


NON-EXISTENT THEATRICAL SPACES – PLACES OF MEMORY OR OBLIVION?¹

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to investigate the impact the non-existent theatre sites exert on the contemporary spaces of Warsaw and to answer the following question: Do the non-existent theatres Warsaw theatre area, exist in the city architectural and urban-planning memory, or only in historical materials? The research methods necessary to define and solve the scientific problem that were applied included: analysis and criticism of source literature, observation without intervention, case study, intuitive method based on the Author's personal experience. The research results showed that Warsaw theatre area operated in the years 1870–1939 Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre], Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre] and Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] / / Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski's Theatre] failed to leave an architectural, urban-planning or symbolic trace. Hence the conclusion that these theatres do not exist in the city architectural and urban memory.

Key words: theatre, theatre space, Warsaw theatre area

INTRODUCTION

Theatre is a kind of performing art, a team of actors, but the term is also applied to define the building in which the art is performed. The first independent theatre buildings in Warsaw date back to the 18th century.

“The place” provides subject to interdisciplinary research, as it is marked with numerous definitions and socio-cultural references. Bogdan Jałowiecki, a space sociologist, interprets the place as part of space distinguished by its unique features. The perception of these aspects may be collective and individual, as it com-

prises physical features and non-physical aspects, e.g. related to emotions (Jałowiecki, 2010). “The place” consists of a composition of physical reality, organic-existential and virtual structures (Zuziak, 2008). No place exists without a human.

The concept of sites of memory was first used and described by Pierre Nora in 1974. Rather than referring to a specific, topographically indicated territory, it comprises all material and non-material signs and traces that recall the memory of the past. To quote Nora after Maria Delaperrière: “Memory and history are by no means synonymous; we are aware of the fact

¹ The study is part of the Author's study on the impact of non-existent historical Warsaw theatre venues, understood as buildings and their surroundings, on contemporary city architecture and urban planning. The whole consists of two problem areas: garden theatre's (Starzyk, 2018) and theatre's – buildings and their surroundings.

that everything divides the two. Memory means life; it is constantly maintained by living groups. Therefore it undergoes constant evolution; it is open to the fulfilment and amnesia debate, with little concern over consecutive deformations, susceptibility to instrumental or manipulative actions. On the other hand, history always constitutes a complex and incomplete reconstruction of what no longer exist [own transl.]” (Delaperrière, 2013, p. 50). Nora’s research was based on the theses developed by Maurice Halbwachs in 1950, with emphasis on collective historical and social memory, consciously ignoring the individual memory (Nora, 1984; Delaperrière, 2013). In contemporary research, the site of memory is subjectivised, analysed both in the context of collective and individual memory.

According to the study quoted by Maria Delaperrière, “the sense of the disappearance of the world’s symbolic meaning provides one of the essential processes of contemporary socio-cultural evolution [own transl.]” (Delaperrière, 2013, p. 52). The process dates several decades back, while Nora’s study on sites of memory was an attempt to stop it (Delaperrière, 2013). Individual memory related to physical and sensory experience may counteract the process. A sense of antiquity, duration, and passing away is evoked by sensory experiences of the marks of the past. At the same time, however, these signs can stimulate emotional ties with previous generations (Szpociński, 2008).

“The sites of memory” [pol. *miejsca pamięci*, fra. *lieu de mémoire*]² constitute places of living history with their social, cultural, and political aspects. According to Andrzej Szpociński, the site of memory concept is now overused and ascribed to all representations of the past in contemporaneity (Szpociński, 2008). The place identity comprises a set of features of both spatial forms and life manifestations; the place identity is subject to interpretation (Zuziak, 2008). According to Ewa Rewers, if identity becomes the subject of postmodern discourses, it is mainly not as certain knowledge, but as a disposition to ask questions, full of discontinuities and conflicts (Rewers, 2005). Identity is linked to the past, whereas the past is always connected to a place. The linguistic structure confirms this. As stated by Maria Delaperrière: “mental structures inform-

ing that something ‘took place’ (*cela a eu lieu, das hat statt-gefunden*, it took place) indicate an ontological need to pin down anything that happened in the past at a specific moment and place [own transl.]” (Delaperrière, 2013, p. 54).

As opposed to sites of memory, the site of oblivion is a place functioning outside of both collective and individual memory. The sites of oblivion are frequently equated by researchers with non-places, as defined by Marc Augé. According to him, these concepts are far from identical, but both definitions may refer to the same place in some instances. According to him, a place is marked with tangible and symbolic space construction, in connection with the principle of sensual participation. A non-place is characterized by a lack of participation and understanding; it constitutes an atopic space (Augé, 2012). The place is accessible, marked; it carries specific values. A non-place is emotionally a no-man’s space.

Memory is related to the recording, storage, and recollection of previously recorded impressions, experiences, and information. Architectural and urban memory is related to the storage of physical elements of the place identity. According to Christopher Alexander, people will not be able to maintain their relationship with the past without traces of the past in the modern physical world (Alexander, 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a result of the preliminary research (see Footnote 1), the topic, territory, and time scope were outlined, whereas the study methodology and concept were established. The study examines a contemporary place that had previously served as a theatre venue, i.e. a theatre building with its surroundings. The territorial scope was limited to the historical area of the Warsaw theatre area, defined in the 19th century as the vicinity of Teatr Wielki [The Grand Theatre], bordered by ul. Długa [Długa Street] towards the north, Starówka [Old Town] towards the east, and ul. Królewska [Królewska Street] to the south, and Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre] and Plac Bankowy [The Bank Square] to the west (Mościcki, 2018). Theatrical sites that exist today, i.e. the build-

² The term was introduced in 1963 by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula (Szpociński, 2008).

ing of Teatr Wielki [The Grand Theatre] and Teatr Narodowy [The National Theatre], were excluded from the study, as well as the non-existent Teatr Mały [The Minor Theatre] due to the unavailability of research material³. The study covered three contemporary sites (Fig. 1), where the following venues used to be located: (1) Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre], (2) Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre], (3) Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] / Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski's Theatre]. The assumed time range when the selected theatre venues operated was in 1870–1939, while the goal-defined research was conducted “here and now”, that is, nowadays.

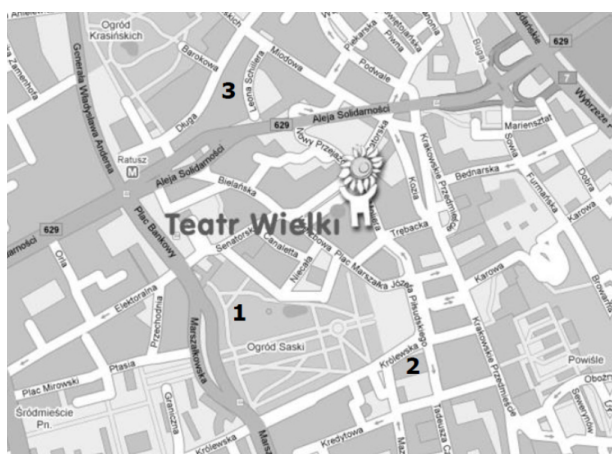


Fig. 1. Study area: 1 – Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre]; 2 – Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre]; 3 – Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] (own elaboration)

The analysis and criticism of source literature were applied together with observation without intervention, a case study, and an intuitive method based on the

Author’s personal experiences. Moreover, landscape and urban inventory was used for the study. In the initial stage, the places indicated in the source literature were chosen, which were then subject to selection regarding the availability and validity of the research material concerning the defined goal. The following were specified as a minimum condition: (i) scientific, popular-science or popular description of the sites; (ii) iconographic sources, i.e. mainly press graphics published in the “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” magazine (published in 1859–1939), and postcard photographs were used as primary sources; (iii) topographic sources, both historical and modern ones, which allow a clear or approximated definition of the location of a given theatre. In the second stage, field research was conducted and documented graphically and through photographs. These focused on three main problem areas: (1) urban trace, (2) architectural trace, (3) symbolic trace. In the consecutive stage, materials collected in the study were processed and synthesized (see Footnote 1; Fig. 2).

According to the Polish language dictionary published by Polish Scientific Publishers PWN, word trace means (i) a mark left on the ground once someone or something has passed or appeared; (ii) signs that something existed or happened, or (iii) a negligible amount of something [own transl.] (Drabik & Sobol (Eds.), 2018). The Author made attempts to identify signs in the contemporary city space to prove the existence of traces of the past in the contemporary historical theatre venues, both in the urban and architectural context. The attempts were based on descriptive, iconographic, and topographic materials. As a result of the preliminary study, it was assumed that finding an

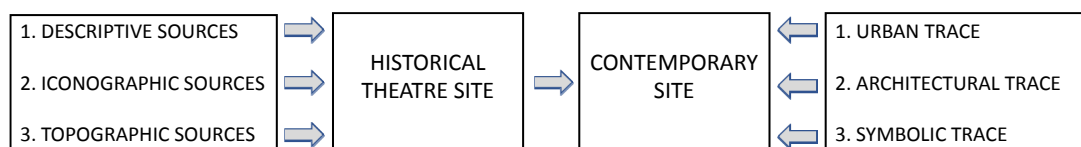


Fig. 2. Research scheme (own elaboration)

³ As a result of the conducted query, it was impossible to obtain research material concerning the exterior (the body of the building) of Teatr Mały [The Minor Theatre]; the lack of iconographic sources availability was confirmed by Katarzyna Wodarska-Ogidel, the curator of the exhibition entitled *Warszawskie teatrowisko* [Warsaw Theatre Area] at Muzeum Teatralne [The Theatre Museum] in Warsaw.

urban and architectural trace may be difficult or even impossible today. Therefore, an attempt was made to depict a symbolic sign without narrowing down the problem with specific criteria, analysing every trace that might indicate former theatrical places.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Until World War II, Warsaw's development was subject to the guiding principles of addition (territorial expansion) and layering the new tissue over the old one. The war resulted in considerable damage to the living urban organism and broke the continuity of the spatial structure (Domaradzki, 2014). Consequently, the identity of Warsaw is complex and multi-layered. The post-war period mainly consisted of the implementation of new spatial layouts and elements.

As a result of in situ studies of selected city places, the actual condition was determined concerning contemporary sites where theatre venues used to be located. The results of the past-present analyses of the site's structure differ depending on the case; significant differences in the architectural solutions applied in the surroundings can be observed.

Ogród Saski [The Saski Garden] – in the past Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre] in Ogród Saski [The Saski Garden]

In March 1870, the construction of a wooden theatre building in Ogród Saski [The Saski Garden] was commenced. Its architecture differed from the neigh-

bouring buildings. The venue was initially planned as a building in Moorish-style architecture. However, due to the introduced changes, it resembled wooden buildings typical of Otwock near Warsaw and its surroundings, i.e. in the Świdermajer style (Fig. 3a). The building was designed by Aleksander Zabierzowski, who was dissatisfied with his design; it was erected by Onufry Waligórski's team and put into use in June of the same year (Mościcki, 2018). The building was located on a tree-free clearing; its front faced the park alley, whereas the back faced ul. Niecała [Niecała Street]. It was placed between "Wodozbiór" Świątynia Westy [Warsaw Temple of Vesta water tower], and the tram line led just behind the row of trees along ul. Marszałkowska [Marszałkowska Street]. The building was implemented on a rectangular plan; its dimensions equalled 42 × 46 m, approx. 25 m in height, with an audience of 1,200 people and a stage similar in size to that of Teatr Wielki [The Grand Theatre]. Despite various aesthetic assessments, the building was characterized by good-quality theatre space; it was spacious and functional, with good acoustics. Thanks to the materials and facade solutions applied (twisted boards), it was airy. Such a solution was beneficial in the summer. However, as over time, the theatre began to function all year round, internal conditions in winter were criticized (Król-Kaczorowska, 1971, 1986; Braun, 2003). The theatre was assumed as a temporary project during construction, but it lasted nearly 70 years; it burned down on 9 September 1939, due to the bombing of the area.



Fig. 3. Ogród Saski [The Saski Garden]: a – Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre] about 1890–1899, postcards photography, photo by M. Pusch (www.warszawa1939.pl/obiekt/letni [access 21.01.2021]); b – contemporary site 2019 (photo by A. Starzyk)

The in situ studies and the analysis of topographic and iconographic materials led to discovering a tree-free space in land development (Fig. 3b). This site can be considered a negligible urban footprint. However, no architectural trace or symbolic trace was found.

Ul. Królewska 11 [11 Królewska Street] – in the past Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre] at ul. Królewska 7 [7 Królewska Street]

As it stems from the source materials, the building of Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre] was built in the former “Alkazar” garden theatre location, which had operated in this place during the summer seasons of 1876–1880. Hence, it was often called Nowy Teatr Alkazar [The New Alkazar Theatre]. Ul. Królewska 7 [7 Królewska Street] is determined as the historical address; however, based on the study by Król-Kaczorowska, the Author assumed the location of today’s “Sofitel” hotel (formerly “Victoria” hotel), at ul. Królewska 11 [11 Królewska Street] (Fig. 4b). Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre] was erected in 1881 as a wooden structure with 700 seats in the audience part (Fig. 4a). During its operation, it was subject to frequent renovation and modernization; its functional and spatial solutions were criticized. Nonetheless, it was liked by Warsaw inhabitants. The theatre was closed, then demolished and sold in parts in 1915 (Król-Kaczorowska, 1971, 1986; Braun, 2003).

As a result of the conducted field study together with the analysis of topographic and iconographic materials, no traces of urban planning, architecture, or

symbolic traces of the theatrical site’s existence in the past were found.

Ul. Leona Schillera 6-10 [6-10 Leon Schiller Street] – in the past Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] / Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski’s Theatre] at ul. Hipoteczna 8 [8 Hipoteczna Street]

The building of Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] was erected in 1901 in the location of the former “Eldorado” garden theatre (Fig. 5a), which had operated in this place during the summer seasons of 1868–1897 (see Footnote 1). The building was provided with two front elevations; the entrance to the theatre was at ul. Hipoteczna 8 [8 Hipoteczna Street] and at ul. Długa 25 [25 Długa Street]. Hence, a double address is often found in the source literature. The representative two-storey brick building was designed by Feliks Stępiński, whereas Marceli Radzicki further modified the design. The facility was functional to both employees and spectators; it was both elegant and equipped with modern devices. Until 1921, it functioned as Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] operetta, then as Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski’s Theatre]. In 1921, the building was extended by one story at ul. Długa [Długa Street], whereas the auditorium was rebuilt. In the years 1924–1926, the theatre was led by Leon Schiller, in cooperation with Wilam Horzyca, Andrzej Proszko and Aleksander Zelwerowicz. It then became



Fig. 4. Ul. Królewska [Królewska Street]: a – Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre], drawing by B. Podbielski, “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” magazine, 1881 (Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera© https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/_/HwHthIe1B0CAqQ [access 21.01.2021]); b – contemporary site 2019 (photo by A. Starzyk)

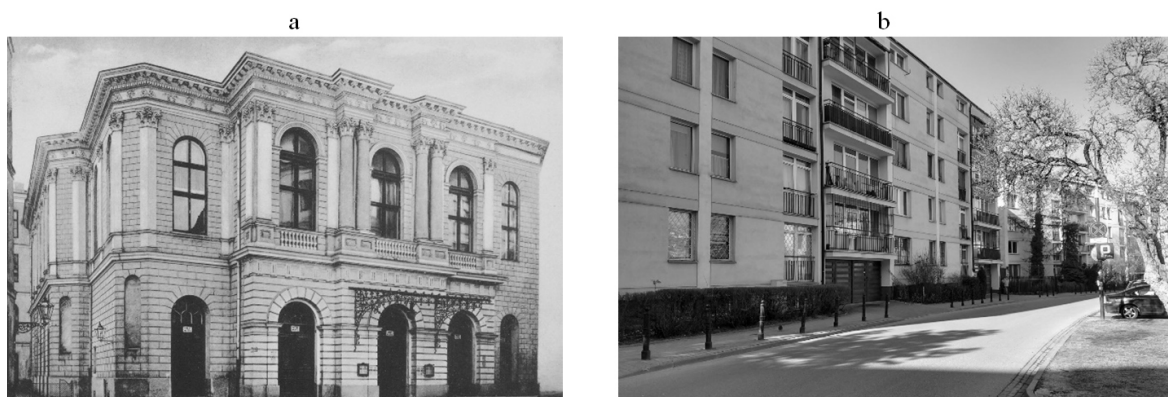


Fig. 5. Ul. Leona Schillera [Leon Schiller Street]: a – Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre] about 1908, postcards photography (artsandculture.google.com/asset/nowości-theatre-postcard/egHFXiZuajpqZQ [access 21.01.2021]); b – contemporary site 2019 (photo by A. Starzyk)

an important theatrical stage of the interwar period; a modern program and innovative staging were introduced. In 1926, following *przewrót majowy* [May Coup] – the theatre was closed and transformed into Miejski Kinematograf [The City Cinematograph]. The building was destroyed during *powstanie warszawskie* [Warsaw Uprising], but walls fragments remained until 1961. Surprisingly, in the 1960s, the theatre was replaced with a multi-family housing estate rather than being rebuilt. The street layout was changed by the 1947–1949 Trasa W-Z [The W-Z Route], currently ul. Hipoteczna [Hipoteczna Street]; the street is not continued to the north. A new ul. Leona Schillera [Leon Schiller Street] is located there, next to which a historic theatre site may be found (Król-Kaczorowska, 1971, 1986; Braun, 2003).

The analysis of iconographic and topographic materials, as well as the conducted field study, show no urban or architectural trace in the contemporary place (Fig. 5b). No symbolic trace of the past existence was

found whose importance to the history of architecture regarding the theatre and the theatre venue could be analysed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study results (the table) made it possible to answer the question posed; thus, the assumed research goal was achieved by formulating the following conclusions:

1. Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre], Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre] and Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski’s Theatre] (formerly Teatr Nowości [The Novelty Theatre]) left no significant urban and architectural trace. The contemporary sites of these venues bear no noticeable symbolic trace.

2. The studied historical theatre sites do not exist in the city’s architectural and urban memory. The space does not convey theatrical content.

Table. Summary of research results (own elaboration)

Historic theatre venue	Contemporary site		
	urban trace	architectural trace	symbolic trace
Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre]	+/-	–	–
Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre]	–	–	–
Teatr im. W. Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski’s Theatre]	–	–	–

Regarding the urban footprint, the study results concerning Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre] were classified as a negligible urban footprint; the urban footprint undoubtedly exists in the space. However, the contemporary genesis of the trace doubtful. It should be debated whether it is a deliberate act by decision-makers or whether it results from the history of the place.

Although the exchange of tissue in a living urban organism is common, standards and social expectations undergo changes. In the case of the Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre] and Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre], it can be concluded that the objects in the proposed form would not have stood the test of time even without military operations that took place in the area; thus, they would not have survived to the present day. In the case of Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski's Theatre], the reconstruction was possible and justified, despite significant damage. A decision not to rebuild the venue was made, and a new functional space was created in the contemporary site previously occupied by the theatre.

The study indirectly aims to create social sensitivity concerning the memory issues with regards to significant theatrical venues, such as Teatr Letni [The Summer Theatre], Teatr Nowy [The New Theatre], and Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego [Wojciech Bogusławski's Theatre]. An essential role in the process is played by Institutions established in order to maintain site memory and place identity. Together with more and more widespread social organizations, they play a crucial role in maintaining the memory of the sites. In the Author's opinion, the contemporary urban tissue may be disrupted by the reconstruction of historical objects understood as contemporary constructions that imitate historical buildings. Such reconstruction may be based on untruthful premises, thus failing to transfer the intended values. Hence, the Author makes recommendations for the symbolic trace to be implemented by means of a system of small spatial forms, perhaps with the street furniture function. Such elements should be aesthetically coherent and convey a clear message, although they may be formally diversified.

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NIEISTNIEJĄCE PRZESTRZENIE TEATRALNE – MIEJSCA PAMIĘCI CZY NIEPAMIĘCI?

STRESZCZENIE

Celem naukowym jest zbadanie wpływu nieistniejących miejsc teatralnych na współczesne przestrzenie Warszawy oraz próba odpowiedzi na pytanie: Czy nieistniejące teatry warszawskiego „teatrowiska” istnieją w pamięci architektonicznej i urbanistycznej miasta, czy tylko w materiałach historycznych? Podczas pracy nad tekstem zastosowano niezbędną do zdefiniowania i rozwiązania problemu naukowego metodykę: analizę krytyczną piśmiennictwa, obserwację bez interwencji, studium przypadku, metodę intuicyjną opartą na osobistych doświadczeniach autorki. Wyniki badań pokazały, że funkcjonujące w latach 1870–1939 Teatr Letni, Teatr Nowy oraz Teatr Nowości / Teatr im. Wojciecha Bogusławskiego nie zostały w znaczący sposób wpisane do pamięci architektonicznej, urbanistycznej czy symbolicznej miasta. Stąd wniosek, że nie istnieją w pamięci architektonicznej i urbanistycznej miasta.

Słowa kluczowe: teatr, miejsce teatralne, warszawskie „teatrowisko”