

To the Horizon and All the Way to the Bottom: Ethnographic Theatre in Poland as a Medium of Cultural Memory

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Abstract: In light of the growing crisis of alienation and the uprooting and loss of basic ties with the local cultural community, theatre plays a considerable role. It helps in re-anchoring the viewer's experience in the modern world and in a given place and community by means of traditional stories, rituals, and practices which usually exist today in the form of remnants, traces, and fragments. Such a trend has been called "ethnographic theatre", "theatres of sources" or "ritual theatre". In Poland this is associated with Jerzy Grotowski's theatrical explorations and is represented by the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices; it remains extremely strong today. In this paper, I look at a few examples of this trend in theatre: Teatr Pieśń Kozła [Goat's Song Theatre], Teatr Chorea [Chorea Theatre], Teatr Węgajty [Węgajty Theatre], and Teatr w Sejnach [Theatre in Sejny]. Fragments of the past preserved in various cultural texts which are used in these theatres' performances reveal their performative potential within two areas. One is determined by the need to restore the lost collective memory of a given group, inhabiting a specific territory, with a long history and rich folk traditions. The other scope is defined by the principle of searching for the roots of contemporary culture in the old cultures of Europe, revealing the prefigurations of human fate, *vitae humana*. In both cases, the artistic work of the aforementioned theatrical groups with the resources of old folk culture serves to reincorporate them into the bloodstream of theatre and contemporary culture through remixes, reinterpretations, representations, and reconstructions. The activities undertaken by these theatres, encompassed in a framework and specific aesthetic/axiological/social order, therefore become an attempt to respond to various processes of globalization. They inspire viewers to define their own identity on the basis of memory and their local culture as well as the culture of their ancestors.

Keywords: ethnographic theatre, ritual theatre, theatres of sources, cultural memory, cultural tradition

In view of the growing crisis of alienation, and the uprooting and loss of basic relationships with the local cultural community, theatre can play a profound role. What I have in mind is a specific type of theatre which is referred to by

many as “anthropological theatre”, a theatre affected by ethnology, “ethnographic theatre”, “theatres of sources” or “ritual theatre”. This trend, inspired by Jerzy Grotowski’s theatrical searches, was particularly prevalent from 1976 to 1982, which is a period known as “Theatres of Sources”, when the author focused on archaic ritual techniques and their tools, later represented by the Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice¹ [Gardzienice Centre for Theatrical Practices]. It is still extremely strong in Poland and is continually evolving and branching out. It has certainly enriched the landscape of Polish theatre, and, although it is not mainstream, it has been widely acclaimed by critics and highly regarded by viewers. I would like to discuss this trend using some examples of several already recognized theatres – Teatr Pieśń Kozła [Goat’s Song Theatre], Teatr Chorea [Chorea Theatre], Teatr Węgałty [Węgałty Theatre], and Teatr w Sejnach [Theatre in Sejny], which constitute elements of the proverbial constellation within this trend – and mention a number of amateur rite theatres. Although they all have the same origins, it is through discovering folk traditions, old or dying out, and combining them with the experience and sensitivity of modern man in theatrical and quasi-theatrical performances that they have their own distinct features. In my opinion, this distinctness does not only rely on a variety of aesthetics, a system of work and skills, but primarily on a different way of evoking tradition and offering other strategies for stimulating viewers’ memory and imagination. The mentioned theatres are not folkloric groups. It is difficult to link them with the phenomenon of folklorism, which is generally the case with, for example, amateur rite theatres, although both make references to ancient rites and rituals, exploring folklore in a completely different way. The use of tradition in the mentioned theatres should be viewed in the context of the mechanism determining the life span of the cultural message, as described by Claude Levi-Strauss. By identifying two different types of work within culture, this anthropologist also characterized corresponding attitudes towards using resources of cultural content. He called one of them mythological, applicable to *bricoleur* (an average carrier of folklore), and the other an engineering one,

1 A number of research papers have been written on Gardzienice’s artistic activities. The most significant are: TARANIENKO, Z. *Gardzienice. Praktyki teatralne Włodzimierza Staniewskiego*. Lublin : Wydawnictwo: Test, 1997 and KORNAŚ, T. *Włodzimierz Staniewski i Ośrodek Praktyk Teatralnych Gardzienice*. Kraków : Wydawnictwo Homini, 2004. Of particular interest is an article by PAWLUCZUK, W. *Wyprawa, opisanie poczynąń Gardzienic*. In *Dialog*, 1980, No. 6, and a monographic issue of *Konteksty*, 2001, Nos. 1–4 and *Konteksty*, 2008, No. 1.

which asks questions of the whole world and uses folklore to achieve individual goals, transforming its resources through modifications, quotations, adaptations, rewriting, and hybridization.² According to Levi-Strauss, a *bricoleur* in his work addresses “the collection of remnants of human works, i.e., a cultural sub-assembly”, and only does what is possible in a given situation with the existing material. A bricoleur’s activity is characteristic of the transfer of cultural content recognized as traditional. Even though an engineer has to make an inventory of information (resources), he creates situations as well as new materials and “is looking for new solutions and purposeful transformations”.³

Using such findings, one can say that the creators of the above Theatres of Sources manipulate a folkloric resource, deliberately transforming its elements to create an artistic work of extraordinary affective power, while amateur rite theatres, staging widely understood rituals, strive to preserve them as a pattern. Amateur actors, who in Poland present themselves primarily at the OFTA All-Poland Amateur Theatre Festival, organized since the 1970s, and primarily at the Assemblies of Rural Theatres (first in Stoczek, then in Tarnogród)⁴, initially tried to faithfully reproduce the traditional farm work and customs which accompanied them for centuries and present unique devices, outfits used as props and costumes, which also had the value of authenticity: “ethnographic faithfulness”. With time, without changing the structure of various rites performed, ranging from baking bread, unveiling and capping ceremonies, weddings, Christmas Eve, and plucking feathers, they began to “inscribe” themes from their own lives; they combined their current experiences with dramaturgy. Today, as was accurately captured by Lech Śliwonik, a great admirer and promoter of such theatre groups, “in rural the-

2 See LEVI-STRAUSS, C. *Mysł nieoswojona*. Translation Andrzej Zajączkowski. Warszawa : Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1969, pp. 35–38.

3 Cf. WĘŻOWICZ-ZIÓŁKOWSKA, D. Replikacja i innowacja. W poszukiwaniu teorii (nie) zmienności kulturowej. In *Badanie kultury. Ludzie, projekty, innowacje* (Eds. Anna Gomońland, Marek Pacukiewicz). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016, pp. 159–161.

4 Sejmiki Teatrów Wsi Polskiej [The Assemblies of Rural Theatres] are a unique phenomenon on the map of Polish theatre. Many theatre groups which present themselves during the assemblies would not be able to go beyond their local environment. This is where they can get to know one another, introduce themselves to others, and confront their own experiences. Their artistic level is invariably very high, as evidenced by the fact that many of them are invited by repertory theatres to give guest performances in front of large audiences.

atres a rite is granted a personal dimension, as it were, and it is transformed into its own dramatic picture”⁵. Thus, using the repository of elements of ancient rural culture, amateur theatres construct a local culture, which is by all means real. They merge the local community with what is known and proven. They protect it against uprooting by making a vertical transfer of the content preserved in native folklore. They can largely be regarded as indigenous, autochthonic theatre. Theatre which does not imitate professional drama theatre but performs its native creative potential, traditions, customs, and values mainly for itself. The strategy applied in this theatre can be described as an attempt to rescue a small-scale history woven from local histories experienced by local people at every turn. It is a history told at home and in the neighbourhood, intentionally constructed with a complete commitment to preserving the idiosyncrasies and distinctiveness of their region (their world) and preserving and cultivating its unique folklore even on a micro-scale, even if it was only in the form of theatrical performances.

Ethnographic theatres and theatres of sources such as the Teatr Chorea and Teatr Pieśń Kozła operate in a different way. They use various forms of ancient folklore, releasing them from their original paradigm and relevant historical and cultural context in order to form an artistically attractive whole, not perpetuating them but out of need recalling them, juxtaposing them anew, and remixing them. These forms can no longer be repeated in a space other than a theatrical one. It is only when filled with actors’ emotions, their voice, body, and energy, that they revive again and intensively affect the audience during a performance and allow the viewer to transcend the boundaries of experiential reality. While this only occurs during a performance, it is intense enough for the viewer to enter a gap in time. In a sense, these theatres become moderators of cultural memory, which, as Jan Assmann claimed, “describes more than the individual memory of a man, because it reaches for the sphere of supra-individual, institutionalized mechanisms of transferring sense between subsequent generations within a given community. Memory reshapes the consciousness of individuals, encouraging their initiation into matters of the past and what a given community decid-

5 ŚLIWONIK, L. To nie jest skansen [interview by Ewa Kędra and Klara Sielicka-Baryłka]. In *Teatr z własnego życia, pamięci, emocji.... Publikacja jubileuszowa z okazji XX Ogólnopolskiego Sejmiku Teatrów Wsi Polskiej w Tarnogrodzie*. (Ed. Lech Śliwonik). Warszawa : Tarnogród, 2003, p. 22.

ed to preserve for crucial reasons”⁶. The spectacles and ethno-performances initiated by these theatres take different shapes and have a different range of influence and scope of penetrating the repository of cultural tradition. Traces of the past, stories told in myths and recycled in dramas, the fortunes of our ancestors, and images preserved in various cultural texts, such as songs, stories, tales, rites, and familiar rituals, are used in these theatres’ performances and shows and are thus reincorporated into the bloodstream of culture and theatre. Composed anew, activated, embodied in the actors’ play, they can reveal both the universal and timeless, which are deeply embedded in the content of our subconscious (“written in our genes”), as well as the peculiarities of a local or regional community which grew out of folk culture, once indigenous and marked by the horizon of time.

All the way to the bottom

Universally there have been theatres such as the Goat’s Song Theatre and Chorea Theatre. Their creators were previously associated with the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices, where they became acquainted with the idea of ethno-theatre, the theatre of sources. Being actors, they participated in the works related to the centre’s performances. It is worth recalling that in the preliminary years their work involved expeditions, the so-called Reconnaissance of villages located along the eastern border of Poland, which is a world of traditional communities. This was where they were seeking “the natural environment of theatre”. The tales, songs, memorized gestures, objects, and details of ancient rituals which they brought from their expeditions provided the material for further work in their performances. It was on the basis of this unique workshop and through contact with authentic traditional culture that this remarkably artistic and avant-garde theatre emerged. Through its references to the marginalized cultural identities of the borderland and a diversity once so common, Gardzienice questioned a monolithic model of culture present in those years. Encounters with the already disappearing tradition of folk cultures, which had only been preserved in the provinces, were primarily a deep, personal experience representative of its autonomy against official sociopolitical life. Such a fascination had nothing to do with the desire to cre-

6 ASSMANN, J. *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*. Translation Anna Kryczyńska-Pham. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008, p. 14.

ate “an ethno-museum”. It was rather about seeking inspiration, essential for theatrical work, about the desire to discover in these old messages and music a trans-historical pattern which is unchanging and permanent.

It was these experiences of Gardzienice that were clearly used by Tomasz Rodowicz while creating the Theatrical Association of Chorea in Łódź. Initially, this was a musical and research project called “Unknown Sources of European Music – Ancient Greece”, which was initiated in 2000 and implemented within three areas: art, didactics, and science. Its main purpose was to recognize the meaning of ancient Greek music in modern times and most importantly to find its references in musical forms and instruments that have still been preserved in the traditional cultures of the contemporary Balkans. By recognizing the Greece of twenty-five centuries ago as the cradle of European culture, participants in the project were seeking answers to questions about the awareness of this legacy in the contemporary world and simultaneously about the attractiveness of the intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic models of the modern world which were shaped by this culture. In addition to the seminars, research work, and concerts given by the Antique Orchestra, this project resulted in several theatrical performances, in which they tried to test the condition of modern man by means of a combination of music, dance, and singing. By making a reference to ancient chorea in the theatre’s name, with chorea being a unity of dance, poetry, and music, its creators meant to do more than announce the aesthetics practised by them which were dominated by the abovementioned forms of expression. They were also seeking to express their proactive approach towards the artefacts of the former alienated cultural reality. These artefacts, in the form of old songs, music, and instruments, were found, collected, and reconstructed, but not with a view to making a collection for exhibition in the museum. The ethnographic work carried out by the researcher was the starting point for artistic activity where the collected ethnographic material in the form of images contained in the texts was subjected to “treatment” used in accordance with the sensibilities, experiences, and abilities of the actors. It can therefore be said that they performed tradition in this theatre. There was an act of transgression in contact with the spectator, where the proper order of time was abolished and tradition was brought to life by pouring the new content into the old vessels. The spectacle of *Tezeusz w labiryncie* [Theseus in the Labyrinth] was an attempt to tackle the problem of human disintegration, man being split up into the intellectual, the rational, into what was expressed through words and what was bodily, emotional, and affective.

During the spectacle *Po ptakach* [After the Birds], which was based on Aristophanes, they diagnosed the fear of a man threatened with the ideas of the power that implements state utopias, which were created both in antiquity and today. In “Bacchus” they then confronted various antinomies such as urban-rural, ancient-modern, and aggressive-submissive, believing that the dilemmas of every participant of the culture should be embedded in this diapason. With time, other traditions were included in the aesthetics of their new artistic undertakings: dance in *Taniec Lasu* [Forest Dance], a drama from the repertoire of No Theatre, and a drama by Wyspiański in *Wiatr w sosnach* [Wind in the Pines]. *Sczeźli* [Perished], for example, was inspired by Tadeusz Kantor and Bruno Schulz. In Rodowicz’s Chorea Theatre, widely understood cultural tradition was recognized as a deposit of human experiences written in the ancient forms of music and movement and expressed in classic literary works, mainly in myths. In the theatre’s performances, these forms constituted a code of access to the wealth of the archaic world, to the pain and anxiety shared by every man, to his joy and sorrow, to the need for love and bitterness of rejection. A given performance did not consist of reconstructing well-known stories but in transcribing them into choreic forms. The unity of songs and movement repeated in a variety of configurations served to stimulate the recipients’ imagination based on associations. In this rhythm of repetition, one could discern attempts to imitate ritualistic activities. Natural bodily expression in the codified forms of dance and mimetic movement most fully articulated the conflict between what is known and remembered and what is mysterious and difficult to express. As Małgorzata Jabłońska wrote regarding the performances of Chorea:

“Meanings older than memory involve the body, each word entails a gesture. A song and a gesture as the carriers of memory are manifested in the truth and credibility of the experience of performers: transferred/donated to viewers.”⁷

The Goat’s Song Theatre operates in a similar way. This troupe from Wrocław, also known as an example of ethno-theatre or anthropological theatre, is not keen on mimetic action but rather on music, a vibrating word, and rhythmic movement; these are the forms most capacious for the ex-

7 JABŁOŃSKA, M. Dorastanie do siebie. Stowarzyszenie Teatralne „Chorea”. Tańce Labiryntu i Orkiestra antyczna, Tezeusz w labiryncie. In *Didaskalia*, 2014, No. 64, pp. 76–78.

pression of highly intense emotions. The theatre was founded in 1996 by Grzegorz Bral, an actor from Gardzienice, in order to develop his own programme of a theatre of sources, which, as he claims, is not just about returning to the roots but about remembering them. In his sixteen spectacles so far, which included *Kroniki - obyczaj lamentacyjny* [Chronicles: Lamentation], *Lacrimoza*, *Pieśni Leara* [Lear's Songs], *Portrety wiśniowego sadu* [Portraits of the Cherry Orchard], *Return to the Voice*, and *Wyspa* [The Island], Bral was inspired by classic dramatical texts (Euripides, Shakespeare, Chekhov, O'Neill, and Miller), which he later reinterpreted and transformed. He extracted from them that which concerns man at all times. The figures of human fate pictured in these dramas were not illustrated with continuous action like they are in traditional drama theatre, but with episodes and loosely connected scenes dominated by mostly polyphonic singing, words vibrating with sounds, music, and the movement of actors and dancers. In this way, the creators of the Goat's Song Theatre attempt to stimulate the imagination of the viewer, who is supposed to not so much watch the performance as contemplate and experience it. Their performances, which offer the viewer an experience of initiation into human fate, also their own, can therefore be regarded as a substitute for a ritual. What is of great importance here is the number of repetitions, references, traces of significant gestures, movements, and various sound scales and harmonics which were preserved in the records of ancient Greek, Scottish, Polish, and other cultures and which were often collected with great difficulty. Old patterns and forms filled with the actors' emotions, with their voice, body and energy, are intensely shared by the viewers, who contemplate and co-experience their theatrical meeting. As the critics and reviewers unanimously claim, these performances are hard to describe; instead, they must be experienced.

One could say that both the Chorea Theatre and Goat's Song Theatre trigger thinking about tradition "in the element of beauty". They both use their performative and artistic potential to prove that older culture, which was once invented and is now vanishing, preserves its own identity due to the art of theatre and thorough ethnographic work. All we can do is lend it a voice and breathe life into it. Simultaneously, it guarantees the preservation of the cultural identity of modern man. It is worth noting, however, that the relics of ancient cultures developed in theatres, such as songs, dances, and melodies, though taken out of their natural context, do not lose their power of expression. In order to answer the question of where their strength comes from, one can briefly say that this strength lies in their relationships with

a ritual: a practice resulting from the deep need to tame a situation of the individual (such as death, birth, marriage and separation, war and peace) through actions of a specific structure, rhythm, movement, and sound. Perhaps it is the disappearance of such practices in today's carnival-like world, practices which would make it possible to channel emotions caused invariably by such border situations, as well as the loss of a strong connection with transcendence, with a superior world, that gives such theatre which uses, recalls, and reminisces about rituals (even if it is a form of substitution), enormous attractive power.

To the horizon

An attempt to identify the world by touching on it in the local dimension was undertaken by three theatres: the Węgajty Theatre, the Theatre in Sejny and the Teatr NN [NN Theatre]. It should be added here that they all function within societies that have a wide spectrum of activity. The first one is located within the "Borussia" Cultural Community and operates under the name of the Węgajty Theatre Association.⁸ The theatre was brought to life in 1986 in a village near Olsztyn and was meant to be a form of cultural laboratory, which was crucial in penetrating the local culture and settling in it without having the ambition of colonizing it as a living space. It endeavoured to seek traditional forms of rural culture and rediscover them as inspirations of artistic work, for an artistic experiment, and moreover, for practising them under new conditions. In addition to staging performances, it organizes field ventures (carol singing and alleluia singing [*alilujki* – Pol.] to the village of Dziadówka⁹), runs research projects on traditional and improvised songs (Project Across), initiates academic conferences (e.g., Art over Barriers 2013)¹⁰ and hosts annual theatre festivals and workshops

8 The Węgajty Rural Theatre consists of six people: Erdmute and Waclaw Sobaszek, Małgorzata Dzygadlo-Niklaus, Wolfgang Niklaus, Witold Broda, and Katarzyna Krupka. Most of the performances were directed by Sobasiuk. Apart from a fixed group of Węgajty inhabitants and the members of the theatre group, many people come to participate in the workshops and conferences to read together and perform during the expeditions. There is also a religious choir and a perfect musical band. Music is the foundation and the starting point for any activity recognized as the *via naturalis* of the theatre.

9 HASIUK, M. Odrodzenie pradawnego obrzędu. In *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, 2016, Notebooks 1–2, pp. 261–284.

10 They resulted in several publications on the theatre's website available at: <http://teatrwegajty.art.pl/pliki/tresc.php>.

(“The Village of Węgajty” in 2017 under the title of “The Art of Coexistence, the Beginnings”). Since its founding (1982/1986), the theatre has staged a number of significant performances. *Historie Vincenza* [Vincenz’s Stories] and *Doliny Issy* [The Issa Valley] by Miłosz, where it presented an innovative approach to tradition, the multi-ethnic, and the multicultural are both worth noting here. By working on various literary texts, the theatre combined them with preserved or rediscovered songs, customs, and folk tales: elements of the folk culture of the area of Warmia and Mazury, which was a tradition marginalized and depreciated as rural, parochial, and vanishing. In the initiated expeditions, the theatre proposed reviving and re-presenting this tradition, not by means of reconstructing or remixing it but rather by seeking to verify its causative power in practice and establishing contact with the past and ancestors through repetitions of ritualized behaviour in a specific natural space of a country house or a farm: not on the stage using “theatrical means, such as songs, props, costumes” but on the border between quasi-reality (typical of theatre) and an authentic life.¹¹ As Tadeusz Kornaś wrote:

“The creators of the Węgajty Theatre, mainly through music, try to reach out to the core of folk nature and the archaic and religious openness towards people, nature, and the universe which flows out of it. They do not attempt to create a new synthesis. They can enjoy the enormous variety of cultures, humbly gathering their crumbs.”¹²

As he observed, those expeditions, so characteristic of this type of theatre, were treated differently. Grotowski’s activities from the time of paratheatre *Droga* [The Road] could be a part of active culture. For Staniewski and his Gardzienice team, staging performances to the public in villages away from all big cultural centres became a basic element of their work. Staniewski naturalized his performances in the rural space. The Węgajty Theatre treated such expeditions differently, selecting for them the time determined by the rhythm of the traditional rites of the village. Domestic performances, full of singing and simple, ceremonial structures, became in a way the simplest form of interpersonal theatre. Therefore, it can be concluded that Węgajty’s carol

11 KORNAŚ, T. *Apologie. Szkice o teatrze i religii*. Kraków : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017, pp. 87–96.

12 KORNAŚ, T. Wędrowcy z rachmańskiej Krainy. In *Teatr*, 1991, No. 2, pp. 20–21.

singing did not consist of the transfer of rituals on the stage, but on the resumption of the rite.¹³

Another theatre, the Theatre in Sejny was created as a result of a number of activities undertaken by the Olsztyn Ethnographic Laboratory within the Borderland Association. In the summer of 1990, the future Borderland team along with their friends and co-workers set out on an expedition called “Journey to the East”, which aimed to experience life of a province far from the centres. Following this expedition, the team decided to change the scope of their theatrical activity (placed so far within alternative theatre) and enrich it with a new dimension. The association was granted a new space (an old synagogue) and established various educational and artistic workshops there involving the local community. One project that deserves particular attention was Bożena Szroeder’s theatre project, which included a children’s performance entitled *Kroniki Sejneńskie* [The Sejny Chronicles]. This was preceded by several years of work on children discovering the multicultural history of that place from old photographs, legends, and historical documents, and above all talking with their parents and grandparents and learning old songs. The following generations of the authors of the performance and its actors, including young Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, and Old Believers from Sejny, continue to add their own family histories to the performance, constantly enriching *Kroniki Sejneńskie* with new elements. This purely amateur theatre in Sejny offers the local community the possibility of a deep and personal encounter with its memory and the present moment. The theatre’s activities should be considered in the context of a certain concept of culture shared by the creators of the Borderland Association and the moderators of the Teatr w Sejnach. According to them, as Grzegorz Godlewski wrote, culture always belongs to a particular individual or group and is seen through the eyes of those for whom it constitutes the content of experience. It has, thus, human features, the features of particular people, along with their fortunes and the

13 The relationship of carolling at Easter or Christmas with a theatre, especially with the comedy dell’arte – the comedy of masks – was emphasized many years ago by Jan Dorman, the creator of Teatr Dzieci Zagłębia [The Theatre of the Children of Zagłębie] and the initiator of “Herody”, the review of carolling groups organized in Silesia from 1963 to 1975. The tradition of carolling also survived in the Żywiec area in the form of the so-called “Gody Żywieckie”, held every year for 47 years. In 2017 they were included in the UNESCO list of intangible heritage. It should be added, however, that for a few years, the activity of such groups, while coinciding with the festive time of the old and new year, has had a looser connection with traditional rituals and customs. They present carolling rather than actually practice it. Thus, it is a phenomenon of folklorism in its pure form.

voice with which they speak about them; along with the buildings and landscapes which equally shape and colour their fortunes; along with their ancestors – with the graves where they rest and the memory in which they live.¹⁴

The theatres mentioned above strongly connect their activities with the local environment. They primarily serve to facilitate the local identification of members of the group inhabiting a specific territory, particularly necessary for settling oneself in a world of ever-changing reality. This is highly important, since in modern times such identification is by no means obvious; it is no longer defined by ethnic identity and the roots shared by the inhabitants of a given region, such as history, customs, language, and tradition. As Joseph Roach¹⁵ would say, the locality is rather produced with the active participation of this type of theatre, evoking a certain cultural tradition by filling vacancies or filling gaps. The creators of this type of theatre encourage the audience to freely express themselves and interact with their immediate surroundings and the environment, and more importantly they engage the viewers in the creation of the memory of a place, restore their lost collective memory, and provide the means for constructing their own narration. Therefore, such theatre belongs to that of active culture and is inextricably linked to the promotion of culture and educational activities. It is in the theatre and through the theatre that they establish emotional bonds between the viewers, who belong to this environment and are the main recipients of their performances, and the surroundings. Thus, they create affective communities mainly through the intensive work of the viewers' imagination triggered by nostalgic images of the locality in the previous form or meaning of this word and not necessarily related to their individual memory and personal biography. What is more, the locality is meant as a project aimed at facilitating their identification with a specific environment: primarily with the place and the elements of folk culture created there ages ago, which have been revived in their artistic spectacles and performances.¹⁶ One might say that the aforementioned theatres are, so to speak, the third variant of theatre done in the spirit of folk based on the idea of regionalism and on the principle

14 GODLEWSKI, G. *Luneta i Radar. Szkice z antropologicznej teorii kultury*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2016, p. 284.

15 ROACH, J. Wprowadzenie: historia, pamięć, performans. In *Didaskalia*, 2014, Nos. 121/122, p. 23.

16 BAL, E. Performowanie lokalności. In *Teatr historii lokalnych w Europie Środkowej*. (Eds. Dorota Fox, Aneta Głowacka, Ewa Wąchocka). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2015, p. 139.

of theatre which is amateur, voluntary, and self-made: theatre from song. And it should be added that folk theatre in Poland has a long history dating back to the 1880s. This is when peasant theatre was organized under the supervision of rural teachers. The most glorious time of its development is the interwar period, when the Union of People's Theatres was established and oversaw amateur groups and promoted performances in a folk spirit. This impulse, emancipatory in its nature, initiated several new forms in the folk amateur movement such as the stagings of rituals, legends, native customs, and songs, and therefore widely understood folklore. As a result of the extensive "propaganda" which aimed at ennobling folk culture, and owing to the Union of People's Theatres and its undertakings, rite theatre started in this period, emanating local traditions and dialects. Of note in this old Polish folk theatre is the use of an ancestor, or even the progenitor, of the contemporary theatre of sources; theatre which appears like new and starts at the grass roots. Paradoxically, such work does not involve any cultural paternalism towards folk/local culture which continues to observe old customs and rites but is rather a desire to transfer and adopt them in modern times to find a place in the world.

Summing up this necessarily brief presentation, since each of the above-mentioned theatres could have its own monograph, it is worth noting that in these theatres of sources, so-called ethno-theatres, traditions are revived in a variety of ways. Mostly by means of re-contextualizing, reinterpreting, and transforming these traditions, using folklore as a resource of cultural content, they transfer traditions, sometimes reorganizing them through a dialogue with the legacy from their ancestors. They replace folklore forms typical of simple folk culture with visualizations and representations in various configurations. This is also evident in amateur environmental theatre in the "grassroots" culture zone, one could say a self-generated zone, which has clearly been revived at the beginning of the 21st century.

Being convinced of a symbolic prefiguration of the fate of humanity, a *vitae humana* which is preserved in tradition, the Teatr Chorea and Teatr Pieśń Kozła deepen the memory of the viewers of their performances and try to unleash associations by their artistic means, shake them, and enter the archetypal stream with them all the way to the bottom. In turn, the theatres of the provinces, of local communities, explore tradition and allocate it to help viewers to settle down in a specific place marked by *the horizon*.

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Biography:

Dorota Fox holds a Doctor of Humanities specializing in literary studies; she also has a postdoctoral degree in the field of culture studies. She has been working in the Department of Theatre and Drama of the University of Silesia since 1988 and is currently an Assistant Professor. She is the author of monographs: *Kabarety i revue międzywojennej Warszawy. Z prasowego archiwum Dwudziestolecia* [Cabarets and Revue Theatres of Interwar Warsaw: From the Press Archive of the Interwar Period] (Katowice, 2007); *Czasopiśmiennictwo teatralne w Polsce w latach 1918-1939* [The Theatrical Periodical Press in Poland from 1914 to 1939] (Katowice, 2014) and several dozen articles about the history of cabaret, theatre, and theatre criticism in the interwar period as well as amateur theatre, popular culture shows, and various stage forms, such as songs and the art of compering. She is the organizer of a series of conferences dedicated to the art of cabaret in Poland. She is a member of the Polish Society of Theatrical Research and the Polish Society of Culture Studies. She is also a lecturer in the Department of Culture Studies at the Faculty of Humanities at the School of Labour Safety Management in Katowice.

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