

Patrycja Korczago

**The Basement on Wójtowska in Warsaw.
Archive as a Trace of Artistic Practices in Ryszard Ostromecki's
Theatre of Small Forms**

SUMMARY

16.10.2023.

Key words: archive, performative theatre archive, theatre of small forms

The subject of my research work is the archive of the theatre of small forms *The Basement on Wójtowska* in Warsaw, which constitutes valuable, hitherto unexplored source material at my disposal (family archive). The scientific objective of this dissertation is to analyse and interpret previously unexamined artistic practices within the activities of this theatre in the years 1980-2010 under the artistic management of its founder, actor, screenwriter, and director Ryszard Ostromecki.

The starting point for my research is the latest theories of the archive by foreign and Polish scholars, according to which documentation ceases to be treated merely as a repository and becomes an invitation to a performative reading of its potential. The archive of *The Basement on Wójtowska* is an incomplete collection of various types of documents that needed to be organised and categorised. Looking at the mass of archival material available to me and having regard to the concepts of the division of documentation proposed by theatre scholars, I decided to adopt the perspective of the Polish scholar Dorota Sosnowska, who, following Rebecca Schneider's concept of the performativity of the archive, reveals a path for the scholar performer who uncertainly follows the traces of the past, discovering their potential and treating the archive as a future scenario.

I applied the performative concept of analysing selected theatrical documents by launching them in an act of scientific reflection. At the same time, I also found it worthwhile to adopt, in looking at the archival material, the method of so-called broad description introduced by Stephen Greenblatt, representing the new historicism, who on the one hand recognises that "interpretations of the past are imbued with the context of values and opinions of time and place", and on the other considers that "the past can 'speak' in its voice".

In the first part of the dissertation, I evoke traditional and new approaches to the archive in foreign and Polish theatre studies. I present definitions and transformations in the understanding of this concept. I draw attention to the performativity of documentation and explain the significance of the performative archive of theatre. Then I describe the history of *The Basement on Wójtowska* in the years 1980-2010 as an authorial artistic project. I present the profile of its founder and artistic manager Ryszard Ostromecki and explain the importance of his professional achievements for the realisation of the programme intentions of the authorial theatre of small forms. I describe the location and interior design of *The Basement on Wójtowska* concerning the programme concept of this theatre.

The further part of the dissertation is devoted to archival documentation. I present the history of the inherited collection, classify its resources according to traditional theatrical divisions, and then, according to the chosen performative research perspective, describe the stages of performing its contents. These include interviews with artists performing at *The Basement on Wójtowska*, work on my book *Niepowtarzalni. Piwnica na Wójtowskiej (The Unique Ones. The Basement on Wójtowska)* in the form of a fictionalized documentary, and archiving activities at the Theatre Institute in Warsaw. I devote most space in the dissertation to discussing the varieties of artistic practices realised in *The Basement on Wójtowska*, dividing them into shows that refer to the rhapsodic tradition, performances with a dramatic tinge, which include monodramas and small theatrical forms, and concerts and recitals representing the musical element.

The analysis of the material, using the most recent theories of the archive, made it possible to recognise the activity of *The Basement on Wójtowska* in Warsaw as a specific stage practice, undertaken in strictly defined social and administrative conditions. It exemplifies an artistic practice that is closely related to external reality. It is also an example of the implementation of aesthetic conventions specific to the theatre of small forms.

In the conclusion of my work, I look at the archive as a trace of stage practice, but also as an area that, according to Ernst van Alphen's theory, 'works' and can be a source of innovative creative exploration. I present possible scenarios for activities related to working with the archive in a performative perspective.