliche zwischen Sonne, Luft und Asche in neuesten Dramatexten Elfriede Jelineks)*).

The last presentation was an analysis by Prof. Paul Martin Langner (at that time from the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków, currently at the Silesian University in Opava, Czech Republic) *Fractures between Singular Humanities (Brüche zwischen singulären Humanitäten)*.

To conclude the conference, Dr Felix Lempp from the University of Bern in Switzerland made a brief speech, joining the participants of the conference via the internet. He referred to the main idea behind the project *Research on contemporary drama and theatre (Forschungen zum gegenwärtigen Drama und Theater)* and invited delegates to the next conference connected to this project which he will organise and is to take place at the Uni-

versity of Bern in spring 2026, the theme of which will be *The sacred in contemporary drama and theatre (Sakralität im gegenwärtigen Drama und Theater)*.

The conference was a perfect opportunity to exchange views and to bring the academic community working on contemporary theatre and literature together. Contemporary theatre and drama also have the potential to shape ecological awareness, emphasising the need for a more sustained approach both to human beings' relationship with nature and other species and to other aspects in the context of contemporary civilisational challenges. Posthumanism, which is well known, has opened up new perspectives in research in the humanities, paying attention to the relationships between human beings, technology and the environment, not to mention the experiences of past generations, history and its influence on the future.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research that the project has inspired is crucial in the context of developing an understanding and finding new perspectives, not only for contemporary social problems, but also ecological ones, which are also a topic of current literary dramas in Poland and Germany. This is because theatre and drama remain a unique place to reflect on humanism and posthumanism, combining art with philosophy and the social sciences.

During the conference, researchers were encouraged to continue their exploration of topics associated with issues of humanity (*humanum*) for sustained development in the theatre, and also to initiate projects that undertake the challenges connected to this. The organisation of subsequent interdisciplinary conferences on drama and theatre was recommended, which will allow the further development of collaboration between scholars from various disciplines who gather around the specific issues mentioned during the proceedings. The conference organisers expressed their sincere thanks to the speakers and participants who contributed to the success of the event. Special thanks were extended to the Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany in Kraków for their organisational support and hospitality at Villa Decjusz, and whose presence provided an opportunity for further discussions and to establish new academic contacts. Papers from the conference will be published in the form of a multi-author volume, and also in German by a renowned academic publishing house.

Prof. Paul Martin Langner and Prof. Agata Mirecka are specialists in German-language literature who have been collaborating since 2005 and working on drama since 2014. Prof. Agata Mirecka is a literature researcher and a certified German translator, while Prof. Paul Martin Langner is a literary researcher, President of the Friedrich Hebbel Association in Wesselburen, Germany, as well as professor at the Silesian University in Opava. They have

co-edited many academic books and articles which analyse current trends in German-language drama and contemporary theatre. Furthermore, Agata Mirecka is a member of the working group Dramaturgia and Post-Docs, which are part of Gesellschaft für Theaterwissenschaft in Germany; this attests to her active involvement in the international research community. Their joint publications and research projects contribute to deepening knowledge of contemporary German-language drama, and their broad academic connections provide a foundation to bring further planned academic projects to fruition.

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**Współczesny dramat i teatr w krajach
niemieckojęzycznych w kontekście europejskim.
Sprawozdanie z projektu i międzynarodowej konferencji
naukowej *Przestrzenie Humanum: Dramat i teatr
współczesny dla zrównoważonej przyszłości*
(Kraków, 3–5 października 2024)**

Abstrakt: Tekst stanowi przedstawienie międzynarodowego interdyscyplinarnego projektu badawczego realizowanego w Instytucie Neofilologii Uniwersytetu Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie, podejmującego aktualne kwestie istotne dla poznania i zrozumienia aspektów współczesnego dramatu i teatru tworzonego w przestrzeni niemieckojęzycznej, a traktowanego w kontekście europejskim. Szczególna uwaga zostaje poświęcona kwestiom poruszanym podczas obrad na mającej miejsce w październiku 2024 roku konferencji naukowej na temat człowieka/człowieczeństwa (*humanum*) we współczesnych dramatach literackich i sztukach teatralnych w kontekście zagadnienia zrównoważonego rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: dramat, teatr, projekt naukowy, Polska, konferencja, sieć współpracy.

**Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater
im deutschsprachigen Raum und europäischen Kontext.
Bericht über das Projekt und die internationale
wissenschaftliche Konferenz *Spielräume des Humanen:
Gegenwärtiges Drama und Theater für nachhaltige Zukunft*
(Kraków, 3.-5. Oktober 2024)**

Abstract: Der folgende Text präsentiert ein internationales, interdisziplinäres Forschungsprojekt, welches am Institut für Neophilologie der Universität der Kommission für Nationale Bildung in Krakau (Polen) durchgeführt wird. Im Rahmen des Projekts werden aktuelle Fragen behandelt, die für die Kenntnis und das Verständnis von Aspekten des zeitgenössischen Dramas und Theaters von Bedeutung sind, welche im deutschsprachigen Raum entstanden sind und in einem europäischen Kontext betrachtet werden. Im Rahmen der wissenschaftlichen Tagung im Oktober 2024 wurden Fragestellungen erörtert, die sich mit dem Thema Menschlichkeit/Humanität (Humanum) im zeitgenössischen literarischen Drama und Theater in Bezug auf die Frage der nachhaltigen Zukunft befassten.

Schlüsselwörter: Drama, Theater, wissenschaftliches Projekt, Polen, Konferenz, Vernetzung.