The issues facing women directors in Poland were always connected to the history of Poland’s liberatory struggle—first, under partitions, then, under Nazi and Soviet occupations. Although historically Polish theatre has gained worldwide renown predominantly thanks to its male directors such as Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski, Poland today has a thriving and influential cadre of young women directors, who have gained renown and respect in Poland and abroad.

Women’s Rights: Historical Context

In 1772 Poland was partitioned by the Russian Empire, Kingdom of Prussia, and Habsburg Austria, which divided the Polish Commonwealth among themselves. In 1795 after two more partitions, Poland ceased to exist as an independent nation. It did not regain its statehood until 1918, following World War I. Because of its long legacy of partitions, the early Polish feminist movement has always been connected to national liberatory struggle. Positivism, the late-nineteenth-century progressive socio-cultural movement, considered women’s education and work outside of the home to be necessary for the survival of the Polish nation. The ethics of equal access to work and knowledge allowed for a relatively pluralistic social structure. On military ground, many women fought alongside men in various national uprisings. In addition to the Positivist and militant strains, deeply rooted Polish Catholicism, Polish Romanticism, and a long established system of nobility created an idealized image of a Polish woman, respected and worshiped foremost as a mother (stemming from the Madonna figure) whose domain was to protect and safeguard the Polish home and national values of...
“God, Honor, and the Country” (Walczewska 10). As a result of all of these factors, Polish women received their full voting and elective rights the same year as the country gained its independence, a tacit acknowledgement of their contributions to the national struggle during the 123 years of partitions. However, despite visible progress, the two visions of Polish womanhood—the militant, working woman and the “Polish Mother”—remained in tension.

Following World War II, the rise of communism and the Soviet regime changed gender relations in Poland: the Communists saw social relations primarily through the prism of class struggle. In that context, the new image of a socialist working woman, who was simple, healthy, able to work side by side with men, and contributed equally to the common, brilliant socialist future, contrasted with the prewar image of a “bourgeois” woman of leisure, who was portrayed as hysterical and weak. With the spread of state-owned kindergartens and preschools, women were given equal access to the workplace, and the concept of a stay-at-home mother basically disappeared from the Polish landscape. As most society was, on some level, engaged in some form of resistance against the Communist regime, once again the image of a “Polish Mother” came to the forefront: she was now both a working woman and a stereotypical Polish mother who stood guard over family, national, and religious values; she was often engaged in some form of subversive political activity, while at the same time being primarily responsible for the survival of her family. Since the Communist regime greatly undermined the sense of Polish masculinity, day-to-day existence under the system was a combination of matriarchal and deeply misogynistic tendencies, with women shouldering the entire burden of housework and childrearing activities while maintaining their position as equal or sometimes only breadwinners. Regardless of their complex position within the family structure, women were equally present in the workforce, getting the same pay for the same work. Though they had more difficulties gaining recognition and promotion, women had a relatively strong social and cultural position despite the deeply misogynistic tendencies of the Catholic discourse that continued to dominate much of Polish family life.

Early Women Directors

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite the progress that Polish women were making on other fronts, theatre and art remained a male domain. Though women playwrights such as Gabriela Zapolska and Felicja Kruszewska made their mark on Polish theatre, women directors were virtually absent. One of the early women directors was Lidia Wysocka (1916–2006), a theatre and film actor, theatre director, and costume designer. Her most notable productions were staged after World War II and included Stuart Engstrand’s *Springtime in Norway*, produced in 1949 in Szczecin, and Aleksander Fredro’s *Husband and Wife*, produced in 1959 in London. The
situation in Polish theatre changed significantly after World War II. As Polish theatre critic Wojciech Szulczyński noted, “The communists privileged the Polish theatre, never stinting it money or other means” (499). Although initially theatre was thought to be a useful tool of socialist propaganda, it soon became a tool of subversion. Classic texts gained new meaning, and playwrights and directors developed a peculiar coded language to talk about present concerns while escaping the omnipotent and omnipresent state censorship. During the postwar period, two women directors marked the strongest presence: Lidia Zamkow (1918–1982) and Krystyna Skuszanka (1924–2011).

Zamkow studied drama at the National Institute of Theatre Arts (Państwowy Instytut Sztuki Teatralnej, PIST) in Warsaw and at the State Academy of Drama (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna) in Łódź—now the Aleksander Żelwerowicz State Theatre Academy. She started her career as an actor and throughout her career continued acting and directing simultaneously. She directed her first show, Bolesław Prus’s Error (Omyłka) in 1948 at the Polish Military Theatre (Teatr Wojska Polskiego) in Łódź. The production was praised by critics for the skillful construction of grand group scenes (Fik 195). In her later years Zamkow directed at a variety of Polish theatres. Some of her most notable productions include Maxim Gorky’s Barbarians in 1953 at The Coast Theatre (Teatre Wybrzeże) in Gdańsk; Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s The Visit in 1958, Shakespeare’s Macbeth in 1966, and Stanisław Wyspiański’s The Wedding in 1969, all at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre (Teatr im. Juliusza Słowackiego) in Cracow; and Bertolt Brecht’s Mother Courage and Her Children in 1962 followed by Albert Camus’s Caligula in 1963 at the Old Theatre (Narodowy T eatr Stary) in Cracow.

Having started her career during the heyday of Socialist Realism, Zamkow, like other Polish artists of that time, had to struggle against the prevailing socialist aesthetics. In 1956 Zamkow said that most of the plays she directed were chosen by the theatre management (Fik 195). Her own personal style, however, was eventually given a chance to flourish in the mid-1950s. In 1953 Stalin died, and Khrushchev came to power. Three years later, Khrushchev denounced Stalinist atrocities, and the period referred to as The Thaw, or Polish October, began as the Communist Party loosened its grip on the country’s political and cultural life. In the spirit of the times, Zamkow’s 1954 direction of Viesvolod Vishnevsky’s An Optimistic Tragedy in Gdańsk at the the Coast Theatre was praised for its “realistic, unsentimentalized image of Russian Revolution” (Fik 196). Similarly, Zamkow’s 1956 production of Romeo and Juliet at the Polish Army Theatre (Teatr Domu Wojska Polskiego) in Warsaw tackled Shakespearean text through the prism of contemporary social and political problems of Polish youth. Like many Polish directors of her generation, during the years 1956 to 1959, Zamkow wanted to make theatre that would engage both social and political reality of the moment. Since then, her plays began sharing a common theme: one’s struggle against an idea, a political force, or a society (Fik 197). Although her staging continued to be subtly political, Zamkow was primarily interested in directing classics, since they allowed for ambivalence, and she...
generally avoided grotesque and farce because they remained politically too hazardous, although they eventually came to dominate Polish playwriting of the post–1956 era. She did, however, direct a number of notable productions in the expressionist style, including Dostoyevsky’s *Dream* and Camus’s *Caligula* in 1963 at the Old Theatre; an adaptation of Kafka’s *America* in 1968 at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre; and Tolstoy’s *Resurrection* in 1969 on the Stanisław Wyspiański stage at the Silesian Theatre (Stanisław Wyspiański Teatr Śląski) in Katowice (Węgrzyniak 443). Thanks to her bold and grand reinterpretations of classics, Zamkow is considered, next to Krystyna Skuszanka, one woman auteur director who was able to develop her individual artistic style under challenging political circumstances.

After studying at the Old Theatre Studio, Skuszanka graduated in 1949 with a degree in Polish literature from the University of Poznań. Three years later she received her directing diploma from the National Institute of Theatre Arts in Warsaw and made her directorial debut with Władimir Bill-Białoćerski’s *Sztorm* (Storm) at the National Theatre (Teatr Ziemi Opolskiej) of Opole. The production, with set design by Kantor, was unconventional by the norms of that time which was dominated by Socialist Realism. In 1955 Skuszanka became an artistic director of the People’s Theatre (Teatr Ludowy) in Nowa Huta, a working neighborhood of Cracow, where, as French theatre critic Raymonde Temkine noticed, she “made an avant-garde theatre which has been able to attract the workers” (17). That year Skuszanka worked with Kantor again on her production of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* at the National Theatre in Opole. At that time, Jan Paweł Gawlik, a renowned Polish theatre critic, wrote of her work: “Skuszanka always focuses on one theme of the drama that she considers the most important, and she develops it, even while disregarding all other possibilities. This bold theatrical shortcut, invention, creativity and monumental vision are the most important elements of her newly evolving artistic style” (Fik 201). In *Measure for Measure*, Skuszanka was trying to make a political statement, and she focused on the issue of power and dictatorship (Fik 202). In 1972 she took a job as an artistic director of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre, while also teaching at the Cracow Theatre School. In addition, along with her husband, she was an artistic director of the National Theatre in Warsaw from 1983–90. Unlike Zamkow, Skuszanka began her career at the twilight of Social Realism, and she always directed at “her” theatres as an artistic director, which gave her more political and artistic freedom (Fik 200). Skuszanka’s most notable productions include Juliusz Słowacki’s *Balladyna* in 1956 and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in 1959, both at the People’s Theatre in Nowa Huta; Adam Mickiewicz’s *Forefather’s Eve* in 1962 at the Polish Theatre (Teatr Polski) in Warsaw; and Słowacki’s *Kordian* at the Drama Theatre (Teatr Dramatyczny) in Wrocław in 1962.

Although Skuszanka also focused on classics, particularly on works by Shakespeare and Polish Romantics, she did not stray away from contemporary Polish drama. She always wanted to “reference the Polish national tradition, but choosing works which would ring true and alive to the contemporary society, often touching on painful
and controversial issues” (Fik 202). Following the 1956 October Thaw, several Polish playwrights began creating an absurdist language that tackled both transnational, existential themes and specifically Polish political and cultural issues. Skuszanka staged some of those works, including a 1967 production of Mrożek’s *Enchanted Night* for the Polish Television Theatre. Skuszanka’s style, even in her work on classics productions became more abstract, often involving metatheatrical elements of “theatre within theatre.” For example, her 1966 version of *As You Like It* at the Polish Theatre (Teatr Polski) in Wrocław, took place on an empty stage with one gold bush of mistletoe (Fik 204).

Working Climate at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

Following the 1989 Round Table talks that ended the forty years of communist regime in Poland, the Polish theatre—always entangled in one way or another in the political struggle—suddenly was left in an ideological vacuum. At the same time, with the economic turnover to the free market, the state sponsorship of the theatres was significantly curtailed, leaving many of them to their own devices as far as funding was concerned. In October 1989, during the general meeting of the Association of Artists in Warsaw’s Polish Theatre, it was acknowledged that during the communist period, theatre depended financially on government. “Suddenly, in free market conditions, the artists felt lost” (Udalska 167). As well-known Polish scholar Halina Filipowicz said: “Who needs the stage for political expression when public debate has moved to the parliament and the media?” (“Polish” 70)

Culturally, during the 1990s, as a country in transition between the communist rule and capitalism, Poland became a battlefield between religious and liberal groups. Catholicism’s overly repressive rule following the fall of communism clashed with the freedom of expression and the influx of the Western (particularly American) culture, with its morally lax attitude toward the female body and sexuality. On the crossroad between the traditionally Catholic-centered mentality of the old Poland and the newly emerging class of women unwilling to submit to it, Poland came to represent a larger, global paradigm shift in the politics of sex and representation. Many women became bitterly disappointed with the direction of the country, becoming nostalgic for socialism, often referred to as a period of “gender innocence.” Despite the obstacles, or perhaps because of them, the transitional period of the 1990s included small political victories. In 1989 Izabella Cywinska, theatre director and critic, became the first Minister of Culture. As Filipowicz wrote in 1992, only a decade earlier Cywinska had been imprisoned for one of her politically engaged productions (“Polish” 76). Another victory for women occurred in 1992 when Hanna Suchocka became the Prime Minister in the government of President Lech Walesa. Unfortunately, during the 1990s, no theatre was willing to discuss “the issues that have dominated public discourse: abortion, the reinstatement,
by governmental decree, of religious instruction in public school, the promotion of Christian values on public radio and television” (Filipowicz, “Demythologizing” 124). The function of political and social commentary was relegated to performance art and multimedia art, which saw its Polish renaissance during that decade of transition.

The turbulent 1990s, however, proved to be fertile ground for a new crop of young women theatre directors of the so-called transitional generation. The years 2001 through 2003 saw directorial debuts of many young women directors, some of whom eventually came to establish themselves as leaders of Polish theatre.3 Interestingly, nearly all of the shows directed by Polish women directors during the first decade of the new millennium were written by foreign men and were lacking in the traditional Polish cannon that once constituted a foundation of Polish theatre. This tendency might have been a general syndrome of uncritical fascination with the Western culture that dominated the transitional decade. It may also testify to certain absorption of the patriarchal mode of storytelling and fear—fear on the part of women directors—of being labeled feminist and relegated to the margins of Polish culture. Nonetheless, Polish women directors work at top theatres in the country, gaining international recognition and earning many of the country’s highest theatre awards. They appear to thrive in the post-communist world, although perhaps their successes are not yet fully on their terms.

Polish Performance and Video Art: Post-1989

The transitional climate of the 1990s was a fruitful ground for the number of artists—mostly filmmakers, performance artists, and video artists—to pursue the paradoxes and ironies of the Catholic discourse vis-à-vis gender difference and sexuality. Women performance and visual artists such as Katarzyna Kozyra, Alicja Zebrowska, and Dorota Nieznańska caused scandals by either mocking or shocking the Polish public opinion with radical juxtapositions between the sacred and the profane. Much of Kozyra’s work entertains the issues of gender, power, and violence. Her 1999 short video, Men’s Bath House (Łaźnia męska), filmed in Budapest in a men’s bath house, is influenced by Jean Auguste Dominque Ingres’s painting The Turkish Bath and a 1995 photograph titled Bonds of Blood that focuses on the Yugoslavian conflict and depicts two sisters’ mutilated bodies lying under religious symbols of Catholicism and Islam. In addition, her video performance and photo series, Lou Salome, shown in Rome at Teatro di Cani in 2005, features femme fatale Lou Salome driving a buggy through Vienna’s Schwarzenberg Palace drawn by Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée, who are dressed as men-dogs undergoing training at the hands of their dominatrix. Kozyra’s most monumental multimedia-performative project yet, Art Dreams Come True, performed during the years 2003 to 2006, is a surreal landscape of mythical and modern iconography. The main heroine, Berlin-based drag queen Gloria Viagra, is an actor and Kozyra’s alter ego, who is both Madonna and dildo-wearing transvestite desperately trying to weave in a coherent self-image from fragmented pieces of her postmodern identity (Kireńczuk 18–22).
Profiles of Contemporary Directors

Anna Augustynowicz

Born in 1959 in Dębica, Anna Augustynowicz studied theatre at Jagiellonian University and directing at the Ludwik Solski State School of Theatre (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Teatralna im Ludwika Solskiego, PWST) in Cracow, graduating in 1989. While at PWST, she studied with Krystian Lupa, a well-known, award-winning Polish director who is considered the patron of the new post–1989 directing wave. In 1992 she became an artistic director of the Modern Theatre (Teatr Współczesny) in Szczecin. In this position, as one of the first Polish directors, she began introducing a number of new European plays onto the Polish stage, tackling difficult social themes with bold theatrical gestures. Her directing style is often characterized as naturalistic, risky, and brutal. The critics also refer to it as “dirty,” “meaty,” “visceral,” “bodily,” and “physical” (Żółkoś 73). Augustynowicz is also credited as one of the first Polish directors to use video and other multimedia techniques widely in her productions. She also introduced a new style of adaptation, updating a number of classics, including those from traditional, national Polish repertoire. Her adaptations attempt to reflect contemporary issues and sensibilities.4 Augustynowicz’s work has been honored with many awards at Polish and European theatre festivals. In 1996 her all-male production of Witold Gombrowicz’s Iwona, Princess of Burgunda was awarded a directing prize at Opole’s Theatre Confrontations: Polish Classics (Opolskie Konfrontacje Teatralne: Klasyka Polska). The production has been judged as a harbinger of a new wave in Polish theatre, a signpost of the new post-1989 generation. Augustynowicz “ranks among Gombrowicz’s most important contemporary interpreters” (Augustynowicz and Semil 70). The Polish theatre critic and scholar Rober Cieślak wrote that by cross-dressing her actors, Augustynowicz was able to trigger other theatrical processes that revealed new dimensions of Gombrowicz’s text. Transgendered aesthetics enhanced the focus on form. Another Polish critic noted that Augustynowicz’s adaptation “is dynamic, full of bitter humor, with its own rhythm and fascinating atmosphere” (Liskowacki). In 2007 Augustynowicz received the top prize for her staging of Wyspiański’s The Wedding at the National Competition of Stagings of the works of Stanisław Wyspiański (Ogólnopolski Konkurs na Inscenizację utworów Stanisława Wyspiańskiego). One critic noted that Augustynowicz’s version of The Wedding captures the essence of Wyspiański’s play: the anxieties over Polish national identity at the crossroads: “With simple black and white aesthetics, subtle music and rhythmical acting, the director asks questions about the future and national identity of the Polish nation: where are we coming from, who are we, where are we going?” (Wójcicka). Another critic pointed out that Augustynowicz’s version of The Wedding “goes beyond theatre, reframing the issues touched on by Wyspiański into a new modern context. It’s an important and wise meeting with an incredibly complex work” (Dolega). For her radical and critically acclaimed adaptations of Polish classics, Augustynowicz...
received the Passport of *Polityka Weekly*, which cited her artistic boldness and sensitivity to modern issues as two most significant accomplishments.

**Iwona Kempa**

Born in 1967 Iwona Kempa graduated with a degree in Theatre Studies from Jagiellonian University in 1992 and studied directing at the State School of Theatre in Cracow, graduating in 1996. She debuted as a director in 1994 at the Universal Theatre (Teatr Powszechny) in Lodz with a production of *Quartet* by Boguslaw Schaeffer. Combining quasi-theatrical and quasi-instrumental elements, *Quartet* was so successful that during the 1990s it was staged by practically every Polish theatre. In 1996 Kempa began working in Torun at the Wilam Horzyca Theatre (Teatr im. Wilama Horzycy), where she directed *Caricatures (Karykatury)* by Jan August Kisielewski. For this production she received the Bohdan Korzeniewski Prize, awarded to young directors by the magazine *Teatr*. Her other productions in Torun included Beckett’s *Endgame* in 1998; *Two and Half Billion Seconds*—based on Beckett’s five one-acts—in 2006; and Martin McDonagh’s *The Lonesome West* in 2002. All three productions received critical acclaim, with *The Lonesome West* winning the Minister of Culture and Journalist Awards.

Kempa is mostly interested in contemporary drama, and she directed a number of Polish premiers of international hits, including McDonagh’s *The Cripple of Inishmaan* in 1999 at the Wroclaw Contemporary Theatre (Wrocłowski Teatr Współczesny), Zoltan Egressy’s *Portugal* in 2004 at the Polish Theatre in Poznań, and Neil LaBute’s *The Shape of Things* in 2003 at the Polish Theatre in Bydgoszcz. Her production of *Portugal* was met with critical acclaim, with one of the Polish critics writing, “Iwona Kempa is never sentimental, always looking at her characters with a somber eye, seeing their poses and pretenses for what they are. Kempa knows how to balance the proportions. In today’s theatre, where everyone’s falling for cheap tricks of extreme emotions—love or hate—looking at things in their true proportions is a real feast” (Sieradzki). Zoltan Egressy, the author of the play, praised Kempa for a perfect balance between pathos and grotesque (Maćkiewicz). The production also won a number of awards, including the 2004 directing award at the IV Festival of Contemporary Drama “Reality Represented” in Zabrze. Kempa’s productions of classics include Chekhov’s *Seagull* in 1999 at the Jana Kochanowskiego Theatre in Opole, Carlo Gozzi’s *The Love of Three Oranges* in 2002 at the Contemporary Theatre in Wroclaw, Büchner’s *Wayzgeck* in 2003 at the Wilam Horzycy Theatre in Torun, Brian Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa* in 2006 at the Theatre Academy (Akademia Teatralna) in Warsaw, and an adaptation of Ingmar Bergman’s *Scenes from a Marriage* in 2008 at the Juliusz Sławacki Theatre. Kempa chooses productions that combine humor with irony, violence, pathos, and the grotesque, focusing on carefully crafted emotional range and subtle study of characters.
Maja Kleczewska

Maja Kleczewska was born in 1973 in Warsaw. She graduated with a degree in psychology from Warsaw University and a degree in directing from the State School of Theatre in Cracow. She was an assistant of Krystian Lupa and Krzysztof Warlikowski, internationally known Polish theatre directors. Her 2000 directorial debut, Jordan by Anna Reynolds and Moiry Buffini, staged at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre, won her immediate critical praise. Kleczewska’s productions analyze the psychology of the characters and their motivations, showing lonely and lost heroes who are unable to adapt to their world and eventually end up either going insane or committing a crime. The central theme of Kleczewska’s work is crime, murder, and violence. Her direction is rough and unsentimental. Polish theatre critic Łukasz Drewniak even calls it, “manly and brutal in the way it portrays the world” (111). Kleczewska’s most acclaimed production was Shakespeare’s Macbeth, staged in 2004 at the Jan Kochanowski Theatre in Opole. The production combined Shakespearean language with modern aesthetics of pulp fiction movies. Peter Rieth poignantly summarizes the impact of the production, explaining,

Kleczewska’s Macbeth takes the ostentatious step of making Shakespeare’s witches— weirder. Rather than witches, the drama unfolds with what appear to be two transvestites and a prostitute. Such an opening salvo may initially be regarded as an application of stereotypically modern crassness to an ancient classic, but Kleczewska’s apparent genius lies in the fact that she recognizes modernity as effectively crass, thus transmutating Shakespeare’s “weirdness” from an acknowledgment of the mystic frontiers of Fortuna into a representation of modern decadence. This very transmutation is essentially the foundation for the plays’ dialectic regarding the possibility of tragedy and the question of farce.

In Poland, the production provoked scandal, because, as Jacek Wakar, a Polish theatre critic pointed out, it “features sex and violence similar to a Tarantino movie.”

Agata Duda-Gracz

Agata Duda-Gracz is a theatre director and designer. Her father, Jerzy Duda-Gracz is considered one of the greatest contemporary Polish painters. Born in 1974 in Cracow, Duda-Gracz graduated with a degree in art history from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow and studied directing at the State School of Theatre in Cracow. She worked on more than twenty productions either as a director, scenic designer, or costume designer at theatres in Kalisz, Cracow, Łódź, Warsaw, and Wrocław. She began her career with the production of Cain by George Byron, staged at the Witkiewicz Theatre in Zakopane in 1998. Other notable productions include her direction at the Theatre Academy of Dramatic Arts in Cracow of Karl Büchner’s Woyzeck in 1999 and Jean Genet’s Balcony in 2004; her direction at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre of Vailland’s Abelard and Heloise.
in 2002 and Camus’s *Caligula* in 2003; Shakespeare’s *Othello* in 2009 at the Jaracz Theatre in Łódź; *Father*, based on a short story by Oscar Tauschinski, in 2010 at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre; and Giacomo Puccini’s *La Bohème* in 2011 at the Grand Theatre (Teatr Wielki) in Poznań.

Duda-Gracz designs costumes and scenography for her own shows as well as for other shows, and she has won a number of awards for her designs, including a Ludwig Award for the set of *Abelard and Heloise*. In 2009 she was awarded a Golden Laurel for her Mastery of Arts, an award given by the Polish Culture Foundation in Cracow. She is often called a “visionary” due to her larger than life, symbolic, and rich visual imagery. Her productions are often compared to those of Józef Szajna and Kantor, two of Poland’s most renowned theatre directors who began their careers in visual arts. Duda-Gracz’s breakthrough production was *Galgenberg*, a collage of texts by Michel de Ghelderode, staged in 2007 at the Słowacki Theatre in Cracow. The production has been hailed as her best show yet, earning critical accolades. Most recently, Duda-Gracz
has been staging productions not only of her own design but also for which she writes her own texts, as with *Apocalypse: A Short History of Marching*, staged at the Słowacki Theatre in Cracow in 2011. Critically acclaimed for its visual and ritualistic aspects (the viewers were sitting in church-like pews), the production marked a new direction in Duda-Gracz’s career; however, like her previous productions, it was called “strong” and was filled with haunting images of violence and sexuality.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of women directors in Polish theatre grew exponentially, with the Grand Theatre in Poznań announcing that its 2011 season would be devoted solely to women directors and the Stara Prochownikia Theatre in Warsaw organizing “women only weekends” for their women audiences. The new generation of women directors is not afraid to take risks and tackle difficult subjects on both small and grand scales.
Notes

1. For example, Roza Pomerantz-Meltzer was the first woman elected to the Polish parliament in 1919 as a member of a Zionist party.

2. In 1994 Katherine Verdery warned that the Western scholars “should be especially attentive to how nationalist politics [in post-Communist Eastern Europe] integrates gender, what alternative forms of national imagery will be offered and by whom, and how the politics around issues like abortion will produce distinctive forms of democracy and capitalism in which nation and gender are intertwined in novel ways” (255).

3. Some of them include Maja Kleczewska, Aldona Figura, Grazyna Kania, Agnieszka Glińska, Monika Strzępka, and Olga Lipinska.

4. Her directing repertoire at the Contemporary Theatre (Teatr Współczesny) in Szczecin includes Stieg Larsson’s Chief (Naczelnny) in 1993 and Brothers and Sisters (Bracia i siostry) in 1995, Clare McIntyre’s Beware of Pity (Bez czułości) in 1995, Werner Schwab’s People Destruction or My Liver Is Senseless (Moja wątroba jest bez sensu, albo zagłada ludu) in 1997, an adaptation of Ben Elton’s Popcorn in 1999, Marius von Mayenburg’s Parasites (Pasożyty) in 2001, Mark Ravenhill’s Polaroids (Polaridy) in 2002, Alan Ayckbourn’s Comic Potential (Komiczna siła) in 2003, an adaptation of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt’s novella Oscar and the Lady in Pink (Oskar i pani Róża) in 2004, Gérald Sibleyras’s The Incription (Napis) in 2005, and Wyspiański’s The Wedding (Wesele) in 2007. Her work for other theatres includes Witold Gombrowicz’s Ivona, Princess of Burgunda (Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda) for the Old Theatre in Cracow in 1997; Catherine Anne’s Agnes for the Wilam Horzyca Theatre (Teatr im. Wilama Horzycy) in Toruń in 1997; Sergi Belbel’s After the Rain (Po deszczu) for The Coast Theatre (Teatre Wybrzeże) in Gdańsk in 2000; and at Warsaw’s Universal Theatre (Teatr Powszechny) Naomi Wallace’s One Flea Spare (Tylko ta pchła) in 2000, Bernard-Marie Koltès’s Return to the Desert (Powrót na pustynię) in 2004, and in 2006 Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure. Her two shows Catherine Anne’s Agnes in 2000 and Krzysztof Bzia’s Toxins (Toksyny) in 2002 have been filmed by the Polish Television Theatre.

5. Other notable productions include Hugo von Hofmannstahl’s Electra (Elektra) in 2001 at the Cyprian Norwid Theatre (Teatr im. Cypriana Norwida) in Jelenia Góra, David Harrower’s Knives in Hens (Noże w kurach) in 2002 at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre, Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over Cuckoo’s Nest (Lot nad kukulczym gniazdem) in 2002 at the Szaniawski Theatre (Teatr im. Szaniawskiego) in Wałbrzych, Chekhov’s The Seagull (Czajka) in 2004 at the Cyprian Norwid Theatre, George Büchner’s Woyzeck in 2005 at the Wojciech Bogusławski Theatre (Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego) in Kalisz, Shakespeare’s Midsummer’s Night Dream (Sen nocy letniej) in 2005 at the Old Theatre in Cracow, Racine’s Phaedre (Fedra) in 2006 at the National Theatre in Warsaw, Sara Kane’s Blasted (Zbombardowani) in 2007 at the Old Theatre, Peter Weiss’ Marat/Sade in 2009 at the National Theatre, and Elfried Jelinek’s Babel in 2010 at the Polish Theatre in Bydgoszcz.

Sources


