

***W Trawie* – “sensoric laboratory”**

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Seen on the 9th of June 2024 at the Wrocławski Puppet Theatre in Wrocław at the 7th Review of New Theatre for Children.

Directed by Alicja Morawska-Rubczak and played by Oliwia Jakubik-Pękala, Diana Jędrzejewska-Szumaska and Paweł Mróz. Groteska Theatre, Kraków.

While waiting in the hall suddenly a woman in grey attire stops by your side and gives you a stone with a picture of an insect on it. As she approaches the sounds of birds grow louder through the speakerphone and you're taken by the hand. Throughout the rest of the show 'being taken by the hand' and being left out of the action was the only way the children got to experience the world of the performance.

Three terrariums with grass on top are staged at the front of the stage. There is a big stone in the middle and a wall in the shape of grass. The colour scheme of the show and scenography made by Barbara Małecka existed in grey and dark aesthetics. Nature, as portrayed in this scenery, consists of stones and neatly placed visual elements that have a sleek quality to them. The show seemed created according to the directors' vision and aesthetic rather than to the needs of its intended audience: children of ages one to four. The same goes for the music (Ilona Skv) that consisted mostly of electronic sounds and beats. Some of us thought the music was too loud and intense and we are adults. As a result of the loud music one of the kids had to leave the room.

The show's blurb in the online programme says it wants to invite children to take a look into nature "together". However, in fact, the show was very selective in pursuing its own aim. Beforehand, for example, it was communicated when the kids were allowed to interact and play on the stage. *W Trawie* only selectively showed and didn't let the children interact freely with the room and said nature.

This story was about engaging deeper with nature. It was about seeing the world of insects anew, constantly zooming in, where the insects kept getting bigger until the performers became them, embodying the insects themselves dressed in costumes. It brought about the idea of how, when you look closer at the world around you, you will find that there is more and more to see. However, the journey that was made was not a collaborative or collective one. Kids were not brought along, even though they certainly wanted to, leaving them bored in their seat or on their parents' lap. *W trawie* was only a show that presented, but not challenged. Sometimes kids would try to get on stage, but because of the guidelines presented, parents were restricting them, in their enthusiasm and wish to explore and interact.

Luckily at the end of the performance the kids were finally invited onto the stage and they were now allowed to play and explore the room. However, even then, the room was first preset by the actors into 'playmode' ultimately deciding with what props and scenery the children could and could not play. What also stood out was the fact that the kids were invited to play with rocks: grey and mostly smooth, which is nowhere near the tangible and textural

nature of the insects. The grass, that was touched by the actors early on in the performance, was too high up and out of reach and it therefore could not be touched and explored.

W trawie had a lot of potential to act as bridge between kids and nature by making it accessible in a playful and safe way. However, limiting the play and imagination replaced free experimenting in a laboratory of nature. Instead of letting the kids explore, the performers showed how they were exploring.