

**ENG-  
LISH  
SUM-  
MA-  
RIES**

# SECTION 2

## DOCUMENTARY TREND IN POLISH CONTEMPORARY ART

Edited by Ewelina WEJBERT-WĄSIEWICZ  
and Emilia ZIMNICA-KUZIOŁA

### INTRODUCTION

Documentary art exploits facts, elements of history and authentic events in order to show contemporary problems more clearly, to describe the socio-political and cultural reality and to register the present. It is focused on designing a new world, on social change and on the development of civil society. It is to raise awareness and mobilize to analyze the existing status quo - as engaged and engaging art, it does not confine itself to interpreting reality. Artists - together with viewers of art - pay attention to phenomena that are marginalized or overlooked in the public discourse of symbolic elites.

The field of documentary art takes part in the public debate and it destroys stereotypes; it is a transgression, an area of freedom, opposition and contestation, a barometer of social moods. It develops democratic and pluralistic ideas, examines things perfectly obvious with suspicion, aims at deconstruction and reconfiguration of selected elements of culture. The subject of its interest is, among others, homology between the artistic field and the field of power (Pierre Bourdieu) or, as

Jacques Ranciere puts it, "aesthetics as a form of politics".

The thesis proposed by the authors concerns the fact that broadly defined documentation (factualism, biographism, autobiographism, self-analysis, historism, experience, interview, archive, registration and many others) has been deeply affecting contemporary art in its various forms for years. This non-fiction turn is clearly visible in theatre (eg verbatim, documentary theatre), in cinema (eg trend towards authenticity, realism, biography), in literature (eg strong position of reportage) and in performative and visual arts, including women's or feminist art (drawing from life experiences).

The section's editors have invited authors of texts representing various disciplines about art to collaborate in order to reflect on the documentary trend in Polish contemporary art.

Katarzyna Niziołek in the text "Performing Memory. Between Document and Participation," writes about the theatre as a medium of collective memory work. She is interested in the relationship between participatory theatre and collective memo-

ry. The author describes selected theatrical projects from the documentary stream, demonstrating how they work through conflicts, historical traumas and, as a result, undermine the dominant frames and narratives.

Patrycja Terciak also invokes in her text the practice of contemporary, documentary and engaged theatre. Her text "Between Public and Private. On the Border of Theatre, Performance and Art (for) the Specific Place" applies to methods of working with a document, archives and spoken history. The author analyzes the strategies of the work of the theatre creators and the documents of selected examples (devised at the Theatre Szwalnia in Łódź).

The text written by Emilia Zimnica-Kuzioła "The Performance *The Nuns Leave Quietly* as an Example of the Unmasking Tendencies in Polish Documentary Theatre" is an analysis of the performance, prepared by Jan Kochanowski Theatre. The performance was created on the basis of a renowned reportage by Marta Abramowicz, who conducted twenty interviews with former nuns. The creators of the performance have extended its thematic spectrum to the problem of acting and sought an analogy between the religious vocation and the social mission of the actor. Considering the problem of the hard-hitting character of the performance awarded with the Golden Mask, the Author claims that it deals with taboo issues in public discourse and therefore generates such strong emotions among viewers.

Joanna Puzyna-Chojka in her text "Performing Memory in Polish Modern Theatre" focuses on several performances that point to the variational aspect of the image of reality created on the stage. The new documentary theatre, denying the possibility of creating an "objective" view of history, illustrates the past as something that is constantly changing.

The main purpose of the article "The Problem of Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion in Polish Film. The Ideology, Politics and Reality" by Ewelina Wejbert-Wąsiewicz is to answer questions about the genuine connections of Polish cinema with the real world and the values portrayed in action by Poles, including public discourse regarding the termination of pregnancy.

The article by Isolda Kiec "I Miss Therefore I Am, About the Saving of Memory. Based on the

Example of the Song *Miasteczko Belz*" is a reconstruction of subsequent versions of the song, reproducing the ways of memory function. The author shows salvation processes, and also a mythologizing the past.

## **Katarzyna NIZIOŁEK** **Performing Memory. Between Document and Participation**

Theatre has long served as a means of social engagement with the past, used by both dominant, and subordinate groups. With the quite recent paradigmatic shift in the humanities and social sciences, known under the label of the performative turn, theatre has become even more important as a medium of collective memory work, or, following the thought of Robin George Collingwood, the re-enactment of history. On the other hand, the present-day participatory trend in the arts is taking artistic practices from the confinement of arts institutions, to a more open space of public and community involvement. In the theatrical field, these changes have introduced a new genre, which is constituted by diverse modes of grassroots engagement in the creative process: from the provision of documentary content, through the directed use of an artistic situation, to the co-operative creation of a theatrical piece. At the same time, it is a genre that gives way to more inclusive and polyphonic discourses, narratives, and histories in the public sphere. The problem addressed in the article is one of the relation between participatory theatre and collective memory. Pierre Nora famously claimed that memory can sustain only when it is performed, practiced, repeated. If this is the case, is participatory theatre the location of live memory in the modern, archive-oriented world? Is it, referring to the terminology of that author, a sort of a *lieux de mémoire* – a space where the past is collectively recalled and remembered? For answers to the above questions I search among selected participatory theatrical (or performative) productions that, based on disparate documentary material, deal with conflicted, often traumatic, memories of the past, question the prevailing historical frames, and/or make space for the otherwise marginalised voices.

## Patrycja TERCIAK

### **Between Public and Private. On the Border of Theatre, Performance and Art (for) the Specific Place**

The text deals with methods of working with documents, archives and oral history in contemporary theatre (which by its nature is multifaceted) - situated at the border of activities characteristic also for the art of performance and art for a specific place.

The author (theatrolgist and curator of the documentary art review *szwalnia.DOK*) with the use of selected examples presents an individual artistic way to create projects/ performances. Here, the process (and the progress) is considered to be the most important part of an artistic work, and issues regarding these decisions are analyzed:

- *Import/ Export*, dir. Michał Stankiewicz (daily experts);
- *Jesteśmy przynętą, kochanie!*, dir. Agnieszka Wąsikowska (*verbatim* method);
- *Życie i śmierć Janiny Węgrzynowskiej*, idea and creation: Ludomir Franczak (performance in theatre space);
- *Pobyt tolerowany*, idea and creation: Weronika Fibich and Ewa Łukasiewicz (performance in private space);
- *Rysunek z pamięci*, team creation: Teatr Kana/ Teatr Szwalnia (art in specific place).

## Emilia ZIMNICA-KUZIOLA

### **The Performance *The Nuns Leave Quietly* as an Example of the Unmasking Tendencies in Polish Documentary Theatre**

The article concerns the hard-hitting tendencies in Polish documentary theatre. In the first part, the author attempts to present the *differentia specifica* of documentary theatre and considers the reasons for the increased interest in this trend both on the part of professional critics and revealed by viewer statistics. The second part of the text is an analysis of the performance *The Nuns Leave Quietly*, prepared by the Jan Kochanowski Theatre in Opole. The performance was created on the basis of a renowned reportage by Marta Abramowicz, who conducted

twenty interviews with former nuns. The creators of the performance extended its thematic spectrum to include the problems of acting and sought an analogy between the religious vocation and the social mission of the actor. Considering also the problems relating to the hard-hitting character of the performance that was awarded with the Golden Mask, the Author claims that it deals with issues of a taboo nature in public discourse and therefore generates specifically strong emotions among viewers. The accounts of the nuns who have left the order are their subjective truth. They are intentional hyperbolic confessions about the dark side of monastic reality. Nevertheless, they break the silence about the reality of life in the women's convents and animate the discussion about the subordinate roles of women within the structures of the Church. Documentary theatre therefore has the potential to reveal unpopular content often treated as social taboo.

## Joanna PUZYNA-CHOJKA

### **Performing Memory in Polish Modern Theatre**

A reflection on the means of using and processing documents in the course of attempts to reconstruct occurrences from the past seems to be the most compelling perspective of contemporary documentarism. Theatre provides a space that is particularly appealing in this case, as it is a place where maintaining equilibrium between the real and the fictional appears to be a widespread practice. This article focuses on a few performances that complicate their relationship with regard to "the archive" in a peculiarly refined manner, pointing at the variational aspect of the image of reality created on stage. The new documentary theatre, whilst undermining the possibility to create an "objective" historical account, pictures the past as something that undergoes constant motion and therefore change. Creating simulations of historical representations, new theatre processes them in order to highlight the shift of interest – from the history itself onto the media of history. In fact, what is being simulated is not the sheer occurrence, but the memory of it, which is prone to varied manipulations.

This new drift in documentarism is derived

from the findings of performance studies, especially the strategy of *re-enactment*. In other words, the procedure of reconstruction, perceived as a type of performative reiteration that questions the capability of the past to evince itself in the present time. In performances founded on the strategy of “performing memory”, a crucial role is being played by the scenography, which is orientated at feigning reality. The theatre, not infrequently acquiring the function of “the site of memory” (*les lieux de mémoire*), reveals a new possibility in documentarism – the offering of a renewed experience, a suggestion to recreate the score of a certain experience, rooted particularly in personal accounts (*oral history*) favored in modern humanities. These performative tendencies that determine the new documentary theatre, focused on the constant process of renegotiating the shape of the theatrical reality, are likely to constitute its greatest potential.

**Ewelina  
WEJBERT-WĄSIEWICZ**  
**The Problem of Unwanted Pregnancy  
and Abortion in Polish Film. The  
Ideology, Politics, Reality**

The aim of the article is to answer the question: what was (and what is) the film image of the problem of unwanted pregnancy and abortion in Poland. This is about a specific film discourse. Cinema is a reflection of reality, sometimes portrayed through a distorted mirror. It is also a production of culture. From this perspective, an interesting topic is how cinema portrays a taboo – the issue of abortion and what myths around this subject cinema creates and perpetuates, and what myths it deconstructs. The text is written from a sociological perspective, including film sociology. The actual connections between the work and the world seem to be as equally interesting for the sociologist as are the studies of communication between the artist and the viewer. The presentation of the problem of unwanted pregnancy and abortion in Polish cinema allows for the connections between art (cinema) and social reality to be followed. The author uses a diachronic perspective to ultimately point to the interrelationships between politics, ideology and reality in films addressing the issues under analysis.

**Izolda KIEC**  
**I Miss Therefore I Am, About the  
Saving of Memory.  
Based on the Example of the  
Song *Miasteczko Belz***

The article is dedicated to the following versions of the song *Miasteczko Belz* [*My Hometown Belz*] (music Aleksander Olshanetsky): 1) *Mein sztetete Belz*, 1932 (text in Yiddish by Jacob Jacobs; Polish translation 1935 – J. Roman); 2) *Miasteczko Belz dwadzieścia lat po wojnie*, two versions from the sixties (text by Agnieszka Osiecka); 3) *Miasteczko Belz. Pół wieku później*, mid-nineties (text by Roman Kołakowski); 4) *Warszawo ma*, 1947 (text by Ludwik Starski). Subsequent changes of the text work on the principle of the palimpsest – the part that is not blurred is the word “town”, and its meaning characterized by history together with its melody with a Jewish folk musical motif. These two repetitive elements allow the sources of nostalgia that is ubiquitous in the contemporary world to be revealed and they document the ways in which memory functions. Context for considerations is Zygmunt Haupt’s story *Lili Marleen*.