

## ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

### **THE PERFORMANCE *WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU TO BE HAPPY?***

### **AS "PERFORMING HISTORY" ACCORDING TO FREDDIE ROKEM,**

### **CREATED WITH DOCUMENTARY AND MUSICAL THEATRE TECHNIQUES**

In the first chapter, I outline the history of performances staged at the Museum, which is regarded as the most successful project of historical policy in Polish culture. I analyze how the memory of the Warsaw Uprising functions in public debate and how extreme opinions about this event are shaped by the political views of those who express them. I explain the perspective I adopted in approaching the Warsaw Uprising as the subject for theatre. Moreover I write about my personal doubts resulting from a lack of knowledge about the resistance from 1944, as well as my difficulty in understanding the ways in which the memory of this event is commemorated. I address issues of ecology and social responsibility involved in producing a performance intended for only a limited number of showings. I refer to discussions on the representation of violence and to the contemporary context of the Uprising, namely the war in Ukraine. I draw on research concerning the mental health of Warsaw's inhabitants after the Second World War. Finally, I explain my decision to speak with living female and male Uprising veterans about their strategies for surviving life while carrying the burden of this traumatic experience.

In the second chapter, I describe the process of collecting documentary materials. Therefore I recount visits to the Warsaw Insurgents' House and conversations with veterans about happy memories from postwar reality, which were meant to help understand how - despite all the burdens - they managed to live normal lives. I note that the entire process was recorded with the assistance of a cameraman and a sound technician. I admit the failure of this method and describe the conclusions that resulted from this setback.

In the third chapter, I explain how I selected the materials. I present in greater detail the profiles of seven interviewees whose stories became the basis for the script. I describe doubts related to intervening in the veterans' statements - selecting excerpts or abbreviations. I explain the process of constructing a dramaturgical structure which was supposed to clarify selected parts of the interviews, if they were no longer understandable without the context of the Warsaw Insurgents' House.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss how I choose theatrical techniques to convey the intended content in the form of a coherent, communicative, and engaging performance. I refer to theatricality, de-illusion, Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, as well as the directing practices of Ivan Vyrpaev and Milo Rau. I analyze decisions such as creating songs based on the insurgents' testimonies, choosing a distanced acting style in which actors do not identify

with the characters, introducing caption boards, covering museum exhibits with newborn baby blankets, using a three-dimensional cloud as a screen for projecting documentary materials and visualizations, and applying a strong, concert-style lighting design.

In the fifth chapter, I outline the relationship between history and the scenic reality. Therefore I discuss the structure of the performance, briefly describing all its components. Then I emphasize that it is an artistic transformation of the image of a past event rather than its reconstruction. Since the performance simultaneously takes part in a discussion about the present and formally departs from realistic means of expression, it can be defined as “performing history” in the sense proposed by Freddie Rokem.

In the sixth chapter, I describe what kind of new “life,” according to Freddie Rokem’s theory, the Warsaw Uprising gains in the performance. I conclude that a shared strategy among living insurgents for their traumatic experience is the adoption of later narratives that frame the Uprising as a moral victory. I refer to the mechanisms of postmemory described by Marianne Hirsch. I summarize that the performance speaks about the Warsaw Uprising from the perspective of the insurgents themselves - that is, from the experience of defeat - in order to convey their sense of helplessness in the face of this tragedy.

In the seventh chapter, I consider how the image of the Warsaw Uprising that the audience brings with them influences their reception of the performance. I refer to the reflections of Bertolt Brecht, Freddie Rokem, and Marcin Napiórkowski, who emphasizes the enormous impact of the collective memory of the Uprising on contemporary assessments of this event. I mention the doubts expressed by Museum employees as to whether the insurgents are aware of the words and opinions they articulate. I cite two radically different reviews of the performance: one from the monthly *Teatr* and the other from the weekly *Gazeta Polska*. They demonstrate that although both my collaborators and I aimed to move beyond the dualism of affirmation and negation of the Uprising, our performance was inscribed into this very opposition. This testifies to the strength of the prevailing narrative about the resistance from 1944, which dominates even the voices of the veterans themselves.

In the conclusions, I summarize that combining the form of a musical with that of documentary theatre makes it possible to remain close to the insurgents’ testimonies while also observing them from a distance. Thanks to this hybrid form, the performance *WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU TO BE HAPPY?* fits into Freddie Rokem’s category of “performing history” and creates a new image of the past event. It reveals the mechanism by which the individual, chaotic, and personal memory of the Warsaw Uprising held by its veterans is taken over by collective postmemory in the sense described by Marianne Hirsch—seemingly coherent and logical, yet constructed for the purposes of political narratives.