

# EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF STAGE MANAGERS' REPORTS ON THEATRE RESEARCH

## A Case Study of Archival Documents

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### Abstract

The stage manager's report is an archival document in Polish theatre, initially created to track the absences and delays of the team working on a performance. However, it offers more than a mere staff attendance list. The report contains the author's notes throughout the entire production process. By analysing reports from 1972–1982 and comparing them with contemporary reports from 2021–2024 from several public theatres in Warsaw, I will show how a report is a valuable resource for further research, providing insights into the institution where a particular production occurred and the socio-political conditions of its time. I consider my research as a contribution to further and more extensive considerations of the potential of the stage manager's report as a source material for theatre researchers.

### Keywords

stage manager, report, archives, backstage, oral history, documenting theatre, production

Výzkum vlivu inspicentských záznamů na divadelní výzkum. Případová studie archivních dokumentů

### Abstrakt

Inspicentský záznam je v polském divadle archivním dokumentem, který původně vznikl za účelem sledování absencí a zpoždění členů týmu pracujícího na představení. Nabízí však více než pouhý seznam docházky zaměstnanců, obsahuje poznámky autora vzniklé v průběhu celého inscenačního procesu. V analýze hlášení z let 1972–1982 a jejich porovnáním se současnými dokumenty z let 2021–2024 z několika veřejných divadel ve Varšavě autorka dokládá, že je zpráva cenným zdrojem pro další výzkum, který poskytuje vhled do chodu instituce, kde se konkrétní inscenace odehrávala, a do dobových společensko-politických podmínek. Jde o příspěvek k dalším a rozsáhlejším úvahám o potenciálu inspicentských záznamů jako pramenného materiálu divadelně-vědného bádání.

### Klíčová slova

inspicient, záznam, archiv, zákulisí, orální historie, dokumentace divadla, inscenace

## Exploring the archives

The theatre archives contain many things that are not expected and are sometimes even difficult to name and identify. Scripts of plays produced and not produced, their stage manager copies and technical copies, press articles, set designs, repertories, old tickets, postcards from tours, programmes, costumes, masks, photographs, negatives, posters, recordings, props, paintings, medals, letters, notes, diaries, and much more (Krawul 2017: 35–67). They are the material heritage of the theatre that generations of documentarians collect, gather, archive and document. They keep the history and lives of many people – both professional and artistic, private and social. But also the work of many backstage theatre workers – stage managers, wardrobe staff, accountants, technicians, and ticket takers. This material heritage of the theatre consists of a huge amount of junk in the storerooms, great chaos, and a non-ecological overabundance of unused objects.

Theatre reveals itself as an institution with a double, almost schizophrenic attitude to things. On the one hand, it is a ruthless squanderer of matter – it produces enormous quantities of objects, which are often made of cheap, and therefore perishable, materials from the very moment of their creation [...] On the other hand, the theatre is the enemy of waste – it keeps records of its objects and stores them [...]. It also collects many things that would be considered useless rubbish in any other place (Waligóra 2017: 84).

So why doesn't the theatre throw away this potentially "useless rubbish"? Out of sentiment? Nostalgia? Things hold the memory of the past, remind us of it and claim it. When we look at objects, we are reminded that they once belonged to someone, someone used them, they served a purpose, they were important to someone. They are part of history. It is difficult to throw away any archives if one can find many lives and stories suspended in timelessness, which bring them back to memory each time they are taken out of storage. But sentiment and memories of the lives and works of people no longer with us are not enough. What will happen to all these archived things in the future? Will they pile up in the storerooms until there is no room for them?

Theatre as an art has to constantly bother with the myth of ephemerality, according to which it „functions as a space of unique and directly experienced live action, and at the same time as a site of an event subject to an irrevocable process of disappearance“ (Sajewska 2015: 80). Researchers have long argued about whether theatre studies can properly be a separate discipline if the object of its study is so impermanent and ephemeral (Sajewska 2015). How can it be encompassed and studied in its entirety if it is a unique experience of the here and now, and no physical evidence will fully describe such an experience? Rebecca Schneider, who explored the relationship between the body and the archive, wrote that:

Western culture has long defined itself through the archive. We see ourselves in the residues we collect, the traces we preserve, mark and cite, and the material remnants we recognise as constructing knowledge (Schneider 2014: 21).

Indeed, archives store things that carry the memory of the past, but are these hundreds of objects already constituted knowledge and a part of common history? Robin Bernstein also wrote about the relationship between the body and things and described this relationship using the dance metaphor. He mentions the difference between objects and things: "Objects are important insofar as they manifest, respond to, or

transmit meaning that originates in humans. A thing demands that people confront it on its own terms; thus a thing forces a person into an awareness of the self in material relation to the thing.” (Bernstein 2009: 69–70) Things are not alive but force people to take action. They have power and can influence people: „Things invite us to dance, and when we sweep them onto the dance floor, they appear to become animate.” (Bernstein 2009: 70) So, continuing this metaphor – I accepted the invitation to dance.

No matter how much we may resent the fact that theatre is “ephemeral” and that things won’t tell us about the experience of the body, they still won’t disappear from storage so quickly. A whole staff of archivists and documentarians ensures that any material remnants of the theatre’s history are preserved. However, looking sentimentally at the dead matter covering itself in dust in the warehouses is not enough. Researchers and archivists must look at these objects as the living potential that can be activated through action – their research and careful analysis. Archives conceal many untold stories that remain hidden from mainstream historical narratives because they are kept in storage. However no one has created a guide on properly reading history from objects and matter, how to enter into dialogue with them and realise the memory of history with only them as evidence. Although we have been trained to read scripts and interpret paintings and poems, there is still a great deal to be discovered and understood when it comes to analysing the material archives of theatre. The historical records, documents, reports, and other physical remnants of theatrical productions provide a rich source of information that can enhance our understanding of the performing arts.

Objects in the archive preserve the memory of the past, remind us of it and demand it. Looking at these things, we realise that they once belonged to someone, someone used them, they served some purpose, maybe they were important to someone. I could not pass by one type of document that I had to work on indifferently and without reflection. They were stage manager reports. One day at work, in the Barbara Krasnodębska Documentation Workshop at the Theatre Institute, where I work as a documentalist, I received a dozen or so folders of stage manager reports from the Studio Theatre in Warsaw, and I had to prepare them for digitisation. It was a simple, mechanical task that should have taken me little time. But it stopped me for a more prolonged moment and became a reason for reflection. I realised that I knew little about the authors of these documents. I am not talking about the specific stage managers who filled out those reports but about the entire professional group. From my general knowledge, I knew that this person coordinated the course of the whole performance. But what exactly does a stage manager do? I had no idea. I also did not know that a stage manager reports a performance in such a formally specified way. At the time, it was a revelation to me. Now, all these facts about stage managers are evident to me. And reporting all rehearsals and performances by a stage manager seems to be essential knowledge about this profession. In October 2023, I devoted my speech to stage manager reports at the open session: A jigsaw puzzle box without a picture. Working with theatre archives, which took place during the meeting of the international network ENICPA (European Network of Information Centres for the Performing Arts) at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw. I entitled my speech *Invisible Guardians of the Stage: The Role of Stage Managers’ Reports in Theatre Archives*<sup>1</sup>. Preparing materials for digitisation contributed to my research on this document and its potential use so that it would not gather dust on the archives shelves – as it is doing now.

1 A jigsaw puzzle box without a picture. Working with theatre archives | open session. Session programme available online at <<https://english.institut-teatralny.pl/2023/09/26/a-jigsaw-puzzle-box-without-a-picture-working-with-theatre-archives-open-session/>> [accessed on 10.09.24].

Stage managers' reports are one such document found in archives that have not been widely examined in Polish theatre studies, which made me stop among these old documents for deeper reflection. So I decided to research this document and view stage managers' reports from the Studio Theatre in Warsaw from 1972–1982 (the time of Józef Szajna's management) and compare them with contemporary reports from 2021–2024 from several public theatres in Warsaw (Studio Theatre, Dramatyczny Theatre, Nowy Theatre and Powszechny Theatre). The stage manager reports got me to the point of understanding that I also know little about the authors of these documents. So, before I move on to the analysis and its potential for theatre studies, I must explain who the authors of these documents are, what place they occupy in theatre, and why these reports are created.

A stage manager is one of the most essential pillars of the production and subsequent stage "life" of a performance, and this is almost indescribable in the history of Polish theatre. The Polish stage manager (in Polish: *inspicjent*) is equivalent to a foreign, western stage manager but has a slightly different scope of duties and much less prestige. Following the Encyclopaedia of Polish Theatre and Diana Poskuta-Włodek's definition, we learn that stage managers "were employed from the second half of the 18th century [...]. Often, the duties of a contemporary stage manager were simply taken over by one of the actors or an entrepreneur" (Poskuta-Włodek 2024). This is a very little described and not documented profession in theatre studies. There is only a bachelor's thesis written in 2018 entitled *Changes in the Profession of a Stage Manager in Polish Theatre of the 19th Century and Contemporary Theatre* (Hanzel 2018). Apart from Michalina Hanzel's bachelor's thesis, there are no more extensive analyses of this profession. Of course, occasional mentions of stage managers can be found, often in the press and anecdotal recollection. However, deeper analyses, a comprehensive look at this profession, or the documents of stage managers are lacking in Polish theatre research. Therefore, I base my knowledge of stage managers on the oral histories of stage managers. With such a state of research, it seems reasonable to me to reach for the scientific tools produced by oral history (Bornat – Thompson 2021). And to treat the spoken word and stage managers' stories as the profession's basic knowledge. I conducted several in-depth conversations with stage managers from public theatres in Warsaw (Studio Theatre, Dramatyczny Theatre, Baj Theatre and Nowy Theatre).

In the process of translating the profession, I encountered several complexities. While translating the profession, I discovered words that referred to related professions but not the same ones, which caused difficulties in conveying the story and understanding the Polish profession. The Western stage manager role shares similarities with the Polish stage manager position but also presents significant differences. The specific tasks and level of prestige associated with this profession are intricately linked to the hierarchical framework and the overall theatrical system prevalent in a given country. This suggests that a stage manager's role is shaped by its core responsibilities and the broader cultural and organisational context within which it operates. The Polish stage manager, in its etymology, does not have much in common with the English equivalent of stage manager. A manager suggests that someone is managing something; a manager has some power over a community or space. Unfortunately, the Polish stage manager does not have a lot of power.

Jan Ciechowicz in his article *Profession: inspicjent (yesterday and today)*, reviews various dictionary definitions of the Polish word *inspicjent* and looks for its roots and beginnings. In most dictionaries, this word does not exist. However, gathering all of Ciechowicz's research, etymologically the Polish *inspicjent* comes from the Latin

*inspicio*, meaning “to look, to drill, to explore” (Ciechowicz 2015: 111). It is characterized by vigilance and care rather than strict management, as seen in the case of foreign stage managers. This distinction is significant to me, which is why I chose to use the term “guardians of the stage” in the title of my article. Throughout history and to the present day, the role of the Polish stage manager has been that of a silent guardian, meticulously overseeing all aspects of the stage. They act as a careful documentarian of the theatre, meticulously observing and recording every detail from the sidelines while maintaining a respectful distance from the creative process. The stage manager plays a crucial role in the production of theatre, managing the technical aspects and observing the intricacies of theatre life on a daily basis. Their close observation of the dynamics and workings of the theatre is evident in the detailed reports they provide. This unique perspective allows the stage manager to offer valuable insights and perspectives on the theatre’s operations and performances.

This profession does not have its textbooks, studies, or courses in Poland. Therefore, the report they fill out during the performance is not regulated. Because of this, my research is only a contribution to further and perhaps more extensive considerations of the potential of the stage manager’s report as a document for theatre researchers.

### Reporting the stage

During a groundbreaking discussion on documenting and reconstructing the performances in Polish theatre, Stefania Skwarczyńska suggested creating a precise archiving system (Skwarczyńska 1973). As Sajewska wrote about that debate in Polish theatre: “Envisioned as a pillar of this new knowledge was the method of ‘reconstruction’ (...). This made it possible to treat theatre history as a history of events and thus to transplant the study of theatre spectacle from the realm of philology to that of cultural history” (Sajewska 2016: 55). Skwarczyńska’s statement was one of this debate’s most essential and representative statements. Due to the ephemeral nature of theatre as an art form, Skwarczyńska’s goal was to establish a robust system capable of accurately reconstructing theatrical works. This would be achieved through comprehensive and well-documented research subjects, allowing for a more thorough understanding of theatre art. She lists 26 documents of art and 12 documents of the work that the theatre researcher would need to collect for each theatre production to compile perfect documentation of the performance. Among these documents, she mentions colour sound films of the entire show, a verbal description of the show, several film shots of the audience, reliable documentation of the set design, recorded speeches of almost all the creators, tape recordings of the rehearsal process and much more (Skwarczyńska 1973). She even mentions “snapshot notes of a reportorial nature, documenting the audience’s first impressions, for example, statements ‘overheard’ during the breaks” (Skwarczyńska 1973: 132). However, her article does not mention the stage manager’s report. A document that already existed at the time and was not invented on the wave of ideas of theatre researchers or documentarians but from the pure practicality of the production of a play. The reports are one example of the historical artefacts that theatrical archives keep and collect but have never been subjected to analytical reflection. At the same time, they constitute both the “document of the art” and the “document of the work” suggested by Stefania Skwarczyńska.

The stage manager’s report is a document prepared by the stage manager of a performance. It covers everything from the first official rehearsal, including conceptual rehearsals and table talks, until the performance last run. It is a detailed record

of a performance's rehearsal process or running. Reporting is an essential process that holds the theatre staff accountable for their duties. It involves collecting relevant news, such as technical problems that need to be addressed, social disputes that may have arisen, and any necessary fixes to the scenery or equipment. This information is crucial for maintaining a smooth process and efficient theatre environment. The stage manager records the play's production's daily process and changes, creating a diary that captures the performance's vitality.

Analysing an example of an archival report (See Document 1), the stage manager has the task of writing down on a piece of paper all the essential technical information about the performance: title, director, theatre stage, date (together with numbering which rehearsal or performance it is) and the type of run in question (premiere, read-through, rehearsal, etc.). Records the length of time a given rehearsal or run of a given day lasted, sometimes with details of every minute of delay or extension and a description of what caused the delay. It records those present, late and absent from all theatre divisions. At the bottom of the report, he leaves any additional comments and his signature. The simplest information that the report can reveal to researchers is any technicalities of the production: substitutions, illnesses, accidents, damage to scenery, mistakes by technicians and creators, cancellations of the show and cuts in the script.

Unfortunately, the history of the stage manager's report is not well-documented, making it difficult to trace its origins and the context in which it was created. Furthermore, the document itself lacks any in-depth studies or analyses. It appears to be one of those documents that are archived and stored without undergoing much scrutiny or analysis. This limitation makes it challenging to fully understand the significance and implications of the information contained within the report.

The report is, first and foremost, a record of the artistic team's working time and was probably created for this reason. However, there is no single template for how it should be filled out correctly and what kind of comments the stage manager can write. As stage manager from The Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera, Teresa Krasnodebska recalls: "The profession of a stage manager is acquired according to an old, medieval principle – 'master and apprentice'." (Krasnodebska – Dorotkiewicz 2012) There is no school, textbook, or universally accepted rules; practice is passed hand to hand. Therefore, the report ceases to be just a raw record of the rehearsal and the performance, as it can contain any personal comments from the stage manager. After I analysed the stage managers' reports from the Studio Theatre in Warsaw from 1972–1982 (the time of Józef Szajna's management) and compared them with contemporary reports from 2021–2024 from several public theatres in Warsaw (Studio, Dramatyczny, Nowy and Powszechny), it turns out that stage managers allow themselves a lot of detailed notes about performances, often of a very personal nature, and reflections. All of them are different from each other – on the one hand, they reflect the personality of the stage manager. On the other hand, they reflect the character and atmosphere of a given production and, thus, a particular director's working model. As Studio Theatre's stage manager Maria Lejman-Kasz says, "This is open-heart surgery – every performance is different" (Lejman-Kasz 2017), and the stage manager's report captures this very ephemerality of each run on a piece of paper.

First and foremost, as a report is a rehearsal or performance run document, it can be used to analyse the work of a given director or a specific production. Even basic information can offer valuable insight into the processes of a creative team. For example, examining rehearsals' types, duration, and frequency for a specific production can provide a deeper understanding of the team's working dynamics. The report

records all the information about what parts of the play were rehearsed most often, which parts were cut and recomposed during the work and exploitation of the play – any changes in casting, set design and so on. This feature also allows the report to be used as a critical resource for reconstructing the performance. By cross-referencing the information in the reports with other archival documents, such as recordings or the script, verifying and validating any changes made during the production process becomes possible. This comprehensive approach ensures that the documented performance accurately reflects the creative decisions and changes made throughout the production. In the “comments” section, the stage manager often included an assessment of the run and any personal reflections. In the 1972–1982 reports, performances are frequently rated in the following categories: good, very good, and average. Assessing how a good performance differs from an average performance is difficult.

**Raport z odbytej próby-przedstawienia**

(nazwa przedsięwzięcia) Scena TEATR # STUDIO #  
Data 19.06.1976 Sztuka WITKACY  
Autor S. J. WITKIEWICZ  
Reżyser J. SZAJNA  
No. próby-przedstawienia 151

Czas trwania		Miejsce	RODZAJ I PROGRAM			
od	do					
19 <sup>15</sup>	20 <sup>40</sup>					
OBECNI		NIEOBECNI	SPÓZNIENI	o min.		
<b>Zespół artyst.</b> H. BRUJNE WMA K. CHMIELEWSKA J. JUN A. WARTKUSIENIA H. LOTHE A. MILEWNA H. MOCWISIA S. BEKOWY C. WAMIASKI G. WUJ W. KROSIŃSKA M. SZYMA A. DUMAS M. KOCOWSKI SUFLEK EWA DUMAS INSYPIENT EUBIETA SUKOSZA		<b>Statystki</b> S. WAMIASKI A. KOSMOLWA	Wprowadziłem Prześniabym o pracy komicznej dla p. Wandy Lothe.			
<b>Zespół techn.</b> STRYBIEC H. KOSMOLWA		Uwagi o przebiegu próby-przedstawienia Bardzo niedobre przedstawienie! Długo zapamiętałem swoje linie! Wskazywałem dźwięki nie był głośny nie było fajny w dniu przedstawienia, a ja byłem pomysłowy. Nie zgadzam się z reżyserem. Reżyser: Władysław Insypient: Władysław Na próbie prób o przedstawieniu ewy an. 16, 19, 20. 2. 1976				
STRYBIEC H. KOSMOLWA		Uwagi o przebiegu próby-przedstawienia Bardzo niedobre przedstawienie! Długo zapamiętałem swoje linie! Wskazywałem dźwięki nie był głośny nie było fajny w dniu przedstawienia, a ja byłem pomysłowy. Nie zgadzam się z reżyserem. Reżyser: Władysław Insypient: Władysław Na próbie prób o przedstawieniu ewy an. 16, 19, 20. 2. 1976				

Reżyser: J. SZAJNA  
Insypient: Władysław

**Report from the rehearsal-performance**

(company name) Stage TEATR # STUDIO # Play WITKACY  
Date 19.06.1976 Author S. J. WITKIEWICZ  
No. rehearsal-performance 151 Director J. SZAJNA

Duration		Place	Type and program			
from	to					How many minutes
19 <sup>15</sup>	20 <sup>40</sup>					
Present		Absent	Late			
<b>Artistic Team</b> H. BRUJNE WMA K. CHMIELEWSKA J. JUN A. WARTKUSIENIA H. LOTHE A. MILEWNA H. MOCWISIA S. BEKOWY C. WAMIASKI G. WUJ W. KROSIŃSKA M. SZYMA A. DUMAS M. KOCOWSKI SUFLEK EWA DUMAS INSYPIENT EUBIETA SUKOSZA		<b>Extras</b> S. WAMIASKI A. KOSMOLWA				
<b>Musicians</b> S. BEKOWY C. WAMIASKI G. WUJ W. KROSIŃSKA M. SZYMA A. DUMAS M. KOCOWSKI SUFLEK EWA DUMAS INSYPIENT EUBIETA SUKOSZA			[Stage manager] I would like to request a new alarm clock for Mrs. Wanda Lothe.			
<b>Technical Team</b> STRYBIEC H. KOSMOLWA						
Notes about the rehearsal-performance run [Stage manager] Very bad performance! Actors forgot their lines. "Witkacy" hasn't been performed for a long time, there was no rehearsal on the day of the performance, hence so many mistakes. Director [Assistant director] The show was very good. I disagree with the above. Please let the director's assistant handle evaluations in the future.						

Document no. 1a: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Elżbieta Sikorska for the performance *Witkacy* directed by Józef Szajna, 19.05.1976, Studio Theatre artistic archive.

Document no. 1b: Translated version of Document no. 1a.

Including a subjective assessment in a report introduces the risk of potential inaccuracies, as subjective opinions can vary. It is essential to verify the information each time to ensure its reliability and accuracy. Reports are usually available for realisers, creators, and management inspection. The reports from the time of Józef Szajna's management in Studio Theatre (1972–1982) were handwritten on sheets of paper by the stage managers, so one can often see conversations or even arguments between the show's creators on the reports, e.g., several characters arguing about the reception of

a given performance (see Document no. 1). In an example report from 19.05.1976, written during a performance of *Witkacy* directed by Józef Szajna, the stage manager writes at the beginning, “I would like to request a new alarm clock for Mrs. Wanda Lothe.” – a basic note during the execution of the performance. And then lower on the paper – “Very bad performance! Actors forgot their lines. *Witkacy* hasn’t been performed for a long time, there was no rehearsal on the day of the performance, hence so many mistakes.” Which is a subjective assessment of the run. And under this remark, there is another type of writing, the director’s assistant, who replies: “The show was very good. I disagree with the above. Please let the director’s assistant handle evaluations in the future.” Reports may contain very subjective information that needs to be verified. At the same time, this comment points to the hierarchy in the theatre, where the stage manager cannot evaluate the run, even though he is supposed to document the entire process.

I conducted several interviews with stage managers from public Warsaw theatres for my research. One of the stage managers from Nowy Theatre recounted on reports, “These are generally filled with critical comments. You write the comment only when something goes wrong to try to understand why something went wrong. That [...] stays in the archive, and you know that something has been reported, and then you can refer to it and say that something has not been done yet.” (Józków 2024) The report often contains critical information. Its main purpose is to effectively communicate any failures, the need for modifications, and any tension within the theatre team to the administration and management. The report is important because it can serve as vital evidence when documenting any negative or unpleasant occurrences in the future. The stage manager from Dramatyczny Theatre claims the same information: “Most things are written that have disrupted the performance. If entered in the report, it can eliminate that mistake in the future. [...] After all, neither the director nor the administrative staff are in the theatre during plays. Consequently, this information in the report remains.” (Karolak 2024) So, the report contains information that is somehow negative about the play. They discuss the theatre’s shortcomings, production problems, and social disputes. What information can we find in the stage managers’ report, and how can these facts be turned into impulses for further research?

### The theatre’s behind-the-scenes archive

We can consider a stage manager as an archivist of the performance’s existence—a documentarian who records the work live as it unfolds. This makes the stage manager the ideal documentarian because they are not confined to archives; they are present during the action. All of this documentation is found in the report. What unique insights can this theatre’s behind-the-scenes archive provide about the performance that other archival documents cannot in the same detailed way? Looking through the reports, it is also possible to extract much information about a particular institution’s problems or a specific social group. In the reports from the time of Józef Szajna’s management of the Studio Theatre, there are many remarks about the technical staff, for example, information about individual employees turning up for work under the influence of alcohol (See Document No. 2 and Document No. 3), or failing to fulfil their assigned duties. There is also evidence of attempts by technical workers to explain themselves for not doing their job – one acoustician was said to have explained that he was “working alone without help and was exhausted with work” (See Document no. 4). One can interpret the situation differently with only this much information from the report.



Without delving into the dispute, we should consider the information from the stage manager as a factual representation of very irresponsible behaviour by an undisciplined technical team. But it is possible to subject these descriptions to more profound analysis, the result of which would perhaps be the reflection that the acoustician working on the *Witkacy* production directed by Józef Szajna was telling the truth. Maybe he really was overtired because too much was being demanded of him. It is possible that the technical team member was shouldering a heavier workload than manageable, and his efforts to convey this were disregarded. Considering this perspective, his statement in the report could be viewed as evidence of mistreatment or exploitation of the technical staff. Such a note today would be precious material for today's discussion in Polish theatre about the disrespect for work ethics, overwork and abuse. In 2019, a grassroots report entitled *Full Culture – Empty Accounts* was published, which examined wages and employment conditions in Warsaw's public cultural institutions. The study was conducted by members of the National Trade Union 'Inicjatywa Pracownicza' (employee initiative) at Warsaw cultural institutions. The study revealed, among other things, that: "People working in the cultural sector are one of the lowest-paid professional groups in Poland. Politicians of all parties are to blame for this, as they have allowed the exploitation of public sector employees for years" (OZZ 'Inicjatywa Pracownicza', 2019). Łukasz Jaskuła, a trade union member of OZZ 'Inicjatywa Pracownicza', who worked on the report, summarised the research results: "Work in culture is certainly not easy and stress-free. We often work after hours. The principle of overproduction governs Warsaw's cultural institutions: too many events are produced concerning the actual staffing capabilities of the institution. The price for this is paid by employees who have a sense of public mission and do their best to make the institution's program the best it can be." (Jaskuła 2024) In 2022, Andrzej Błażewicz conducted detailed research on work efficiency in Polish performing theatres in the 10:00–14:00 and 18:00–22:00 hours system (Błażewicz 2022). This is the most popular work system in theatres in Poland, i.e. it includes a standard 8 hours of work a day but is divided into two blocks. According to research by Błażewicz, it turns out that more than half of people work effectively in this system. In response to the question, "What is the controller of your work in the 10:00–14:00 and 18:00–22:00 hours?" the average rating was 6.2 out of 10. Which 1 meant an ineffective impact and 10 a very effective result (Błażewicz 2022: 25). However, in later questions regarding the impact of this hourly system, private aspects of employees' lives, such as sleep, eating, passions, or relationships, the results are worse. In response to the question, "What impact does your 10:00–14:00 and 18:00–22:00 work schedule have on your private life?" the average results are only 3.6 (Błażewicz 2022: 31). In his research Błażewicz asked not only for ratings on a scale of 1–10 but also short comments, including the following voices regarding their private life in this mode of work: "In this work system, I am not there for my family." (Błażewicz 2022: 32) "When friends have free time, I am at work, and we cannot spend it together – such relationships are gradually disappearing, and soon the only friendships will be those from the workplace." (Błażewicz 2022: 36) "This mode of work caused sleep disorders, which I struggled with for over two years until I had to resort to a medical sleep 'rehabilitation' program. Depravity, that's what." (Błażewicz 2022: 40) All these statements resemble the technician's statement recorded in the report. It is paramount to delve deeper into the historical work of technicians from several decades ago, even if the information is solely obtainable through records and reports. This comprehensive approach can yield vital evidence, shedding light on Polish theatre's persistent and far-reaching challenges. Furthermore, it may reveal that these issues have been systematically disregarded over an extended period, indicating that they are not isolated to the Studio Theatre in the 1970s.



The reports also comprehensively describe the audience's response to a specific performance. They evaluate the behaviour of the audience, noting instances of standing ovations, any incidents of audience members taking props, the presence of disruptive individuals, the level of audience turnout, and any notable changes in audience mood or sentiment throughout the performance. In older reports from the Studio Theatre, there are repeated notes about aggressive spectators (men) in the audience, which the stage manager noted as "not the first time" (See Document no. 5). Or frequent notes about young people misbehaving (See Document no. 6), sometimes appearing at performances in larger organised groups of school trips. Upon conducting a more detailed analysis of a specific period in the Warsaw theatres, it may become evident that the recurring boredom experienced by schoolchildren in the theatre audience is not solely attributed to hooliganism. Instead, it could be linked to a deficiency in repertoire tailored to and engaging for this particular age group. Consequently, young individuals may find themselves attending performances not intended for their demographic, potentially due to being compelled by their teachers.

The reports are written in the language of their time and may reflect the socio-political conditions of the times. The reports from 1972 to 1982 show how stagehands address employees from the artistic and technical divisions differently. For example, the signature "Kol." [colleague], e.g., "During a rehearsal, kol. Meres [actor] had an accident on the ramp next to the electrician's cabin – twisting his leg into the ankle. He was taken to the emergency room." (Document no. 8) At the same time, some technical workers were signed as "ob." [citizen], e.g., "Absent acoustician ob. Kraśniewski. Music was introduced by ob. Gorzkowski." (Document no. 9) The notation in question arises from the naming conventions used in the Polish People's Republic during the era of communism. This notation can also be examined in the social hierarchy of professions. The inquiry arises as to whether a citizen holds a lower position in this hierarchy compared to a colleague. In this context, it suggests that the acoustician, a vital technical team member responsible for sound management, holds a lower hierarchical standing within the theatre than the artistic team, personified by the actor. This arrangement reflects a clear hierarchy within the theatre, implying that technical personnel are subordinate to those in artistic roles.

Reports still exist, often in physical form. The reports nowadays are usually stored in company archives and are frequently discarded after a few years rather than in artistic archives where they could be preserved. However, they are still not standardised and contain exciting annotations. Reports I analysed from Warsaw are slightly different, although they are from the same city. At Nowy Teatr, and the Studio Theatre, they are currently electronic documents, but in Powszechny or Dramatyczny, reports are still a piece of paper. At the Studio Theatre, the switch to electronic documents happened on the wave of a visit from a foreign company. Zuzanna Prusińska, the stage manager of the Studio Theatre, mentioned that they started using electronic reports when collaborating with American visitors. She emphasised that filling out the reports is much easier since they are in PDF format, which cannot be altered, ensuring the reliability of the information provided (Prusińska 2024). At the Nowy Theatre, the stage manager recalls that the transition happened naturally and didn't even remember it exactly: "We had physical ones, but now we've switched to electronic ones. They no longer take up space in the archive. It's an excel form." (Józków 2024) The transition to virtual report storage prompts us to reflect on the historical significance of the theatre's material heritage. If these reports were inadvertently overlooked in the archives for such a long time that their value for storage was forgotten. By storing

these reports online, we can save physical storage space and make it more challenging to bring them to the attention of researchers. Storing them online reduces the need for physical filing cabinets or storage rooms, allowing for easier access and sharing among researchers. However, it also presents the challenge of standing out among the vast amount of online information, making it more difficult for researchers to become aware of these specific reports.

	NIEOBECNI	SPÓZNIENI	o min.
Usprowadliwieni	W dniu dzisiejszym zmuszony do zejścia z ławki w związku z chamskim zachowaniem kilku widzów. W takiej sytuacji widzowi nie są przeciwniakami, bo awantury są wspaniałymi w/w prawie mają zadanie pilnowania	p. G. Kron został z drabiny przed rozpoczęciem widowiska. prawie bileterki: kierownicy w stanie skutecznym musiałoby dojść do głośnej rozprawy, ponadto w tym czasie są wejści na widowiska	
wiedliwieni	czas regulowanie sytuacji agresji (na ogół są to aktorów stojących nie po raz pierwszy).	niechęć publiczności pewnej części widzów mężczyźni) wobec na drabinie zdarza się pierwszy.	

Document no. 5: "Today, one of the actors was forced to get off the ladder before the start of the performance due to the rude behaviour of several spectators. In such a situation, the ticket ladies and audience managers are unable to counteract it effectively, as it would result in a loud brawl or even fistfights. Moreover, the ladies are responsible for guarding the entrances to the auditorium and regulating the movement of the audience. This is not the first time that a certain part of the audience (usually men) becomes aggressive towards actors standing on a ladder."

All of the above examples could be subjected to a deeper analysis, one by one, from which valuable information could emerge regarding, for example, the hierarchy prevailing in the theatre I have proposed, the violence towards employees, the political conditions of the time, the nature of the audience, and much more. Therefore, the comments excerpted in the reports could encourage researchers to ask more questions and provide an exciting impetus for further research.

Uwagi o przebiegu ~~Wsp~~-przedstawienia

SKANDALICZNE ZACHOWANIE SIĘ  
PUBLICZNOŚCI (MŁODZIEŻ) ZMUSIŁO  
KOL. KAMINSKIĘ DO PRZERWANIA  
AKCJI SCENICZNEJ. STANOWCZA  
INTERWENCJA SŁOWNA UCISZYŁA  
MŁODZIEŻ. PRZEDSTAWIENIE DOKOŃCZY-  
LI SIĘ W MOŻLIWIE NORMALNYCH  
WARUNKACH.

Reżyser  
Inspektor

*[Signature]*

Document no. 6: "The scandalous behaviour of the audience (youth) forced the show to be stopped. Firm verbal intervention silenced the youth. We finished the show in as normal conditions as possible."

**RAPORT ZE SPEKTAKLU**

DATA: SZTUKA:  
L.P.SPEKTAKLU: REŻYSER:

CZAS TRWANIA		MIEJSCE	RODZAJ I PROGRAM		
Od	Do				
OBECNI		NIEOBECNI		SPÓŹNIENI	MIN.
ZESPÓŁ ARTYSTYCZNY	STATYŚCI				
	MUZYCZY				
ZESPÓŁ TECHNICZNY I REALIZATORZY	UWAGI O PRZEBIEGU				

Inspektor:

Document no. 7: Sample of an empty report from Nowy Theatre in Warsaw, 2024.

## The researcher's curiosity

Stefania Skwarczyńska wrote, “The achievements of theatre studies depend – apart from the talents and inquisitiveness of theatre researchers – on the surviving documentation of theatre performances.” (Skwarczyńska 1973: 130) The shape of the written history also depends, of course, on what is in the archives and how it is stored, but above all, on who and what they pull out of the theatre archives and what questions they ask when looking at these documents. The significance of documents like the stage manager's report underscores the essential role of archives as repositories of a wealth of untapped materials. Archives serve as invaluable research resources, providing easy access to these documents. Researchers can contextualise these materials within various frameworks, opening up numerous avenues for in-depth analysis and exploration. While exploring the archives, I came across stage managers' reports, which brought me to discover an invisible but important theatre profession. In this article, I tried to analyse a stage manager report as an archival document of the Polish theatre, which can be great research material. This document was created from an administrative need to account for the absences and delays of a team working on a performance. However, I tried to present a wealth of information that can be retrieved from the stage manager's report and suggest potential avenues for further research based on this document. A carefully analysed report can provide more information than just about the performance itself. It can also tell a great deal about the institution in which a particular production is staged and about the socio-political climate of the time. Besides the previously mentioned, the stage manager's report not only provides a recount of the intricacies involved in bringing a play to life but also serves as a comprehensive source documenting the indispensable contributions of the often unnoticed yet pivotal member of the theatre's team – the stage manager. This revelation stood out as the most significant finding during the research process. In the meantime, this document is often viewed as a mere administrative piece of paper and is rarely preserved in artistic archives. If it does end up in an art archive, its potential remains largely unrecognised. The discussions about the ephemerality of theatre and the dreamlike nature of theatre archives have primarily focused on the performance as a piece of work and the main research subject for theatre researchers. However, the remaining materials from the performances reveal much more. They also represent the history of a community, the changing times, and, as in the case of this report, the documentation of one man's unseen work. The researcher needs to look at the materials with the proper curiosity, accept the invitation to dance with them and not let these documents become just ‘useless rubbish’.

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## Unpublished interviews

- The quoted interviews are part of my master's thesis about stage managers in Polish theatre, titled *Conductor of the play. Oral histories about stage management*. In-depth interviews were conducted using the oral history methods. The thesis was written under the supervision of Dr Stanisław Godlewski at the Theatre Studies Department at The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw. The thesis was defended on September 27, 2024.
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### Unpublished materials

- Document no. 1a: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Elżbieta Sikorska for the performance *Witkacy* directed by Józef Szajna, 19.05.1976, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 1b: Translated and edited version of unpublished material, stage manager's report by Elżbieta Sikorska for the performance *Witkacy* directed by Józef Szajna, 19.05.1976, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 2: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Urszula Kasprzak for the performance *Dante* directed by Józef Szajna, 24.10.1978, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 3: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Józef Bokota for the performance *Gulgutiera* directed by Józef Szajna, 25.05.1973, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 4: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Józef Bokota for the performance *Witkacy* directed by Józef Szajna, 10.05.1973, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 5: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Marek Kokiza for the performance *Dante* directed by Józef Szajna, 10.12.1975, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 6: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Józef Bokota for the performance *Nos* directed by Bohdan Korzeniewski, 10.10.1972, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 7: Sample of an empty Excel report from Nowy Theatre in Warsaw, 2024.
- Document no. 8: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Jozef Bokota for the performance *Nos* directed by Bohdan Korzeniewski, 27.06.1972, Studio Theatre artistic archive.
- Document no. 9: Unpublished material, stage manager's report by Jozef Bokota for the production of *Sędziowie* directed by Helmut Kajzar, 9.03.1973, Studio Theatre artistic archive.

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