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## FEMALE DIRECTORS OF CONTEMPORARY POLISH THEATER AND CINEMA (SELECTED EXAMPLES)

**Abstract.** The issue of artistic careers is rarely tackled by Polish sociologists. The article is an analysis of the work of selected contemporary Polish female film and theater directors. The present study exploits secondary sources (monographs and scientific studies, press and internet publications, interviews with directors) and primary sources: interviews with creators of Polish drama theaters conducted as part of the authors' own research. Women in Polish theater and film are slowly breaking the glass ceiling and they are taking their rightful place in the pantheon of artists who have a lot to say about our difficult modern times. Polish directors are true individuals however they raise important social problems. Their creativity is not feminist. They have their own signature style and their sex is of secondary importance.

**Keywords:** art, female directors, film, theatre, Polish female artists.

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to characterize the work of women who direct theater performances and films in Poland – women who are recognized as outstanding and successful. Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross, in the work *Women in Media: A Critical Introduction* (2006: 75), distinguish three ways that women in the media can cope: 1) acquiring male patterns; 2) using feminism as an alternative way to build their own careers; 3) artistic creation without a work in the team. Polish female directors choose the first and third model of work, but we want to discover what is behind these strategies. The analysis covers the works of five selected film female directors who were honored with numerous prizes

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at home and abroad, as well as five female theater directors rewarded by critics at nationwide festivals (at the same time, they are well-regarded among other theatrical artists)<sup>1</sup>.

At the outset, it is worth noting that female filmmakers' works are quite diverse in terms of genre but they are usually more scarce than those created by those in the theater world. In the field of cinematography, we focus on full-length feature films, especially those that prove the directors' professional position. In addition to a synthetic discussion of the works of selected Polish female film and theater directors, and the specifics of their careers, we are interested in the issue of the transmission of women's art – we illustrate the strength of “female traditions” in theater and cinematography. Today there is a lack of systematic research conducted by sociologists on the careers of female artists. Among sociologists of art, the subject we are discussing is of no interest. This may be due to scientific traditions and the lack of access to certain sources. It takes a long time for female work to be appreciated.

The most important Polish female artists in the field of visual arts are described in the monograph *Polish female artists (Artystki polskie)* edited by Agata Jakubowska (2011). In the field of film and theater direction, such a study is lacking, and monographs about Polish women directing films and plays appear sporadically (Mazierska, Ostrowska 2006; Talarczyk-Gubała 2013a, 2013b, 2015). When comparing social circulation of works in cultural institutions of theatre, and film, and visual art we detect gender inequalities.

The participation of women in exhibitions between 2007 and 2014 in leading American and European museums is four times lower compared to the representation of male artists (Reilly 2015). A common feature of female artist's activity is a gradual withdrawal from the field of art – it is undoubtedly easier to make a debut than to stay in the artistic world. The explanation for this fact can be divided into institutional and cultural reasons (e.g., the patriarchal division of duties in the private sphere).

In Poland, the number of female directors who have graduated from a film school is systematically increasing. At the same time, external and internal conditions continue to favor male careers. We can perceive a lower autonomy of female artists (due to the hardships of pregnancy and motherhood, or burdens related to the division of household chores, for example), the education system in the field of film and theater direction, and the system of institutions that sacralize creators and their works, reproducing the belief of “an inferior sex”. Women have less authority in the professional sphere, and specific traditions (including norms and stereotypes) determine this. The family situation largely determines the possibilities of achieving professional goals. In the 20th century, many prominent female artists forfeited marriage in favor of open relationships or living alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on free interviews with the creators of Polish public dramatic theaters, conducted between 2015 and 2017.

The present study exploits secondary sources (monographs and scientific studies, press and internet publications, interviews with directors) and primary sources: interviews with actors and actresses of Polish drama theaters conducted as part of the authors' own research (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015; Zimnica-Kuzioła 2018).

## 2. Meaningful statistics

Film and theater direction is still a male profession. The publication produced by the Theater Institute in 2018, *Agora. Statistics (Agora. Statystyki)*, contains a summary of the names of graduates of directing who graduated between 1945 and 2010. Approximately 150 women studied at Polish art academies over those 65 years (Krakowska 2018a). They graduated from the National Higher Schools of Theater in Łódź, Warsaw, and Cracow, as well as branches of the Cracow school in Wrocław (Faculty of Drama Directing) and Postgraduate Studies in Directing of Children and Youth Theaters, and the branch of the Warsaw school in Białystok (Faculty of Puppetry).

Characteristically, in the post-war years (1944–1950) only seven women graduated from theater direction; between 1996 and 2000 it was 14, while between 2006 and 2010 there were 50 graduates. This is evidenced by the transformation in the mentality of the artistic community, because in the post-war years, the profession of director was treated as masculine, demanding “hard” competences and a strong personality. The situation described by Lidia Zamkow at the 1970s is a thing of the past: “Of course, the beginnings were not easy. When I was directing my first play, the actors assumed in advance that the female director was a misunderstanding; they read newspapers in a demonstrative manner during the rehearsals. They put them away only when they stepped onto the stage” (Zamkow 2018: 237). The director strongly emphasized the “severity” of cooperating with male actors and the need to avoid sentiment and emotional involvement in this relationship: “Teams should not share sentiments, rather common ideas and understanding. It is not the most important thing if the actors like each other or not, because the feelings do not fall within the scope of art and they do not create art” (Zamkow 2018: 240). Contemporary female directors are not afraid of emotions in teamwork; some establish close relationships with actors and experience lots of emotions regarding the end of each project. Theater direction is an extremely difficult profession. It is associated with high mobility, which is difficult to reconcile with family life, with raising children, and with ordinary life. Women engaged in this profession bear high personal costs of this profession. However, this job gives them gratification, because it is a real passion, and it satisfies their strong inner need.

It is obvious that graduating from directing studies does not guarantee professional activity. Of the dozens of women who have decided to study directing,

only a few have achieved success and are appreciated in the social world of the theater. They include Lidia Zamkow, Krystyna Skuszanka, Krystyna Meissner, Izabella Cywińska, Ewa Kutryś, Julia Wernio, Anna Augustynowicz, Iwona Kempa, Maja Kleczewska, Agnieszka Glińska, Monika Strzępka, Agata Duda-Gracz, Agnieszka Olsen, Barbara Wysocka, Marta Górnicka, Ewelina Marciniak, Natalia Korczakowska, Agnieszka Korytkowska-Mazur and Krystyna Janda. Many others are also successful in Polish theaters.

In cinematography, in the first half of the twentieth century, only a few Polish women stood behind the camera, for example, the pre-war avant-gardist and visual artist Franciszka Themerson, who created experimental miniatures, or Wanda Jakubowska, the author of *The Last Stage* (1948). Women behind the camera fulfilled themselves by producing documentaries and animations, but rarely did they create feature films. In contemporary national documentary production, approximately a third of films are directed by women. The career trajectories of female directors are arranged heterogeneously, because the course of the professional path is determined by various individual, biographical and socio-cultural and political determinants. Patterns of ousting female filmmakers from directing profession between 1919 and 2002 were described by Krzysztof Tomasik (2004). Apart from the censorship of film works, he distinguished three strategies of excluding female creators: 1) cooperation with their husbands, on whose account the wife's work passed; 2) creating cinema for children; 3) female directors acting as assistants (assistant director, second unit director). In the 1960s, the co-scriptwriters and co-directors of "husband's films", Ewa Petelska and Helena Amiradžibi, were active in feature films.

A mere decade later, thanks to Agnieszka Holland and Barbara Sass-Zdort, there was a gradual change. Sass-Zdort had been working as an apprentice with Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Has for a long time, and she also cooperated with Jerzy Skolimowski before she made her full-length cinema debut at the age of 44. Agnieszka Holland went to study in Prague. After returning to Poland, she worked in Team X under the supervision of Andrzej Wajda. Urszula Antoniak's career (*Nothing personal*, *Code Blue*, *Nudity Zone*) is also marked by educational migration. She gained her education and professional experience in the Netherlands, having previously tried to cut her teeth in Poland<sup>2</sup>.

There is still a strong tendency for the third strategy of excluding women from their careers – women acting as support personnel in film direction – which can be confirmed by statistics. In Polish feature films produced between 2006 and 2017, as many as 74% of co-directors (second unit directors, assistant directors) were females. Additionally, women directed only 14% of all full-length feature

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<sup>2</sup> The works of five, highly regarded, contemporary Polish female film directors will be presented in the further part of the study. Urszula Antoniak was not included because she produced all her films abroad.

films (see Talarczyk-Gubała 2018; Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015: 54). Male directors also dominate in the production of TV series (see Talarczyk-Gubała 2018; Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2015: 51–52); therefore, in this way, they raise their financial status and socio-cultural capital.

Three women (compared to seventeen men) have so far received the prestigious Passports Awards from the weekly magazine “Polityka” (awarded since 1993) for directing a feature film: Małgorzata Szumowska, for the film *33 Scenes from Life*, Dorota Kędzierzawska, for the film *Nothing*, and Jagoda Szalc, for the film *Tower. A bright day*. In the Main Competition at the Gdynia Film Festival, women constitute only 17% of the experts, while in the decision-making bodies of the National Film Institute it ranges from 14% (PISF Council) to 28% (PISF Expert Commissions), and in the Polish Filmmakers Association, it is 27%. What are the theater statistics?

The monthly “Theater” has been handing out its prestigious award for the best director of the theater season since 1976. It was not until 2017 (the 41st edition), that the first woman was honoured, when the award went to Anna Augustynowicz (for *Wedding* by Witold Gombrowicz, for a performance produced at the Contemporary Theater in Szczecin), and in 2018 it went to Maja Kleczewska for *Under Pressure* (for a performance at the Stanisław Wyspiański Silesian Theater, in Katowice). The Special Prize has been awarded 12 times, but only once to a woman (Danuta Szaflarska in 2007) (see Krakowska 2018a).

At the Festival of Theaters of Northern Poland in Toruń over the period 1960–1989, women comprised only 18% of jury members of the competition. A similar situation can be found in the Kaliski Theater Meetings (between 1961 and 2017 only 28% were women) and the Polish Classics Festival in Opole (from 1975 until 2017, only 21% of the experts were women). At the National Festival of Directing – Interpretations in Katowice, from 1998 to 2016 there were 97 members in the jury, including only 21 women (about 21%), including, among others, Teresa Budzisz-Krzyżanowska, Anna Polony, Anna Augustynowicz, Joanna Szczepkowska, Izabella Cywińska, and Agnieszka Glińska. The Grand Prix, Konrad’s Laurel, was awarded 16 times, but only four women were recipients (Anna Augustynowicz, Maja Kleczewska (twice), Iwona Kempa and Monika Strzępka) At the “Reality Presented” Contemporary Drama Festival in Zabrze, between 2001 and 2016, among 53 jurors, there was only one woman. Only five times did the main prize go to a woman (31%). At the Premiere Festival in Bydgoszcz (between 2002 and 2014), the Grand Prix went to four women at the 12th edition of the festival, which constitutes 33%. The statistics concerning female directors at the Festival of Polish Contemporary Art R@Port in Gdynia (between 2006 and 2017) are a little more promising – although there were only four women among 48 jurors, female artists were awarded six times in 11 editions of the festival (which is about 54%), including Monika Strzępka three times. Aleksandra Popławska, Agnieszka Glińska and

Agata Duda-Gracz were also awarded. Only about 28% of women became members of the artistic commission which selected the final performances at the National Competition of Polish Contemporary Art (1994–2017), but the jury consisted of over 40% women.

What conclusions can be drawn from this statistic? The juries of festivals and expert committees are dominated by men, and they are also more likely to reward men. Kinga Dunin writes explicitly about the supremacy of men in the social world of the theater: “In the case of [*Agora. Statistics*] the facts are quite ruthless: there is little room for women in the theater. This applies to the management of theater groups, directing, the number of dramas published and directed by women, or participation in the bodies distributing theatrical laurels” (Dunin 2018: 7). And she adds: “it is not enough to say that these differences are clear, they are dramatic” (Dunin 2018: 7). Dunin puts forward two hypotheses that may explain the disadvantageous status quo – the first is that women place themselves on the margins of theater life, are less ambitious, do not take on challenges, and are less creative; the second hypothesis seems more convincing – contemporary culture is androcentric, discriminates against women, and hinders them from achieving prestigious positions. However, it is worth appreciating the improvement of women’s situation in the film industry. Actions for equality between women and men resulted in a written statement by the Polish Film Institute in January 2017 that the “number of women among the leaders of the Committee Experts should not be less than 35% of the number of all leaders” and that “at least one expert on the committee should be a woman”.

In the functionalist perspective, gender-related inequalities are sanctioned; they are explained by the natural predispositions of women and men, predestined to meet different social roles (i.a. George Murdock, Talcott Parsons, John Bowlby). Sociologists (especially of feminist orientations) note that the life chances of men and women in contemporary societies are varied – men have easier access to goods valued in society, such as social and financial status, power and prestige. Patriarchal culture, sexism, glass ceilings, and unequal wages determine the positions achieved by women who represent “the weaker sex”. The feminist approach represents, among others, bell hooks, Rita Felski, Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray.

It is worth considering whether the works of female directors who produce theatrical performances and films in the 21st century share common characteristic features and are different in themes and formal artistic procedures. Is there a “women’s theatre”? Do female directors tackle similar issues, and are there any stylistic similarities between them? On the basis of our observations of Polish theater and film life, we think that we are dealing with a collection of individualities – independent female artists who possess diverse artistic and ideological sensitivities.

The exemplification of the above-mentioned thesis will be the characteristics of the work of selected female directors from the world of theater and cinema

(full-length feature films). Due to the length of the article, we will limit ourselves to listing the thematic scope of film and theater productions and to characterizing the specificity of Polish artists' techniques.

The female film-makers born in Polish People Republic and the youngest generation (born after 1989) are distinct, unique, and exceptional authors. There are other women working in the field of feature films who have produced at least two full-length feature films. They are not featured in this study, but they deserve attention as they represent the generation of women over forty. They include Kinga Dąbrowska, Agnieszka Smoczyńska, and Maria Sadowska. Additionally, original film productions by Anna Jadowska, Anna Kazejak-Dawid, and Barbara Białowąs are worth mentioning, as are films from directors making their debut recently on the big screen, including Jagoda Szelc, Ewa Bukowska, and Aleksandra Terpińska. In addition, female theatre directors are true individuals. Each of the women has her own signature style, originality, and each has a different take on the problems of the individual and society.

### 3. Female theatre directors

Feminist strands rarely appear in the works of female theatre directors (recently in Maja Kleczewska's performances). Female directors work with actors in different ways, for example, Agnieszka Glińska and Anna Augustynowicz lead the actor gently, while Maja Kleczewska represents the type of "male" leadership (*nota bene*, it arouses resistance among some members of the theater environment). However, all the female directors say important things about contemporary culture, even if they dress their actors in a historical costume.

**Anna Augustynowicz** – "a theater and television director, born in 1959. A graduate of theater studies at the Jagiellonian University and the Directing Department at the National Academy of Theatre in Kraków"<sup>3</sup>. The themes of her performances are the attitudes and choices of man, the tension between what is social and personal, and the problems of contemporary times portrayed both through classical dramas and the lines of young playwrights. As far as the formal aspects of her work are concerned, the director values asceticism, metaphorical abbreviation, theatrical technique, and she strives to achieve functional and stylistic unity between the semantic layer of the show, the musical layer, the stage design, the costumes, and the lighting. Augustynowicz thinks that "directing is independent of sex"; however, she leads actors with a "feminine" hand, is subtle, and she cares that the team gets on well together. The credo of the theater director, expressed in interviews is: the theater is not an ideology, an illusion, and it is not

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<sup>3</sup> <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/anna-augustynowicz> (accessed 12.05.2018).

storytelling. It is a game, a metaphor, showing the mechanisms governing society; it is a mirror in which a human looks at himself/herself.

**Agnieszka Glińska**, born in 1968, is a director of theater and television and an actress. She graduated in 1994 from the Faculty of Acting and Drama Directing at the National Academy of Theater in Warsaw. The themes of her performances are the psychological problems of the individual, universal stories about the meaning of life, interpersonal relations, and the human condition – its greatness and meanness. In terms of formal aspects, it is realistic theater with elements of the grotesque; it is sparing in its use of stage direction, favoring intense work with the actor. Glińska's theater is based on great classical literature and contemporary drama, and the director seeks current interpretations in the dramatic texts while remaining faithful to the author.

The second generation of female directors, born in the 1970s, is represented by **Maja Kleczewska** (born in 1973). She studied psychology at the University of Warsaw, graduating in 2000 from the Faculty of Directing at the National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow. Her performances are, above all, a study of pathology (deviations, madness, corruption, violence, toxic interpersonal relations, and murder). The artist is interested in man situated in borderline situations, gender and national stereotypes, marginalized people who are excluded from society, the figure of “another”, and the diagnosis of pop culture. Kleczewska's theater is associated with interesting staging effects, the visual frame, pop culture language, and numerous uses of foul language. The director thus explains her artistic credo: “I believe in theater based on conflict. I am not looking for pleasant moments in the theater. In theater, I want a fundamental shock [...] I want to explore new areas, even at the price of a catastrophe. In addition, it is difficult to talk about important things while flirting with the audience. I prefer to torment it” (Urbaniak, Kleczewska 2014).

Her theater is described as masculine, brutal, bloody, scandalous, and anti-patriarchal. Maja Kleczewska is regarded as a “difficult director” in the theatrical community, extremely demanding. According to the accounts of actors, working with this director “exhausts you to the limits” (see Stenka 2018: 166). “This is undoubtedly one of the most expressive and defiant personalities in contemporary Polish theater. She reads classics in her own way, flirts with kitsch, and makes the most of pop culture” (Mokrzycka-Pokora 2019).

One of Kleczewska's peers, **Agata Duda-Gracz**, is another director, but she is also a theater designer. “Born in 1974, she is the daughter of painter Jerzy Duda-Gracz. She graduated from Art History at the Jagiellonian University (1998) and the Faculty of Drama Directing at the Ludwik Solski National Academy of Theater in Krakow (2002)”<sup>4</sup>. The themes of her performances revolve around the sacred and the profane. An important issue in her work is the criticism of contemporary

<sup>4</sup> <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/agata-duda-gracz> (accessed 12.05.2016).

culture and pop culture; the condition of man who is capable of heroism but also the greatest evil. As far as formal aspects are concerned, the director's productions are distinguished by careful artistic design, interesting scenographic solutions, and experimenting with where the performance is staged, e.g., an action carried over to a city bus. The artist says that she is addicted to the theater, which is her real passion. This is how she defines her artistic priorities:

I thought that people involved in art should be apolitical. That it is our duty to be proficient in the use of techniques, to talk about important things and side with man – not favoring the right side or the left. But this is not enough anymore [...] I am furious that someone forced me to make a statement! I do not put on political performances, because politicking from the stage is the same as politicking from the pulpit – whoredom. But I am behind the felled trees, oblivious children, people thrown out of work, deprived of their rights [...] (Duda-Gracz 2017).

The last theater director discussed is **Monika Strzępka**, the youngest of the directors, although she also belongs to the generation of forty-year-olds. Born in 1976, the author of loud stagings, she arouses a great resonance among the audience with her performances. According to the data in *Agora. Statistics*, the artist graduated in 2001 from the Warsaw Theater Academy (Krakowska 2018a: 222). Her theater is described as involved, leftist, critical, political, provocative, radical, and revolutionary. She creates an artistic tandem with her partner, playwright, Paweł Demirski. The themes of the performances staged by the artistic duo are the revision of national memory, mythology and consciousness, the memory of war and extermination, criticism of consumption and capitalist perversions, current politics, sexual minorities, collective obsessions (e.g., healthy eating), and conspiracy theories, among others. The authors exploit the grotesque, mockery, and the ability to laugh at oneself. Their performances contain sharp and dynamic images, often realized in the cabaret convention. The language of the characters can be described as natural, not avoiding profanity. Monika Strzępka's directing work has polarized opinions – caused a storm and disputes in social world. Some considered it to be “theatrical chutzpah”, others regarded it as a manifestation of originality and a fresh view of reality.

Contemporary female theater directors are more and more often complimented and admired for their talent and artistic achievements by men from the social world of theater. Krzysztof Orzechowski (an actor, a director, a teacher and manager of theaters) writes with admiration about Agata Duda-Gracz. He credits the director with “an unlimited talent”, “an excellent workshop and organizational preparation”, “knowledge and theoretical background”, “courage”, “excellent work with actors”, “unbelievable intuition” and “psychological sensitivity” (Orzechowski 2017: 31–35). Women in Polish theater are slowly breaking the glass ceiling and they are taking their rightful place in the pantheon of artists who have a lot to say about the here and now, about our difficult modern times. It is worth emphasizing that female directors have common features – sensitivity to important social problems.

#### 4. Female film directors

For years, Polish female film directors have been creating world-class auteur cinema<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, there is no colloquial awareness of their works and names. Surveys carried out between 2011 and 2015 among 543 students of sociology and journalism at the University of Lodz show that young people do not know the names of Polish female directors, except for Agnieszka Holland (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz 2016). Therefore, the first Polish film director discussed will be **Agnieszka Holland**. Born in 1948, she graduated from film direction at the Prague Film School (FAMU) in 1971 and emigrated from Poland in 1981. In her professional career, she has produced about fifty films representing various genres (e.g., drama, horror, thriller, biography, political, adventure, and costume drama), which sometimes resonated in her home country. She is the director of four documentaries and a dozen plays produced for Polish Television and television in France, a director of American and French series (including series for Netflix and HBO), and she was the screenwriter or co-scriptwriter of films for other directors. Most often she directs on her own, although in some projects in Poland she has cooperated with her husband, Laco Adamik (*Man Not Necessary*), with her sister, Magdalena Łazarkiewicz (the series *Ekipa*) and with her daughter, Katarzyna Adamik (*Janosik. The True Story, Spoor*).

The author's work is characterized by formal heterogeneity and operating with a variety of styles. Initially, the director focused on subdued and less dynamic images, situational and psychological realism, and natural language. After she emigrated, she used the diverse genre convention of popular cinema, not avoiding kitsch. It is difficult to talk about any specificity of Agnieszka Holland's cinema because the themes that she exploits are of a universal nature. In the Polish People's Republic, she portrayed everyday life, families against the backdrop of the socio-political changes, and the drive for a career. Currently, she deals with the fate of individuals in the face of great history and politics, including the revision of social memory, mythology, heroes, social consciousness and social legend, the memory of totalitarian regimes, and war and extermination. She is also familiar with topics such as artistic freedom, the relationship between man and nature, and metaphysical issues. Holland has been internationally successful, nominated three times for an Oscar (for *Angry Harvest*, *Europe Europe*, and *In Darkness*), won many awards at the most important film festivals in Europe, and she was awarded for outstanding achievements in national culture and artistic creativity (2011). The director does not

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning Barbara Sass (who died in 2015). She was a master at depicting women in Polish cinema. In her films *Without Love*, *Debutante* (1981) and *Scream* (1982), starring Dorota Stalińska, she created a convincing picture of an attractive and dangerous contemporary woman, equal to a man. Her last, uncompromising film, *In the Name of the Devil* (2011) did not hit the cinema screens. The director mentioned in an interview its distribution was being blocked (director's comments at a meeting at the Museum of Cinematography on 13.06.2013).

avoid popular cinema, working with various screenwriters and producers. Her films are well received both critically and in terms of the box office, in Poland and abroad, and they are broadcast on television and available on DVD.

Agnieszka Holland is a director, an intellectual, a reformer, as well as an autonomous and versatile author and a titled artist, skilled in various techniques; her work is undoubtedly professional. Thanks to her excellent craft, she can produce auteur films as well as films on commission. She is a determined artist, focused on getting a professional education and performing as a director. Her creative path led her to emancipation, to achieving creative freedom. Her attention is directed to mainstream cinema, but also the cinema of rebellion – her intention is to destroy stereotypes, undermine the dominant ideologies and patterns of thinking, to take into account marginalized voices and viewpoints, and to draw on various sources and products of high and low culture. In the field of theater, her counterpart would be Anna Augustynowicz.

**Dorota Kędzierzawska**, born in 1957, is the daughter of Jadwiga Kędzierzawska, the filmmaker who specialized in children's films connected with the SE-MA-FOR film studio in Łódź. She started her film education as a child on set with her mother. She was educated at Moscow's VGIK (the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography) and the Lodz Film School (the National Film, Television, and Theater School), among others. She made her debut with the TV film *The End of the World* (1988). Since the beginning of her career, she has created independent auteur cinema with universal themes, such as intolerance and social rejection. Since the 1990s, the director has collaborated with her partner, Artur Reinhart, a cameraman. Together, in 2011, they created a tour film project called "Photosensitive Poland".

Her most important film productions include *Devils Devils*, *Crows*, *End of the World*, *I Am*, *Tomorrow Will be Better*, *Nothing*, and *Time to Die*. Kędzierzawska is also the author of several theatrical performances and the documentary *Another World* about the Polish actress Danuta Szaflarska. Showing the problems and the world of the child, she became her mother's continuator in depicting "small sorrows" on the screen. The director polemicizes with this label, announcing a completely different movie called *Speedway* (currently in post-production). Dorota Kędzierzawska attaches great importance to the poetics and beauty of the frame, the symbolism of "small things". Taking care of artistic aspects of the film, with the camera she paints subjective experiences of distinctness, loneliness, and old age. She illustrates everyday life through a static frame, carefully building the mood, operating with soft light and natural color.

The characteristic elements of her mature film forms are the sparing use of language, simple form and in-depth work with child actors. Kędzierzawska is a unique cinema writer, an independent creator of artistic and socially involved cinema. She is appreciated by critics, the press, and the juries and the public at international festivals in Poland and around the world (she has won over one

hundred prestigious film awards). However, her works enjoy limited social and cultural circulation as there are no releases on DVD, and they are unavailable online; however, the director has a loyal audience.

Kędzierzawska is an individual artist – exceptional and faithful to herself. She has been connected with film from an early age, but her creative path is fully independent. She is an independent screenwriter, editor and producer, maintaining autonomy, even when collaborating with another artist. The director creates her works in the convention of realistic dramas, according to her own formal and ideational project. She draws her ideas from observation, her own experiences, from well-known and hidden social facts, from various sources and products of culture. In theater, her equivalent would be Agnieszka Glińska.

**Małgorzata Szumowska**, a director born in 1973, received her film education at the Film School in Łódź. She grew up in an intellectual family. Her father, Maciej Szumowski, was an opposition journalist, and her mother, Dorota Terakowska, a writer. Initially, like most film directors, she made documentaries. She debuted on the big screen with the film *Stranger* (2004) and has worked with the cameraman Michał Englert since her studies.

The most important works of the creative duo are *Happy Man*, *Stranger (Ono)*, *33 Scenes from Life*, *Elles (Sponsoring)*, *Body*, *In the Name of...*, *Mug (Twarz)*. These are realistic films based in a contemporary reality, sometimes with journalistic overtones. The director is sometimes critical, sometimes provocative, but her work is well-received in cinema and non-theatrical circles (DVD, Blu-ray disc, television, Internet). The formal nature of Szumowska's films is reflected in several permanent components: skilfully emphasized mood, the use of humor, contrast, the grotesque, the presence of improvised scenes and dialogue, the realism and psychologism of the characters, close relationships with the actors, and natural and sometimes blunt language. The themes of Szumowska's films vary around the contemporary problems faced by individuals (and sometimes the author herself). For years, Szumowska has been an artist seeking taboo topics, awarded at film festivals in Poland and abroad. Among the topics subjected to her film analysis are the issues of pregnancy and motherhood, death, including trauma, the loss of parents, male-female relations, sex, modern prostitution, emigration, sacrum and religious faith, homosexuality among priests, the split of body and spirit, and body treatments, including anorexia and plastic surgery.

Małgorzata Szumowska is a total director. Her work is professional and autonomous. The artist draws from her personal experience and rich material based on the facts. Her characteristic feature is a deep intuition and a strong imperative to work creatively. She writes the scripts herself but willingly cooperates with a creative partner. The theatrical equivalent of this total director, someone spontaneous and full of theatrical passion, is Agata Duda-Gracz.

Another artist is the film director and screenwriter **Joanna Kos-Krauze**, born in 1972. She completed Polish and Hebrew studies and first worked in the film

industry as a second director. From the 1990s, she made films with her husband Krzysztof Krauze (*Street Games*, *The Debt*, *Great Things*). Together, they created social cinema, which is based on social fact, real stories of human fate, and life drama. The creative duo were awarded dozens of prizes at national and international festivals.

Their most important films include *My Nikifor*, *Great Things*, *Saviour Square*, *Papusza*, and *Birds are Singing in Kigali*. The themes of these films focus on social relationships, seen from the perspective of weaker, socially excluded characters – Polish female family members in the period of socio-cultural changes or female witnesses of genocide. Formal aspects, such as static and dynamic images, photographic vision of the shot, simplicity in “film code”, natural language, and caring about the psychology of the characters, all emphasize the humanistic and engaging message of the films. Since her husband’s death in 2014, Kos-Krauze has continued to work in the film industry. She is highly regarded among contemporary Polish filmmakers thanks to the fact her films are well received by the public and critics alike, both home and abroad, and they do well at the box office.

Joanna Kos-Krauze is an artist who pays a lot of attention to the common weal. A talented director, she creates works of high artistic value aimed at initiating dialogue and raising the level of emotional intelligence, including empathy. She precedes her creative activity with a careful cultural and historical investigation, drawing from social facts. In the world of the theater, she resembles the previously mentioned Maja Kleczewska, who incorporates a masculine pattern of creation, showing the brutalization and pathologies of social life.

The youngest film director in this article is **Katarzyna Rosłaniec**, born in 1980. In 2004, she graduated from economics in Gdańsk, and then from 2004 until 2008 she studied at the Warsaw Film School and the Andrzej Wajda Master School of Film Directing. A clear feature of the director’s creative personality is her focus on the problems of young people. Rosłaniec wrote the screenplays for her three feature films, *Mall Girls (Galerianki)*, *Baby Blues* and *Satan Said Dance*. Her works have been honored at home and abroad. Among others, in 2013, she received the Crystal Bear Award at the Berlinale Film Festival for *Baby Blues*. In *Mall Girls* and *Baby Blues*, she convincingly depicted the life of teenagers, putting on the big screen the problems of underage prostitution or teenage parenting. In her last screen production, she sketched a picture of the generation of twenty-to-thirty-year-olds, showing their consumption patterns, the dictates of fashion, the media and new technologies, and their spiritual emptiness. Rosłaniec’s films are characterized by sharp images, dynamic framing, grotesque, irony, and vibrant colors. The director attaches great importance to the symbolism of colors and costumes, as fashion is an important hallmark of her films. She closes her work as a whole with modern (slightly kitsch) music video aesthetics, and introduces natural language saturated with a large dose of expletives. Despite the awards and distinctions bestowed upon the director, her works arouse extreme opinions among filmmakers and critics. For

some, she is uncompromising, radical, and revolutionary in presenting the younger generation, their confusion, their needs, and the mistakes of youth. Other filmmakers and critics regard her as “immature”. Katarzyna Rosłaniec’s films are available on various media, and in cinemas they are eagerly watched by young audiences.

Katarzyna Rosłaniec is a director-cum-provocateur. As an artist, she is expressive and emotional. Her work is professional, autonomous, and unique. The director draws creative ideas from documentary material, and focuses on the journalistic recording of facts. She is particularly interested in the problems of young people and the paths that life takes in post-modernity. In the field of theater, the director closest to this image is Monika Strzępka.

## 5. Conclusion

Women directors are in a definite minority, both in the cinema and in the theater. The above examples concern female directors who have achieved different dimensions of professional success. Female film directors are passionate artists and social reformers, social critics, and explorers of difficult issues. They are engaged and full of empathy towards the different, the rejected, the poor, the lonely, the humiliated, and those abused by fate and their poor living conditions. A common feature of the filmmakers’ works is that they evoke private and intimate experiences, and they direct the camera to the margins of reality, to what is seemingly unimportant. Some Polish female directors possess a masculine style of work, most often working in collaboration with someone else. Some are the screenwriters and directors of their own films, and some represent the minority *Women’s Cinema*, as well *minor cinema* (expressing the cultural issues of minorities) and *counter cinema* (seeking their own language to express oppression and rebellion) (see Butler 2012: 15).

The aspirations for creative autonomy are visible in the biographies of the directors. To maintain their independence, they must break with being subordinate to a protector, another artist (e.g., Andrzej Wajda, in Agnieszka Holland’s case). As for Joanna Kos-Krauze, she became an artist in her own right only after the death of her husband, Krzysztof Krauze. Characterizing female film directors, one can point to their creative predispositions, intelligence, imagination, aversion to authority, stubbornness, ambition, self-confidence, desire for achievement, risk-taking, but also that they keep their cultural achievements in perspective. Their artistic creativity is original and unruly (however, what is worth emphasizing is that it is not feminist). Feminist strands rarely appear in these directors’ works, and the creators agree to such labeling reluctantly or with moderate acceptance. The younger directors identify more often with the works of women or feminism. The “cautious” attitude towards feminism is characteristic of cinema and theater, not of art in general, since feminism was visible in the field of visual arts in Poland.

In the monograph *Polish Artists (Artystki polskie)* (Jakubowska ed. 2011), Ewa Toniak points out that in the Polish People's Republic, female artists were individualists, but that strong and explicit feminist interventions only started to appear in the 1970s. Among the most famous activities were those of Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Natalia LL, and Ewa Partum. However, in the cinematography and theater of this period, there are no analogous examples. The only film in Poland which has been hailed as feminist so far is *The Ivy* (1982) by Hanka Włodarczyk. In the 1990s, "scandalous" works were created in the field of visual arts (by, e.g., Katarzyna Kozyra or Alicja Żebrowska). At that time, Polish artists were diverse and versatile.

Women's art in the 1990s exuded the female experience, including corporality, the appreciation of the home sphere, images of oppression and power, and a reflection on the biological and cultural sex (see Jakubowska ed. 2011: 157). In 21st century Poland, in the visual arts as well as in the cinema and the theater, artists born in the 1970s have come to the fore. They do not enter into a creative dialogue with the past, with the works of other women (in the visual arts, the exception is Paulina Ołowska, who refers to the artistic activities of Zofia Stryjeńska). In Polish cinematography, female creative activities by Jadwiga and Dorota Kędzierszawska – a mother and daughter – are visible. The youngest film director in the study, Katarzyna Rosłaniec, values highly (but does not imitate) Małgorzata Szumowska. Both in the theater and film, there are no artists who refer to the works of other female creators. Therefore, it is not possible to talk about a generational relay and a clear matrilineal line of Polish theater and cinema.

Contemporary female directors have their own signature style, they create works on current issues, are immersed in the here and now, and raise important social problems. Their sex, however, is of secondary importance – it is only visible in a particular imaging of reality, full of empathy and sensitivity.

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## **POLSKIE REŻYSERKI WSPÓŁCZESNEGO TEATRU I KINA (WYBRANE PRZYKŁADY)**

**Abstrakt.** Kwestie kariery artystycznej rzadko podejmowane są przez polskich socjologów. Artykuł jest analizą prac wybranych współczesnych polskich reżyserek filmowych i teatralnych. W niniejszym opracowaniu wykorzystano źródła zastane (monografie i badania naukowe, publikacje prasowe i internetowe, wywiady z reżyserami) oraz źródła pierwotne: wywiady z twórcami polskich teatrów dramatycznych przeprowadzone w ramach badań własnych.

Kobiety w polskim teatrze i filmie powoli rozbijają szklany sufit i zajmują należne im miejsce w panteonie artystów, mających wiele do powiedzenia na temat współczesnej rzeczywistości. Polskie reżyserki są prawdziwymi indywidualistkami, mają swój charakterystyczny styl, niemniej łączy je to, że mierzą się w twórczości z ważnymi problemami społecznymi. Ich kreatywność nie jest nacechowana feministycznie, pleć w pracy twórczej ma drugorzędne znaczenie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka, reżyserzy, film, teatr, polskie artystki.