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PERFORMANCE THAT DISAPPEARED: TWO CASE STUDIES OF ALTERNATIVE AESTHETICS IN THE RECENT LATVIAN THEATRE HISTORY

The paper will focus on the alternative theatre and performance culture of the late 1980s in Latvia and on two independent companies that appeared around 1987 in particular, namely “The Obsessed House” and “The Theatre Studio No. 8”. Both companies existed only for a few years and their activities and traces in Latvian theatre had not been properly researched by now. However, they are remarkable because of their aesthetics, which significantly differed from the mainstream Latvian theatre of the time and could be regarded as *performative transgressions*. “The Obsessed House” grew out of the amateur theatre group led by the theatre director Ilmārs Ēlerts (1948-1991) who during the Soviet times consistently worked outside the institutional theatre framework and developed his own theatre language much closer to the ideas of Grotowski and Brook than to psychological theatre. The whole artistic path of Ēlerts could be defined as the resistance to and the transgression of the uniformed understanding of theatre during the Soviet times. In 1986–87, several graduates of the acting course at the Conservatorium refused employment at institutional theatres and together with the movement artist Modris Tenisons (1945-2020) and the young playwright Lauris Gundars established “The Theatre Studio No. 8”. They were interested in absurdist approach mixed with performance art strategies that were hardly known and adopted in the context of Latvian theatre of the time. The paper will contextualize both phenomena within the recent Latvian theatre history and within a wider context of the post-soviet Eastern European theatre and performance culture.

Biography

Zane Kreicberga has been trained as a theatre director at the Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) where she currently is a professor in contemporary theatre. For about 20 years she has been working at the New Theatre Institute of Latvia organizing the International Festival of Contemporary Theatre “Homo Novus”. Since 2012, she has been the research assistant at the

LAC Research Centre. In 2017–2022, she was the head of the Performing Arts Department. Her research interests include acting techniques and the role of the theatre in the social and political context. Now Zane is working on her doctoral thesis about the transition period of the late 1980s and 1990s of the Latvian theatre.