

A MEMORIAL

Regarding the Creation of the Museum and Archives of Teatr Laboratorium and Laboratory Institute in Wrocław

Authorised by the director of the Culture Department, Stanislaw Krotoski, we carried out an initial inspection of the Laboratory Institute's archives. Its aim was to evaluate the work done so far on organising the documents, which were to be delivered to several institutions due to the termination of the Laboratory Institute's activities.

We feel deeply alarmed by this project. It would be an unforgivable mistake and cause irreparable damage to divide what is a whole and only in its entirety may fulfil important functions. We insist that everything possible be done to preserve the entirety of the archives and the possessions of the Theatre and Laboratory Institute.

The materials gathered in the archives are of exceptional value, and their significance—as a whole—will grow with the time.

The access to the archives will be a great benefit to future researchers and critics, making their work easier. These collections—properly arranged and partially exhibited—may also accomplish important social and cultural functions by exposing the public to the history of one of the most original and significant phenomena in contemporary theatre.

Therefore, we think the most advantageous solution for the above case would be to establish a separate institution combining museum and archive functions. It could consist of the entire archives of the Theatre and Laboratory Institute with its collections containing 140 portfolios of documents and other materials (see: annex); a few hundred programs, posters and play-bills; its valuable and unique library (about 500 volumes); photo collection; documentary films of great value; and the rest of the durable possession (props, costumes, scenography elements, etc.).

Motivation

There is no need of proving the significance of the Theatre of 13 Rows and Laboratory Theatre in Polish theatre history. There is also no need of pointing out how influential it was for world theatre. It was a unique cultural phenomenon, and it popularised Polish culture around the world. Its significance has not ended with the official closure of the Laboratory Institute's activity. Being a historical phenomenon and having established a permanent place in theatre's history, it will influence and fascinate future generations of artists, explorers, critics, and theatre admirers.

Teatr Laboratorium has become permanently rooted in Wrocław's culture, making this city famous all around the world. It would be hard to come to terms with the thought that no visible trace might be left of its activity, which lasted in our city for 20 years.

Theatre is an art of its time—it exists and passes with time, leaving a more or less permanent trace. Often we light heartedly forget that what is not immediately secured and preserved falls to destruction or becomes scattered. Repeatedly, with great effort, we have to reconstruct what was not appreciated and preserved by our predecessors. We should not repeat their mistake. We stand face to face with the chance to rescue all documents of Teatr Laboratorium's activities. We assume that future generations will pass a bitter and severe judgement if we do not do it, and instead allow the collection to scatter.

We think that our proposal may prevent this situation. Moreover, an archive-museum may become a “living” institution, that accomplishes many useful functions, and may further the cultural influence of the practice and thought of Laboratory Theatre.

Organisational structure:

1. An archive-museum has to be an autonomous unit, subordinate directly to the Cultural Department. Its activity is to be based on proper regulations. It should have its own, internal statute, determining not only its organisational status, but also its goals. It may work under the auspices of the Institute of Polish Philology at Wrocław University.
2. The institution is to consist of three basic sections:
 - a) a permanent exposition portraying the 25 years of Teatr Laboratorium’s activity
 - b) an archives
 - c) an office
3. The institution must be located in Teatr Laboratorium’s premises. We suggest the three rooms in the building on Przejskie Zelaznicze Street, which are separated from the other rooms belonging to the Theatre. One of those units is about 90 sq. meters and is adequate for an exhibition hall.
4. The number of employees could be reduced to two people (an office person and an archivist).
5. The name of the institution depends on its structure. The name suggested by us is The Museum and Archives of Teatr Laboratorium or the Museum-Archival Centre of Teatr Laboratorium.
6. In the future, when the Theatrical Museum is set up in Wrocław, our institution would become an independent part of it.

Work Assignments

The established institution will gather and hold the Theatre’s and Institute’s collections—properly catalogued and stored—in one place. They must systematically update the collection’s documents from the past (e.g. the photo collections need an immediate reconstruction), and documents created in the future (firstly, press publications and books). The archival documents will be accessible to the public, except those reserved by a special clause. They are to be available first to researchers, critics, students, and theatre practitioners.

The institution should maintain contacts with theatrical and academic centres abroad, and exchange materials (e.g. posters and programs) to enrich its collections with materials written in foreign languages.

The museum-like character of the institution will be manifested in the permanent exhibition demonstrating the 25 years of Teatr Laboratorium’s history and its reception in Poland and abroad. All preserved elements of performances will be presented there (costumes, props, scenography, its full documentation: photos, projects, posters, programs, and, more importantly, publications by Teatr Laboratorium; Jerzy Grotowski’s books in multiple editions, selected review, articles and books about the Theatre).

We are sure that this exposition will be eagerly visited by individual tourists and organised groups. Because of the world-wide fame of Teatr Laboratorium, attending the exhibit will be a permanent point in travelers' 'must-see' itinerary.

The exhibition hall should be organised in such a way that allows for presentations of documentary films, workshops, and trainings held by the troupe's members. These demonstrations might be included in a published schedule of visits, but should also be a constant form of activity complementing the promotional activities conducted by our institution.

These activities do not have to be limited the premises of our institution. We receive signals from all over Poland about the need to see films about or related to Teatr Laboratorium. Our Institution may choose to take these notifications into account and offer help in this sphere for students, theatre, experimental theatres, theatrical schools, theatrical centres at universities, etc.

Patronage may be entrusted to a Advisory Board, which should consist of members of Teatr Laboratorium.

We are profoundly convinced of the cultural and social importance of such an institution. That is why we appeal to the political and administrative authorities in Wroclaw to seriously consider our offer and to make an appropriate decision. Any offer should be discussed with the members of the Laboratory Institute. We are aware that it may be controversial from their point of view, which is surely emotional. We are full of respect and understanding for their feelings, but we cannot agree with them. We hope we will convince them that our proposed solution is the best for our culture.

We know of plans for similar institutions at several centres outside of Poland (e.g. New York University). That makes us even more convinced that such a unit in Wroclaw is necessary. Social, cultural, and political reasons speak for it.

Twenty years ago, the wise and noble decision of Wroclaw's authorities saved the Theatre from closing down. We believe their current decision will save the Theatre's archives and collections.

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Wroclaw, July 1984

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translation edited by Grzegorz Ziolkowski. Wroclaw 2004.