Introduction: really existing democracy

What was to be the function of political theatre in Poland after 1989? Following four decades of Soviet-enforced communism, which included mass censorship, anti-democratic bureaucratization, systemic corruption, imperialist militarization and the brutal disciplining of political dissidents, this question formed a vital part of the ten-year anniversary celebration in 2013 of Warsaw's Instytut Teatralne (Theatre Institute). This cultural institution houses the largest physical and digital archives of contemporary theatre in Poland and is intended to support research and education and prompt public debate. *Teatr*, one of the country's leading journals, devoted a special issue to mark the anniversary, including a number of interviews and articles considering the Institute's role in the formation, analysis and documentation of contemporary and historical Polish theatre. *Teatr*'s chief editor, Jacek Kopciński, criticized the Institute's director, Maciej Nowak, for instigating 'a permanent cultural revolution' in his unconventional programming and commissioning of publications, seminars and workshops. By this, Kopciński meant that theatre studies at the Institute has been defined since its inception primarily on the grounds of feminist, gender and queer theory, which was exemplified in the Institute's flagship publication series *Inna Scena* (Another Scene). Kopciński suggested that such strands of philosophy, theory, activism and criticism were too restricted and that the Institute should also refer to mainstream modes of thinking about the theatre and the world that are 'less eccentric and, for many, less ideologised' (2013: 8).

In this argumentation, Kopciński articulates popular anxieties around Polish cultural and national identity through an exclusionary process of community formation that implies an 'authentic' audience that represents a general population who do not face matters relating to gender and sexuality as central to their experiences of social marginalization. Subjects such as gender inequality and alternative sexual identities are marginal rather than marginalized, peripheral rather than fundamental, and not the central concern of the political, public sphere. While thematically feminism, gender and sexuality might deserve attention, they are not a principal cultural focal point. Kopciński lamented that *Inna Scena* undeservedly preceded a more basic series on theatre history that has yet to come to light, which might have included biographies of canonical male theatre directors of the late twentieth century such as Gustaw Holoubek or Kazimierz Dejmek. While what is needed is a 'proper history' of the Polish theatre that is still woefully full of lacunae, Kopciński argues, the Institute has only invested in debating its alternative versions, which he opines as 'extravagant.' Disappointingly, Nowak, who championed an alternative theatre practice over the past two decades, capitulated to Kopciński's view, claiming that he was simply offering a 'complement' to traditional narratives.

In *After '89*, I will take the opposite view of both Kopciński's claim to the primacy of mainstream national and historical narratives and to Nowak's defense of the vanguardist representation of marginalized subject positions as significant only in their correlation or complementarity to normative majority positions.[1] I argue that it is the role of political theatre to activate precisely such a 'permanent cultural revolution' that does not find closure through adherence to a particular and substantive cultural identity that obscures precisely the exclusive demarcations on which it is grounded. In this way, my methodology and conceptual framework have implications for the discipline that resonate and have implications beyond the direct cultural focus of this study. Not only is the notion of a 'cultural revolution' significant in its diagnostic undermining of a stable construction of culture, 'permanent' is equally crucial in its temporal durability. I will suggest that a radical democratic pluralism is only tenable through the systematic destabilization of such attempts to close ranks and essentialize Polishness through a focus on the development of new theatre practices that have responded to the growth of pluralism and that interrogate the rise of nationalism in the move to democracy after 1989. While nationalism under communism had particular social functions, some (although not all) of which held subversive potentials, in a liberal democracy, nationalism often attests to the needs

of conservative factions that foreclose contestation, counter the conditions for free individual self-development, mobilize popular anxieties and perpetuate domination by constructing the national as an omnipotent apparatus that manages and reduces difference through assimilatory and disciplinary strategies.

As I will argue in this introduction, I am wary of theatre practice that motivates unwavering adherence to particular social formations and classifies community as a site of normative values and fetishized cultural identities. The relationships I develop between theatre *and* pluralist democracy and theatre *as* a political act have wider implications for theatre and performance studies. Opposing a nationalistic theatre as a nexus for community spirit that constructs democratically defined difference as a threat to or a violation of the rights of an originary ethnic, national population, I will propose and corroborate a political theatre that encourages dissensus, and that is constitutively disruptive and skeptical of communities that are not heterogeneous and coalitional.

Poland is celebrated internationally for its rich and varied performance traditions. Throughout its history, theatres in the country have been treated as sacred institutions where Poles have fought against censorship and occupation, constructed viable cultural bonds and affirmed social cohesion. Studies in English that considered Polish theatre before 1989 generally placed an emphasis on political resistance or actor training, and the innovations of Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski. While Kantor and Grotowski both hold a particular (and not unproblematic) place in Western discourses and imaginaries, this project will take as its subject the dynamic new range of aesthetics, conventions and practices that have been developed since the demise of communism in the flourishing theatrical landscape of Poland, which I have not restricted to Warsaw, Kraków and Wrocław. I document how Poznań, Gdańsk, Szczeczin, Wałbrzych, Lublin, Bydgoszcz, Opole and Łódź all vie for their status as artistic centers. Since 1989, changes to political structures, governance, religious faith, community building, national and ethnic identity, and attitudes towards gender and sexuality have had a profound effect on Polish society. The theatre has retained its historical role as the crucial space for debating and interrogating cultural and political identities and this has been attended by a proliferation of criticism. For this reason, I also spend time evaluating and engaging with the dynamic and often tense debates posed by and through the Polish critical establishment. Providing access to scholarship and journalism not readily accessible to an English-speaking readership, this study will survey the rebirth of the theatre as a site of public intervention and social critique since

the establishment of democracy and the proliferation of theatre-makers that have flaunted cultural commonplaces and begged new questions of Polish culture.

Political names

The title of this introduction is clearly a play on 'really existing socialism,' which is intended to draw attention first to the mode in which democracy has been too often subsumed under the banner of 'really existing capitalism,' thus eclipsing democratic conventions for the dynamics of the free market, and second, to the failures of a democracy grounded in neoliberalism, which was conceived of as the unchallenged political structure of transformation founded on the four primary concepts of privatization, liberalization, stabilization and internationalization. In *After '89*, I have been very attentive to the use of terminology that shores up conceptions of communism and life in the Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (PRL, People's Republic of Poland) as they were fetishized and derided in the West. I do not use the designation Eastern Bloc, for example, which offers an impression of homogeneity, obscuring a large and diverse geographical terrain. Václav Havel observed that such an indiscriminate determination rendered the barriers between the 'Bloc' countries as inconspicuous to the West (cited in Reading, 1992: 12). 'Central Europe' replaced 'Eastern Bloc' in an effort to align postcommunist countries, particularly Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, with Western European values, cultural norms and forms of Christianity and to provide distance from the proximity, both cultural and ideological, of the East, which implied Russia in particular. Historian Larry Wolf has been equally wary of Winston Churchill's coinage 'Iron Curtain,' which produced an ideological bisection of Europe during the years of the Cold War. Wolf is critical of the shadow cast by this 'curtain' on the eastern regions of the continent, which 'made it possible to imagine vaguely whatever was unhappy or unpleasant, unsettling or alarming, and yet it was also possible not to look too closely, permitted even to look away – for who could look through an iron curtain and discern the shapes enveloped in shadow?' (1994: 1). Before 1989, Western media mostly framed defection as unidirectional, escaping the terrifying East for the safety and freedom of the West, and the turn to democracy, the so-called Springtime of Nations, served to reinforce the idea of the dominance and supremacy of the West's political order, wherein the only choice politically

was liberal democracy and, economically, free-market capitalism. As the political scholar Graeme Gill (2002: 178) has noted, the collapse of communism was equivalent to a 'return to Europe,' which, somewhat paradoxically, encompassed both a return to European ideals and a reassertion of traditional Polish values, often at odds with one another.[2] Within Poland, the PRL is largely seen as a period in which the country was divided from the progressive development of European history, and is expressed as an interregnum. The 1990s were then largely construed as a time for Poland to catch up with Western modernity; an entirely one-sided binary in which the country needed to regain normality after the certain and inevitable failure of the communist experiment. Poland was not seen as a cultural space that offered anything new, valuable or constructive for the West. Western tourism to postcommunist countries was constructed as the uncritical enjoyment of cheap prices and the fix of witnessing the faded kitsch of the 'second world' free from the anxieties, perceived dangers and political risks of visits under communist rule. These reductive East–West binaries do not shed light on the innumerable ways in which populations, economies and cultures have been interdependent and mutually supporting both across the continent and globally.

Some scholars have chosen to use the term 'state-imposed socialism' as opposed to 'communism' as it more clearly represents the reality of the PRL. I choose to use 'communism' although the political project was never fully realized, partly because of the way in which the goals, beliefs and strictures of the ideals of communism were nevertheless crucial to the formation of culture, and partly because, while English-language scholarship sides with 'socialism,' researchers in Poland tend to use 'communism,' and I have chosen to follow their lead. Nevertheless, the failure to establish actual communism is inherent to my usage of the term and its application to Polish culture. There was equally a temptation to employ the now popular term 'postcommunism' in the title of this book, but I have resisted this given that it too quickly restricts understandings of contemporary Poland by focusing directly on a particular moment in its history. I chose '1989' instead, as it is devised of associations around transition, transformation, vulnerability, hope and instability that I intend to unpack and critique.[3] Political theorist Michał Kozłowski warns that terms such as 'postcommunism' and 'transition' are both overly elastic and unclear, 'applied as they are to countries as disparate as Slovenia and Mongolia'; these terms are constantly redefined and exploited in the Polish political realm. Kozłowski (2008) puts pressure on postcommunism in particular, which he contends functions as a 'catch-all' for the post-1989 era that classifies what is legitimate and

reasonable. The lack of any unity or coherence in this conception does not hinder its performance. On the contrary, while to designate a country as 'postcommunist' appears to be an act of benign description, in practice this assignation actively manipulates, limits and contains according to Kozłowski. Postcommunism is seen as a pejorative term that links Poland and other former communist-ruled countries to their (traumatic) past, which begs the question of the longevity and applicability of this term. There are two standard answers to this. When the 'ideals, ideologies and practices of socialism are perceived to provide a meaningful (albeit increasingly mythical) reference point for understanding people's present condition' (Hann, 2002: 11), the term will begin to lose traction and, moreover, when the generations raised under communism disappear then the category will consequently dissolve. I employ the term 'post-communism' when I am articulating cultural identity or political configurations in either direct or perceived relation to the ongoing legacies and decipherable traces of Poland's communist past in the present. I do this with the awareness that the term 'postcommunism' is not a neutral designation, nor is it a singular narrative that encompasses a fixed set of national norms, but is rather a discourse in flux. I find 'post-transition' fails to act as a productive replacement as it too easily implies Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history,' that is, a stable and effective end of politics that finds its ultimate resolution in the particular horizons of free-market capitalism and liberal democracy. Fukuyama (1992) famously argued that liberal democracy was, in effect, the embodiment of the Hegelian stage of the end of ideological evolution and, with the collapse of communism, this political system had no legitimate opponent. Therefore, free from inherent contradiction and at the conclusion of the struggle of ideas, liberal democracy was equivalent to the 'end of history.' Ultimately, quite the opposite has been apparent. Over the past quarter of a century, it has become apparent how liberty and equality are not mutually inclusive principles in neoliberalist democracies, liberal societies are not free from internal contradiction and the principle of equality cannot be fully actualized in capitalism.

Transformations of the political

Kathleen Cioffi (1996) and Elżbieta Matynia (2009) have both championed the political impact of the alternative theatre scene in Poland under

communist rule. Cioffi pointed out the particular funding systems that not only allowed for but promulgated subversive theatre practice in distinction to the professional theatres, which as primary cultural institutions were subject to strict censorship, and the ancillary institutions such as amateur theatres, particularly student groups who worked under the protection of university sponsorship, that were allowed to produce work at particular moments in the 1950s, 60s and 70s with less restrictive oversight and control. The administration of censorship mechanisms fluctuated throughout the communist period, particularly relaxed during the 'thaw' that followed the death of Joseph Stalin and the decade of the 1970s during Edward Gierek's alleged economic miracle that resulted in economic disaster, and then acutely stringent during Stalinism, the aftermath of the 1968 events in Poland and Czechoslovakia that confirmed there could be no 'socialism with a human face,' and the induction of Martial Law in the 1980s. In *Alternative Theatre in Poland*, *1954–1989*, Cioffi celebrated the work of Warsaw's Studencki Teatr Satyryków (STS, Student Satirist's Theatre), who attempted to directly portray the grim communist reality rather than rely on the metaphors and allegories of the professional system; the popular avant-garde of Bim-Bom, the 'socialist romantics' who marshaled the subversive value of mirth and whimsy; Taduesz Kantor's Cricot 2, not only distinguished for the director's formal experimentation with autonomous theatre and his excavations of cultural and individual memory, but also for the company's unique position of existing outside of the state system of subsidy; the dynamic combination of physical expressivity and political daring of the Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day); and the stunning visual theatres of Scena Plastyczna and Akademia Ruchu, who produced their own innovative sign systems. The closure of theatres in Warsaw on December 13, 1981 at the commencement of Martial Law signified a major crisis in Poland for resistance-oriented theatre practice. In this tense political climate, the director Jerzy Jarocki disregarded authorities and placed himself in real danger by staging T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral.* The production was quickly put together over the Christmas period and opened in the Archikatedra św. Jana (St. John's Archcathedral) in Warsaw in 1982 with the acting ensemble from the Teatr Dramatyczny (Dramatic Theatre). Theatre in churches boomed in this period precisely because state censorship did not extend to private performances of a religious character on Church property, which made them a unique place for political critique. This was particularly significant as two major artistic directors, Adam Hanuszkiewicz at the Teatr Narodowy (National Theatre) and Gustaw Holoubek at the most politically subversive theatre in Warsaw,

the Teatr Dramatyczny, both lost their tenures in the 1980s. While official state-funded theatres were highly restricted as sites of social criticism, as Maciej Karpiński noted, the Church supported many independent cultural projects and theatre productions that had become included under the rubric of 'unofficial culture,' previously restricted to literary readings (1989: 110). Similarly, Andrzej Wajda staged Ernest Bryll's religious dramatic poem *Easter Vigil* at the Kościół Miłosierdzia Bożego (Church of the Lord's Mercy) in Warsaw in 1985, starring Krystyna Janda.[4] Wajda's simple staging in the church drew an audience of more than 6,000 spectators in just 12 performances, which relied solely on word-of-mouth as publicity. Jarocki and Wajda's performances were political manifestations as much as theatrical events, drawing on the Church as a traditional space for collective gathering, the articulation of independent culture and implied protest against the communist regime. While the political thrust of the work of these directors and companies was immediately apparent before 1989, the political transformation that followed generated a radically new understanding of resistant artistic practice, as well as the role of the Catholic Church in the political organization of Polish society.

This book both picks up from Cioffi's work and goes in a radically different direction. I examine the way in which social norms are contested in the theatre, how such contestations register as political acts, and the way in which publics are differently formed after 1989. This is not a survey of Polish theatre over the past 25 years. I consciously choose examples from within and from without the construction of the contemporary canon, which is itself a concern of many public debates. If Cioffi looked at alternative theatre that worked outside of the officially funded and carefully censored professional system in order to trace the politically subversive potential of Polish theatre, I am more concerned with the professional system itself, which in good old-fashioned capitalist style has been able to assimilate precisely the norms that challenge contemporary morality, but that all too often do not present any actual challenge to the political and ideological structures underpinning that morality. This is of course one of the defining differences between communism and capitalism. In the PRL, the communist regime did not support political or social critique, which led to the often violent suppression of the intelligentsia, political dissidents and ideological critics, while conversely capitalism thrives on the assimilation – and sterilization – of criticism. The production of communities in distinction to the communist regime, which sought to collapse the boundaries between the public sphere and the state, can be seen as a political act, even if these communities were tied to particular conceptions of what the

Polish nation is (in the minds of its people) and should be (in practice). Within the horizon of democracy, however, the political, as theorized by the French political philosopher Claude Lefort, is conceived of as the moment in which there is a hole opened up in the social fabric that has not yet been filled with positive content; that is, with a definitive and singular ideological system, and therefore demands alternative forms of resistance and subversion. The change in political theatre practice after 1989 has therefore been from one that opposes the state while championing Polish nationalism to a more pluralistic practice that engages with marginalized identities purposefully left out of the rhetoric of freedom and independence. I will theorize those performances that extend the discursive limits of Polish national and cultural identity as part of a wider democratic project of implementing pluralism, paying heed to the socially marginalized, producing visibility and new subject positions, and making of public concern that which has been relegated to the private sphere and, as a consequence, considered politically irrelevant.

The Polish theatre critic Tomasz Plata maintains that the notion of political theatre under communism took two particular routes (2006: 218–19). First was the use of allusion to thwart censorship, in which stage signs had to be decoded by spectators to render their subversive, hidden meanings. The second mode, employed by Konrad Swinarski, Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Jarocki, was the focus on the defenseless individual at odds with society, caught within an existential battle that highlighted the absurdity and precariousness of history and historical progress. In the latter case, the focus was not on individualism, but rather on the functional metaphor of the individual as representative of the national community. Considering how a wave of productions of Chekhov replaced the abandonment of grand narratives after 1989, Erika Fischer-Lichte counters Plata's claim that the focus on the 'private' discourses at work within Chekhov signaled an escapist tendency in the Polish theatre that moved from the 'here and now' to the 'always and everywhere' and consequently neglected social and public affairs (2014: 138–9). While I would argue that this shift in focus was part of the larger transcendental turn that could be seen in the work of Jarocki, Lupa and Grzegorzewski, Fischer-Lichte contends that Chekhov was the appropriate playwright to stage in this decade given his historical insights into eras of great political upheaval and social transformation. Writing in *Teatr*, Andrzej Wanat (1993) observed the similarities between the transitional eras in which Chekhov was writing in pre-revolutionary Russia and post-independence Poland, both of which were defined by generational conflict, the collapse of traditional values and practices, a denial of authority and a loss of stable categories

of meaning. Breaking with the naturalistic tradition of GITIS and the Moscow Arts Theatre, Jarocki in his 1993 interpretation of *Płatonow* (Platanov) at the Teatr Polski in Wrocław mined a new approach to the play that led the critic Jacek Sieradzki (1993) to compare this production with Grzegorzewski's contemporaneous staging of *Uncle Vanya* at the Studio Teatr in Warsaw, concluding that both directors expressed ambivalent attitudes to their protagonists. Deemphasizing the empathy one normally finds with Chekhov's characters allowed for the more bitter and ironic aspects of the playwright's comedic lines to emerge, which lampooned the audience's normally reverent reception of the Russian playwright. What's more, portraying the excessive declarations of melancholy and existential angst as false, melodramatic and ultimately the result of social privilege chimed perfectly with the economic chaos of the early 1990s. By the end of the decade, however, the work of political theatre abandoned the emphasis on both allusion and the portrayal of the isolated individual forsaken by history, and took a new turn.

In *Strategie publiczne, strategie prywatne: Teatr polski 1990–2005* (*Public Strategies, Private Strategies: Polish Theatre 1990–2005*), Plata pointed to 1997 as a crucial year for a radical change in Polish theatre (2006: 227). It was in this year that Jerzy Grzegorzewski took over as artistic director of the newly reopened Teatr Narodowy (National Theatre) in Warsaw. While social alienation, temporal disunity, spiritual apathy and existential disorientation and displacement were the dominant themes in Jarocki and Lupa's productions, Grzegorzewski's highly anticipated premiere at the Teatr Narodowy moved in an entirely new direction. As I will explore in Chapter 2, what had been crucial in Grzegorzewski's directorial interventions into canonical texts in the latter part of the twentieth century was a profound break with the inherited covenant between stage and audience that formally unties the theatre as the locus of community spirit, which explains why his work is inhabited by a defamiliarizing effect. Grzegorzewski distinguished himself as a director more interested in the theatre's formalistic potentials rather than its moralizing and ideological function, and the dominating themes of his work have been the condition of the artist, particularly their pursuit of excellence, struggles with moral weakness and the limitations of the physical world. Having trained as a painter, his primary concentration was often on theatre as a visual and plastic art rather than on pictorial mimesis or psychological realism. Throughout his career, Grzegorzewski faced sharp condemnation from Polish critics due to his liberal adaptations of canonical texts, often flaunting authorial intention and stable narrative structure. Given the director's trajectory of deconstructing sacred national mythologies,

it is significant that Grzegorzewski was selected to head the National Theatre, suggesting that this theatre was a place for the vital critique of Polish cultural and national identity rather than a patriotic stronghold for its inscription or reification. Stanisław Wyspiański's *Noc listopadowa* (*November Night*, 1904) was selected for the premiere. The play, which some critics refer to as effectively the fourth part of Adam Mickiewicz's paradigmatic Polish Romantic text *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), uses the 1830–31 Uprising as a nodal point to frame the tragedy of failed rebellions in the nineteenth century that fundamentally shaped Polish political consciousness in the twentieth century. The critic Roman Pawłowski (2007) noted that for two centuries the Polish intelligentsia shared the fate of their National Theatre, which held the responsibility of defending national identity, guarding cultural traditions and teaching patriotism. Grzegorzewski's National Theatre, however, was a mirror for the Polish sociopolitical reality at the turn of the millennium rather than a monument to a sublimated past or messianic future.

The year 1997 was equally significant in marking the emergence of two major new Polish artists, one in the visual arts, Paweł Althamer, and the other in the theatre, Krzysztof Warlikowski. These artists established a new set of questions, expectations and conventions that in turn produced new publics. By posing relevant questions about social marginalization that moved away from the standard constructions of Polishness as white, Catholic, heterosexual and, very often, male, they critiqued Polish society as a depository of insular values and exclusionary moral interests. Through his installations Althamer opened up the artistic spaces previously reserved for the intellectual and economic elite to the socially marginalized and expanded the field of cultural reference outside of Polish contexts in the shaping and contesting of cultural identity. Krzysztof Warlikowski, a member of the first generation to work exclusively in a 'free' Poland, has undoubtedly had the greatest impact on Polish theatre since the late 1990s. Kopciński (2000) argues that Krystian Lupa introduced Warlikowski to subjects that would come to shape his work, such as cultural dispossession, spiritual atrophy, a deficiency of collective identity, internal chaos and immaturity. Warlikowski eschewed texts and directing styles that rely on assimilationist or exclusionary cultural strategies, which attempt to essentialize Polish history or embody the essence of the Polish nation. Warlikowski's theatre has disrupted accepted historiography, broken down traditional gender roles, frustrated dominant cultural discourses and commentaries, reconsidered synchronic notions of time, favored the individual over the collective and interrogated sexuality in place of nationality.

Grzegorz Jarzyna was only 29 years old when he took over management of the Teatr Rozmaitości, making him the youngest artistic director in the country at the time. In this theatre on Warsaw's trendy Marszałkowska Street, Warlikowski directed many of his early seminal productions of Shakespeare, Euripides and Sarah Kane. Fearing that Warsaw had become a cultural desert in the 1990s, Jarzyna wished to open a venue for the production of avant-garde theatre similar to those in neighboring Germany, such as the Kulturbrauerei in Berlin and the Kampnagel in Hamburg (cited in Wyżyńska 2005). Fueled by substantial media attention, the Rozmaitości was soon known as the 'fastest theatre in town.' Many critics remarked on the immense enthusiasm, even impatience, mounting in audiences that matched the energy of the productions. After asking Warlikowski to join forces in 1999, the two young directors were indelibly linked, treated for some time as Siamese twins, according to Kopciński (2000), who spoke with one voice the manifesto of a new generation. The situation, however, was far more complicated in reality. Rumors of the large riffs over creative control that shaped much of their artistic cooperation, which only served to increase their popularity and notoriety, ended with Warlikowski's departure to start his own company Nowy Teatr (New Theatre) in 2010.

Despite their creative differences, these directors were responsible for drawing a new younger audience who had been put off by the transcendental 'high art' theatre of their parents' generation. Performances frequently sold out at the stylishly rebranded TR Warszawa, where an innovative brand of aesthetics borrowed from pop music and culture, street slang, uses of English and German adopted into contemporary Polish vernacular and quotations from art-house cinema (Pasolini, Dogma 95, Lynch, van Sant, Godard and Hitchcock in particular). Representing Poland at major theatre festivals around the world, including Edinburgh, Avignon, New York, Hong Kong and Moscow's Golden Mask, the pair have stood as ambassadors for contemporary Polish theatre and the TR Warszawa became the most identifiable Polish brand for theatre overseas. Fischer-Lichte contends that Althamer and Warlikowski, to which I would add Jarzyna, 'followed paths that connected Polish art and theatre with that of Western European countries,' which 'opened up the possibility of a dialogue with other European cultures, emphasizing what Polish culture shared with them instead of highlighting its otherness' (2014: 144),[5] and the extent of their influence led one critic to claim that 'the history of contemporary Polish theatre can be divided in pre- and post-Jarzyna/Warlikowski' (Nyc, 2007).

Throughout *After '89*, I give particular attention to Warlikowski's interventions into historical narratives and normative identities. Having explored the limits of cultural taboos through his feminist and postcolonial reworkings of Shakespeare, the performativity and elasticity of gender in Sarah Kane, and the decline in religious faith in Euripides, Warlikowski's later work dealt directly with Polish/Jewish relations, contested legacies of the Holocaust, Polish anti-Semitism, gay rights and AIDS, queer identities and alternative sexualities. Warlikowski's work in the 1990s and 2000s signaled a widespread move away from a focus in much Polish theatre on the 'human soul' and a preoccupation with transcendental spirituality, which has been replaced by a corporeal turn, a concentrated focus on material bodies, gender roles and sexuality.

Defining the political theatre

In 'Political Fictions and Fictionalisations: History as Material for Postdramatic Theatre,' Mateusz Borowski and Małgorzata Sugiera consider the political potential of Hans-Thies Lehmann's oft-cited study *Postdramatic Theater* (1999; English translation 2006). One of the primary concerns for the establishment of political theatre practice today, they observe vis-à-vis Lehmann, is that the diffusion of authority, power and governance in the contemporary globalized world results in both the obscuring of social and economic processes and their expansion across national borders that makes it impossible to grasp motivations for crises and conflicts in their entirety (Borowski and Sugiera, 2013: 67). Consequently, it is no longer reasonable to assume that Brechtian forms of epic theatre will lay bare the underlying structures of oppression engendered through capitalist production and social relations in a transparent and straightforward manner. Borowski and Sugiera are particularly sensitive to Lehmann's argument that political theatre today must subvert the very foundational categories of the political in order to probe the assumptions underwriting popular political discourse and to make room for spectators to reflect on the ethics, efficacy and limitations of current forms of political involvement, many of which are deeply complicit with the dynamics of late capitalism. Equally, audiences engage with theatres as institutions in particular historical moments in relation to their 'current interests, frame of mind, cognitive capacities and dominant convictions' (*ibid.*: 72). Actively shaping audiences and

producing particular, and I would argue temporally bound, counterpublics to hegemonic discourses is therefore one of the primary political tasks of the theatre.[6] Michael Warner has defined *counterpublics* as a public 'structured by alternative discourses or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying,' whose 'exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power' (2002: 56).

Borowski and Sugiera are invested in the notion of the 'sensible' elaborated in Jacques Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), wherein the author posits a theory of art and politics as an historically contingent means of social ordering and communication that are responsible for the 'distribution of the sensible.' Art then only becomes political 'the moment it confirms the existing order or introduces a new pattern of distribution of the material and symbolic space, and shifts the borderline between that which in the public domain is either visible or invisible, excluded, and deprived of representation and autonomous voice' (Borowski and Sugiera, 2013: 73). The onus of the political then becomes the register of representation rather than the deliberate amplification of politics, social conflicts or identity-based concerns. Following from this incentive, in the performance examples I examine I am as concerned with the political register of representations, both their aesthetic and social conventions and effects, as I am with offering semiotic-based performance analysis. While I agree with Borowski and Sugiera that art does not need to take up the concerns of politics to be political, I differ from their choice of terminology when they assert that 'politics lies at the core of establishing communities based on a set of shared values, beliefs and principles of conduct' (*ibid.*: 73). Far from producing harmonious collectives organized around common belief systems or shared values, I side with gender and economic theorist Miranda Joseph, who suggested the abandonment of the notion of 'community' altogether in her seminal study *Against the Romance of Community* (2002). Joseph is suspicious of the connotations of 'community' and particularly attentive to the modes in which it can shut down rather than mobilize collective action. While community might suggest 'cherished ideals of cooperation, equality and communion,' Joseph demonstrates how communities can also be 'disciplining and exclusionary' (2002: vi–vii). Of necessity is the way in which racism, sexism and violence have been central to the establishment of nations and liberal states as communities, and critics' fetishization of community as a predetermined good obscures 'the enactment of domination and exploitation' predicated on the constitution and organization of society as community. Benedict Anderson (2006) has also focused on the narrative

function of conceiving of nationhood through the evocation of a mythic trauma that is continuously recirculated and repurposed in the construction of nation as an organic community. Seeking the organic over the constructed element of community seems to me to be particularly treacherous in the post-1989 political universe.

The assertion of Polish homogeneity by the conservative right functions like philosopher Slavoj Žižek's conception of a 'sublime object' that disguises a social antagonism and promises social unity through its eradication. Siding with Žižek, I argue that national identity is not correlative to the category of truth. Žižek's notion stems from Immanuel Kant's reflection on ethnic roots, which 'engage in a *private use of reason*, constrained by contingent dogmatic presuppositions' (Žižek, 2006: 9, emphasis in original). Adherence to ethnic identity should therefore be directly contrasted to the dimension of universal reason. Particular reason (national identity), an equivalent term to 'private use of reason,' is not the exact obverse of the universal, which follows an entirely different logic. What particular reason fails to take into account in its xenophobic aspect is that social antagonism is not the direct opposition between 'self-identical' social groups, but rather an inherent feature of social identity; that is to say, antagonism always-already splits any self-identical group itself. One must reject adherence to national identity insofar as it functions as a displacement of social antagonism onto a foreign, ethnic or religious other. Identity politics have been crucial in left-wing theatre in Poland precisely because the implementation of this democratic discourse requires that structural forms of oppression are highlighted, contested and subverted. It is not enough to simply offer token representations of sexism, misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia, none of which can be completely divorced from class relations, unless the social relations on which they are structurally compounded are interrogated.

While it was crucial to signify dissonance through the particular assertion of 'Polishness' against the communist regime, which was often framed as a foreign invader, the next step was to create counternarratives for those excluded from this particularity. Supposed Polish homogeneity, which was already mythical and largely inaccurate, functioned not only as a category for the exclusion of minority identities, it also was a category that disguised the social desire *for* homogeneity that re-emerged in the 1990s. Rather than forming a community around shared values, which I see as the effort to produce unity through the universalization of identity and the reduction of difference, I am invested in an understanding of political theatre as predicated on dissensus, which Rancière defines as 'an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity

belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception' (in Corcoran, 2010: 2). Dissensus is not simply the opposite of consensus, but is rather the 'reorienting of general perceptual space' that unsettles forms of belonging grounded through consensus, and is an act or demonstration of impropriety that unfixes the assumed indivisibility between a fact and its interpretation, legal status and the declaration of rights, or between a subject and her 'proper' place in the social hierarchy that makes it possible for new subjects and heterogeneous objects to come to light.

Although operative in creating effective bonds of solidarity between citizenry, Jürgen Habermas warns against the affective or emotional identification of citizens to a community that are produced through attempts to define the nation through ethnicity (2002: 115). I side against conceiving of a 'national people' that presupposes hereditary membership to the nation through kinship and shared ethnicity, and instead conceive of nation after 1989 as equal citizens in a legal membership. Economic instability, among other political factors such as social alienation, has led to the rise in Poland and across East and Central Europe of nationalistic-oriented rhetoric that attempts to renew social solidarity through the revivification of a national consciousness, the 'thick' citizenship that Habermas sees as regressive in *The Inclusion of the Other* (1996, 2002); he further argues for citizens to identify with the principles of democracy and to acknowledge the equal worth of others. With regards to these concerns, I spend time in Chapters 2–4 analyzing the nationalist and exclusionary orientation of Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*), which met with huge popularity in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The point is that one has to move away from an essentialized notion of community and nationality across the political spectrum, from a socialist-oriented conception of the social body to the ultra-conservative Catholic-inflected national body. In eras of political upheaval and stratification, it is one thing to situate history and traditions within a pluralistic society to find an anchor for cultural identity; it is quite another to attempt to constitute a nation around a homogenous set of cultural values that absolutely excludes others based on race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. The pluralistic approach of contemporary theatre practice is crucial in this de-essentialization.

Scholars such as Michal Kobialka have considered the ongoing effects of 1989 as a spatial and temporal category that resonates with the neoliberal imaginary of new materialist conditions. Moving beyond a limited focus on narrative and aesthetics, Kobialka calls for new models in the

consideration of the problems and failures resulting from the 'emancipatory endeavors prompted by the Western idea of liberal democracy' and the 'recurring utopian dream that it will still be possible to construct a rational order of things' (2009a: 79). It is in the nature of political theatre to change shape, form, context and framework as part of a process of discarding stale political identities and obsolete national, cultural and social configurations. As I outline in Chapter 1, in Krystian Lupa's work we see a move away from cultural essentialism after the 1990s, where the spiritual condition of the nation is represented through Dostoyevsky and other European novelists, to the focus on celebrity, media and alternative sexualities in the 2000s. While these have significant relations to neoliberalism, they are not confined to the concerns of a particular or essentialized cultural position. This move sums up a more widespread trend in democratic Poland to open up the exclusionary category of Polishness. While national identity may remain a unifying signifier for the political designation of a civic body, the civic body must remain open and un-signified. Once the positive content of this signifier is firmly and finally established, it loses its political potential and instead begins to function as the site of exclusionary discourse that results in domination and marginalization.

The political theatre can be a shared social space in which citizens come to know their human rights, what Claude Lefort refers to as the 'generative principles of democracy' (1988: 260), and take part in the dissemination of a radical democratic discourse in which normalized forms of subjugation are graspable. This is crucial in shifting experiences of subordination that do not allow the subject to grasp that her identity is overpowered by an agent that blocks the full realization of her identity, to a self-conscious understanding of oppression. As political theorist Anna Marie Smith explains, this shift requires that a subject must have tools to allow her first 'to envision a world that lies beyond subordination and to imagine what she could become in that alternative space, second, to analyze the ways in which she has become caught up in and thwarted by the relation of subordination, and third, to grasp the possibilities for collective struggle to overthrow the entire subordinating structure' (1998: 8). The demand for equality within the horizons of liberal democracies, therefore, may only occur if there is a shift in perspective from one of subordination to one of oppression. The political work of the theatre functions along similar lines that often begins with imagining a new, alternative world that requires the spectator's analysis, which has liberatory implications both for an individual's personal life choices and expressions of identity as well as her participation within a collective struggle. While I will demonstrate in Chapters 3–5 how these have

been more productive for women, gays and lesbians and Polish/Jewish relations, I will focus in Chapter 6 on the less successful construction of political critique with regards to race and racial discrimination.

The question is how to deploy or instrumentalize a radical democratic pluralist imaginary, and how the theatre in particular plays a role in its formation and distribution. If politics is 'a positively determined sub-system of social relations in interaction with other sub-systems (economy, forms of culture)' (Žižek, 2002: 193), the political (Claude Lefort's *le Politique*) is a moment of openness or undecidability in which the structuring principle of society is called into question. For this reason, as political theorist Chantal Mouffe argues, it cannot be 'restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society,' but rather 'must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and determines our very ontological condition' (1993: 3). The Lacanian political theorist Yannis Stavrakakis argues that in defining politics as the space of 'political institutions, such as parties, etc.,' we lose the dimension of the political itself (1999: 72). For this reason, the political engenders social transformation without being correlative to a new social fantasy or a 'political' project's institutionalization. For Lefort,

> The political is thus revealed, not in what we call political activity, but in the double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured. It appears in the sense that the process whereby society is ordered and unified across its divisions becomes visible. It is obscured in the sense that the *locus* of politics (the *locus* in which parties compete and in which a general agency of power takes shape and is reproduced) becomes defined as particular, while the principle which generates the overall configuration is concealed. (Lefort, 1988: 11)

This is in line with Rancière's positing of the political as 'that [which] simultaneously denies every foundation on which it might come to form the positivity of a sphere or a purity' (in Corcoran, 2010: 3). Taking up Lefort's postulation of the political, Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have theorized a radical democratic pluralist imaginary that challenges and delegitimizes normalized forms of subjection, thus opening up the possibility of envisaging an end to subjugation. The shift to liberal democracy and free-market capitalism after 1989 resulted in the reduction of women's rights and a documented rise in homophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, ethnic exclusionism and chauvinist nationalism across the postcommunist landscape. Such forms of prejudice either were not officially accounted for in the PRL, or were buried for political purposes.

Therefore, it is perhaps not enough to simply say that there was a sharp rise in these forms of prejudice after 1989, but rather that the occurrence of such beliefs in Polish culture came to light. In opposition to these developments, Laclau and Mouffe dispute Habermas' emphasis on public consensus, instead offering a vision of radical pluralist democracy that is reliant on an infinite series of political contestations that are never fully resolved, in which those who exercise public authority can never become self-identical with the position of power, and in which shared values, cultural identity and common goals never find a substantive and undeviating articulation. In opposition to an authoritarian hegemony that seeks the greatest disciplining of difference and which strictly regulates spaces of dispute, radical democratic pluralism multiplies the points of contestation and defends the plurality and autonomy of public space created by democratic struggles.

Further to dissensus, in conceiving of a counterpublic produced through political theatre, I side with Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas' conception of the public sphere, which the German philosopher confines to a singular conception of the public that is dependent upon the normative limitations of the white, male bourgeoisie. Distancing herself from Fukuyama's premature proclamation of the demise of Soviet communism as synonymous with capitalism's world domination that signified the 'end of history,' and which Derrida critiqued in *Specters of Marx* (1994) as a fundamental misunderstanding of liberal democracy as a contemporary process of exploitation and subjugation, Fraser is invested in theorizing the limits of late-capitalist societies and the ongoing discursive and ethical work involved in the development of liberal democracies. It is well-known that communist regimes failed to fully appreciate the necessary critical distance required between the state and civil society, which requires unrestricted public arenas for the circulation of discourse and analysis and the formation and articulation of public opinions, which, in the long run, support the preservation of a stable society. Fraser uses Soviet-style communism as an example to reinforce the value of Habermas' championing of the public sphere and its political significance and impact, arguing that the conflation of state apparatuses with the public sphere in East and Central Europe resulted not in a participatory form of socialism but rather in the authoritarian repression of the socialist citizenry (Fraser, 1992: 110). The public sphere for Habermas, Fraser maintains, 'designates a *theater* in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk' that produces a 'space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena for public discursive

interaction' (*ibid.*, emphasis added). The public sphere and the state must therefore be separated in order to nurture and ensure a site for the production and circulation of discourses that are capable of criticizing that state. In capitalism, the public sphere must also be separated from determinate market relations. Reiterating the stage metaphor, Fraser suggests the public sphere is 'a *theater* for debating and deliberating rather than buying and selling' (*ibid.*: 111, emphasis added). Fraser is particularly critical, however, of Habermas' assertion that the public sphere requires a bracketing of social inequalities between citizens for the unrestrained and democratic interaction of competing discourses. The problem is that Habermas presumes that the systemic exercise of power can be temporarily neutralized in order for social inequalities to be temporally bracketed to enable the free circulation of democratic discourse. However, the public sphere is determined through gender, largely masculinity, ethnic privilege and education. While the theatre allows for silenced voices to be heard and marginalized bodies to be visible, I argue that political theatre, as a site of public debate, does not propose to bracket inequalities, but rather to emphasize them, thus challenging the very social prejudices that are disavowed, and thus confirmed, by their ostensible neutralization or temporary banishment. This process of un-bracketing makes space for the *political* work of the theatre, as Rancière articulates the aesthetics of politics, by making visible that which was unknown or invisible, producing subject positions on the part of those with no part.

In the Polish context, the problem is the mode in which the political transformation resulted in a particular claim to the role of the public by the groups that were suppressed under communism. After 1989, the very same repressed and marginalized public returns in its obverse form, as the exclusive community (ethnically Polish, heterosexual, Catholic, male-dominated) that legitimates its own interests and articulations of nationhood and nationality, thus naturalizing such national formations. What's more, the assertion of a singular public constitutes culture as autonomous in time and space, rather than porous, open to change and multivalent. What we see in the political theatre, quite vehemently by the nascent years of the twenty-first century, is the emergence of rival publics and counterpublics that challenge the assertion of a singular Polish public and the understanding of Polish culture as predetermined and intransigent. I follow Michael Warner's differentiation between public and counterpublic. The former is a 'space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself' that exists 'by virtue of being addressed.' In other words, 'an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence' (Warner,

2002: 67). A public is self-organized and independent from the state, and is addressed to strangers as public discourse, and not only reserved for known members of a group or community. Given that a public is formed through the medium of its address, it can be differentiated from a nation not only because membership is free and voluntary but precisely for the reason that its members must be active and attentive. Indeed, attentiveness is precisely the 'sorting category' of a public, rather than national or communal identity (*ibid.*: 87). Although a counterpublic is generated by the same features, it is distinguishable from a public in a number of ways. First, it remains conscious of its status as subordinate to dominant publics and a 'hierarchy of stigma is the assumed background of practice' (*ibid.*: 121). This impacts its modes of address, its use of speech and its discursive articulation of bodies and identities, placing emphasis on transformative rather than replicative discourse. Crucially, for political theatre and the circulation of discourse that produces publics and counterpublics, address must be extended impersonally and be available for co-membership based on attention and not on bounded or restricted and exclusive notions of identity.

Across the chapters of this book, we find examples of political theatres producing both publics and counterpublics, which have been able to contest the exclusionary norms legitimized through a singular articulation of a Polish public and the realization of collective social knowledge resistant to change, which in the theatre has been reliant on fresh approaches to directing, the abandonment or rewriting of canonical texts, the staging of emergent subject positions, the employment of daring new aesthetics and innovative experiments with modern technologies. As these theatres are publicly funded institutions not working independently of the state I do not see them as what Fraser has coined 'weak publics,' those publics whose 'deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and [do] not also encompass decision making' (1992: 134). I agree with performance theorist Shannon Jackson that designating certain publics as 'weak' is normative (2011: 9), and I also share her attentiveness to the implications and significance of the state funding critical art practices. Unlike the theatre counterpublics that contested the official and appropriated civic society under communism and that were determined by shared moral values, developing publics and counterpublics elaborate alternative norms, generate dissensus and conceive of the public sphere as constituted by difference rather than unity. This shift in the nature of the public sphere in the 1990s denoted a move from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one, that is 'from rule based primarily on acquiescence to superior force to rule based primarily on consent

supplemented with some measure of repression' (Fraser, 1992: 117). The public sphere today then is no longer something one may simply resist or withstand; as the site of the construction of majority consent, it can therefore either directly be linked to hegemonic modes of domination or it can act as a resistant site of antagonization, provocation, contestation and conflict. The public sphere is *both* a stage for the formation of discursive opinion and an arena for the formation and enactment of social identities, which for theatre and performance scholars is of acute significance.

Where Fraser diverges from Habermas is in the latter's assumption that the propagation of competing counterpublics is a move away from greater democracy and that deliberation about the common (public) good is of more value than individual (personal) interests. If there were the kind of singular, overarching public sphere that Habermas articulates in his seminal *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, 1991), then 'members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives and strategies' (Fraser, 1992: 123). Theatre as a significant location for the inaction of the public sphere in Poland – a space that any person has the right, if not always the means, to attend – makes it a crucial site of political activity, particularly for the expression of repressed histories and curtailed, marginalized or heretofore unimagined identities. As I will demonstrate throughout the book, oppositional theatre publics and counterpublics have been crucial in articulating the thoughts and voices of those left out of the official discourse on Polishness by *un*bracketing inequalities and overtly thematizing them. Not only then does the theatre substantiate 'interpublic relations,' provoking dialogue between publics with conflicting views or competing political agendas, it also enables 'intrapublic relations,' safe spaces for the discursive interaction and strategizing of a marginalized public who are connected by a common history, political affiliation or identity. Fraser calls these 'subaltern counterpublics' that are 'parallel discursive arenas where members of a subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (1992: 123). What was relegated as an individual and personal matter, and thereby not of interest to the public sphere, is recuperated and enunciated as a public and political concern through the work of these counterpublics that widens the discursive space of cultural and national identity and the political. The point is that such understandings of counterpublics, which have both a contestatory *and* a publicist function, present one possible solution to the kind of separatism that the communist usurpation of

the public sphere produced. Whereas subversive political performance intended to undermine communist society, the publics and counterpublics I analyze help to stabilize stratified pluralist society through their formation, enactment of a democratic participatory parity and performances of contestation.

Overview

Analyzing these publics and counterpublics, I consider the political and aesthetic tenants of Polish Romanticism, which was traditionally understood to fortify the ideals of a 'nationless' Poland during Partitions and occupations, inclusive of Soviet-enforced communism, by placing emphasis on the metaphysical and rebellious nature of a national hero. In Chapter 1, first conceiving of the modes in which this tradition translates directly into both patterns of thought and national identity in the 1990s and its subsequent dismantlement in the 2000s, I then frame this discussion with a focus on the contested and disavowed legacies of the Solidarity movement, a politically charged referent that remains open-ended and thus easily instrumentalized in cultural debates in Chapter 2. I argue that the legacy of the Polish Romantic hero is a figure that must be extremely sensitive to changes in specific historical situations, political constellations and ongoing social metamorphoses, which I assert is not so much a death of tradition, as is laboriously hypothesized, as its realignment. Spending time over Jerzy Grzegorzewski's grapplings with Romantic paradigms and Tadeusz Kantor's resistance to nationalist essentialism, I consider a subsequent generation of directors such as Jan Klata, Monika Strzępka, Paweł Demirski, Paweł Wodziński and Michał Zadara, who have adapted Romantic texts in an effort to redraw boundaries of national consciousness and community formation that were seen as absolute and unassailable. Ultimately, I contend that the crucial understanding of pluralistic democracy requires the inclusion of identities that have been traditionally excluded from the restrictive notion of the 'Romantic community' that is built on complex lines of racial, ethnic, national and sexual division.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I turn my focus towards developments in feminist and queer thinking in the theatre. In examining feminist new writing and reworkings of the Polish canon, I assert that it is imperative to amend the habit of interpreting the political transformation as

lacking gender components and to stop codifying women's experiences as uniform or homogenous. As both the civic and the social spheres have become increasingly sexualized, the radical right continues to reinforce conceptions of nationhood through gender binaries. The performances by Krystian Lupa, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Andrzej Wajda, Anna Augustynowicz and Maja Kleczewska I concentrate on in Chapter 3 seek to disrupt the ongoing solidification of binary tropes that position women as either eroticized victims and sexualized objects or asexual martyrs that safeguard conservative national narratives and restore traditional hierarchies in a return to a Polish 'normality' that is antithetical to communism. I argue that the primary objectives of staging gender in political theatre over the past two decades has been to repudiate a perceived 'proper' femininity, to advocate and contest legacies of feminism, to represent innovative and lateral forms of kinship and intimacy, to disrupt the reinforcement of heterosexuality as originary and natural and to attend to the insights offered by trans bodies, identities and experiences.

Given that vanguardist approaches to theatre-making privilege the culturally excluded, I maintain in Chapter 4 that queer theory does not merely *illustrate* formal innovations, but rather provides a uniquely appropriate vocabulary for the theatre to articulate its own aims to itself. Queer theory is both before and between, rather than descriptive and after.[7] In conservative public discourses, gays and lesbians are still framed in conservative rhetoric as a threat to the family, a concomitant symbol of the collapse of society, demonized figures produced through sin and perversion and a pathologized body in need of medical treatment and prayer. Homophobia continues to mark the boundaries of normative masculinity in public discourse. I invest considerable space to theatre that has staged alternative paradigms, tested the limits of political activism through new conceptions of alternative sexualities, championed gay rights, constructed queer counterpublics and enacted queer worlds.

Conceptualizing the Polish other has been complicated by the composite concurrence of the country's colonial histories, rebellions and attendant narratives of Polish suffering, marytrdom and victimhood alongside an identification with Western Europe that produces a sense of cultural elitism that distinguishes Poland from Russia. In the final chapters, I chart the most paradigmatic interventions into 'exclusive communities' that attempt to yoke national identity to Polish ethnicity and practice decisive omissions from the construction of critical histories. In the twentieth century, the anti-Semitism either directed at Jews in Poland or that was more broadly at work within ideological

systems was largely disavowed, deployed for political point-scoring or simply prohibited from critique in public discourse. In Chapter 5, my focus on Polish/Jewish relations gives particular attention to the public debate provoked by the publication of the historian Jan T. Gross' *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001), which attributes guilt for the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom to ethnic Poles rather than the German National Socialists. The publication of Gross' monograph caused mass outrage, provoking Joanna Michlic (2002) to identify the debate around the pogrom as the most important and longstanding in postcommunist Poland. A large number of productions by artists such as Krzysztof Warlikowski, Jan Klata, Tadeusz Słobodzianek, Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, Artur Pałyga and Marcin Liber appeared within an environment of public outrage and recriminations over culpability for anti-Semitic violence in Poland over the course of the last century that gave voice to alternative and often-repressed histories, Jewish lives and experiences, and that mark a haunting and acutely felt absence of Jewish populations after the Holocaust and the purges of 1968.

Furthering this discussion, the staging of non-ethnic Polish others and attendant questions around the status of Poland as a postcolonial space form the basis of Chapter 6. While a number of scholars have detected an overlap between the colonizing experiences of language, political economies, labor, resistance and emancipation between postcolonial nations in the Global South and countries formerly governed by or under Russia and later the Soviet Union, the performances I examine both undermine and disrupt the assimilation of Poland under the referent of postcolonial by drawing attention to a concomitant capacity in the country to reproduce colonial discourses. Although a number of progressive directors such as Krzysztof Warlikowski and Bartek Frąckowiak and writers like Weronika Szczawińska and Dorota Masłowska have felt empowered to articulate a discerning appraisal of Polish values through the lens of race and ethnicity, I articulate an apprehension about the coupling of a critique of ethnic nationalism purely and singularly to the ethnically Polish body. Despite artists' attempts to disarticulate biology from culturally constructed notions of racial character, they do not purport to resolve social contradictions in the confrontations they stage between ethnically Polish bodies and other cultures and races. Throughout Chapter 6, I challenge the equivalencies of exclusion that move across the political spectrum on race and ethnicity but that fall short of generating dissensus, demonstrating that the universalization of exclusivity as a category fails to take into account the particularities of oppression that

are systemically linked to the prerogative of Polish whiteness, as well as the postcolonial imperative to allow for a speaking position that does not render the other invisible or silenced.

First attempting to theorize a shift towards neoliberalism and a subversion of the Polish-Romantic paradigms that were so crucial for expressions of public resistance to the communist regime, the chapters that follow look towards the particular subjects and bodies that have been excluded from understandings of national identity and, as a result, the public sphere. Acknowledging the legitimacy of genuine democratic differences, I hope to uncover the obfuscated desires at work in the founding of the political with a positive content, asking whether theatres function as a symptom of social antagonism or if they, instead, reinforce the fantasy of consistent cultural self-identity. If the proliferation of sites of contestation is a sign of the health of a pluralistic democracy, then the establishment and multiplication of political theatres are one of its significant expressions. Political theatre, as I posit it, does not offer substantive, concrete or universalist solutions to hegemony but provides a space for the enacting of political demands that bring to light social exclusions, working against the closure strategies that jeopardize democratic principles. I invest time in productions that fully attempt to account for dominance, upholding difference in identity, exposing and putting at risk hegemonic social relations, activating effectual alliances, offering alternative understandings of the law and its transgression, and strengthening bonds of reciprocity in the work of building pluralistic democracy in Poland after 1989.

Notes

1 Here I choose the term 'subject positions,' by which I mean identities that perform interpretive and mediating roles in the provocation or encouragement of certain practices at particular historical moments, as opposed to the *subject*, which in psychoanalysis is associated with lack and the 'impossibility of identity.' While subject positions are also unstable, imperfect and incomplete, this term focuses on the political effects and mobilizations of identities over their coherent or stable production. For more on subject positions, see Norval (1996: 64).

2 Jerzy Szacki argues that in the PRL the only serious Western tradition Poland retained was the strong tie to the Roman Catholic Church. The 'freedom' that one finds in postcommunist political rhetoric is attached to a much older notion of the Polish nobility and not to modern liberalism (1995: 45–7). This signals some of the obstacles in the transition period. If Poland's experience of liberalism was strictly limited to the struggle against

communism, then it follows on that the country did not have a positive political program to revert back to after 1989. This accounts for the apparent absence of a solid or stable liberal doctrine that safeguarded personal liberty, freedom of choice and the protection of individual rights through society. This led Szacki to query whether any other kind of liberalism in Poland existed beyond economic liberalism (*ibid*.: 173). No one would deny the legacy of hostility between the Catholic Church and proponents of liberalism in Poland. The essential problem revolves around the appearance of these ideologies as incompatible and in direct competition, wherein liberalism is positioned as militantly atheistic and anti-clerical and the Church as fundamentalist and closed (*ibid*.: 201). There needs to be a change in the very discourse that sets up this binary opposition if there is to be constructive discussion between groups.

3 The defining image of the collapse of communism was the fall of the Berlin Wall. This was a tangible image of mass protest to which the success of democracy and liberty over the evil of communism could be attributed. What was missing from this picture was the communists themselves. If one was to overthrow them, where were they? This peculiar absence in most CEE countries, with the obvious exception of Nicolae Ceaușescu's execution in Romania, led to a period of transition that was at times difficult to define. Because the memory of this collapse failed to unite citizens in a cohesive national identity, many politicians sought in reinscribe the events of 1989 with their own ideological significance (Mark, 2010: 2).

4 Bryll was a particularly controversial figure at the time. Having been one of the writers officially extolled by the state, the poet-playwright changed his political alignment as a result of the Solidarity movement and became a dissident writer. Given Bryll's abandonment of his earlier literary conformism, the censor would not allow a poem by the author to be produced at a state theatre.

5 Warlikowski and Jarzyna's work in international festivals can be seen as new mode of intercultural interaction that stands in opposition to Richard Demarco's obscurantist othering of Polish theatre at the 1992 Edinburgh Festival where he claimed that, 'Western Europe needs Poland, because alone it is spiritually bankrupt. The only important energy in art is the energy of the spirit. I hope that you [Poland] realize how heavily the responsibility regarding Europe weighs on you' (cited in Cioffi, 1996: 227). Interestingly, Demarco's claim fully coalesces with the Polish Romantic paradigm, in which the resurrection of Poland acts as the salvationary function for the European continent, while also wholly reinscribing the East–West binary into Polish–UK interactions that purports to emphasize and privilege Poland's unique position in Europe, while in actuality marginalizing and obscuring the imaginary 'East.' It is the same logic with which the category of 'woman' is sublated in Polish Romanticism in a mode that alleges to empower her while, in fact, it diminishes her agency.

6 This is in line with Jacques Rancière's concept of the 'emancipated spectator,' who realizes the mode in which ideologies are experienced as naturalized, as opposed to the natural experience of ideology. Rancière suggests that the emancipated spectator is produced through aesthetic and formal challenges to the passivity imposed by mimetic theatre practices within the proscenium-arch stage that produce a clash of 'senses' rather than the development of arguments established by conflicting views in a play's diegesis. See Rancière (2014).

7 Across the chapters, I adapt contemporary theoretical paradigms within Polish culture and assert that given my sensitivity to local and national contexts, this is not a case of intellectual colonization or a generic mapping of Western theory. While I oppose any blanket use of critical theory that is inattentive to cultural specificity, I am also wary of the East–West binary that a wholesale resistance to the application of Western theory in non-Western spaces shores up. What's more, many of the theorists that I employ, such as Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek and Nancy Fraser, are already deeply embedded within the circulation of contemporary thought in Poland.