

Hanna Nikolaieva

Odesa National Polytechnic University, Ukraine

THE RESEARCH ON ARTICULATION OF THE CITY MYTH IN THE CREATIVE ACTIVITY OF ODESA MUSICAL COMEDY THEATRE NAMED AFTER M.VODYANOV: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

This article is dedicated to the problem of implementation of the cultural anthropological and «verbal history» methods in modern theater studies. The author tries to show how the aforementioned interdisciplinary instruments may be appropriate in the context of the research on creative activity of Odesa Musical Comedy Theatre named after M.Vodyanov and this activity correlation with Odesa local myth and city identity («odeskost»). It was also emphasized the irreplaceability of historical-anthropological and culturological strategies at the detailed reconstruction of comprehensive picture of the past, namely, restoration of the history of the development and foundation of Musical Comedy Theater on the background of general Soviet and modern Odesa history, revealing of new facts from actors' biography, resumption of the performances, which were taken off from the theater playbills, etc.

Key words: interdisciplinarity, «oral history», cultural anthropology, theater studies, «Odesa myth», performance, artifact

At present moment in humanitarian science the interdisciplinary researches gained a remarkable importance. Passionate interest of the scientists to interdisciplinarity is caused by general requirements of postmodern époque, because in modern culture of ruling pluralism, fragmentariness, non-finishing the researcher faces the problem of necessary overcoming of narrow specialization and disciplinary restraint. The tendency on interdisciplinarity also is one of the most significant consequences of the historical change of social cultural science's functions which call scientists on more attention to social ethical issues in their activity. «Under the flag of interdisciplinarity were united all aspects of social philosophical, psychological and methodological research of science which cannot be afforded by positivism»¹, – E. Mirskyi stated.

In line with modern paradigms at the edge of history, cultural anthropology, culturology and theatre studies our research was set in the frames of which we insist on the application of historical and anthropological strategies, actual complexity and interdisciplinarity, which supply scientific work with desired deepness and variety. New and nontrivial in this context will be an introduction in domestic scientific circulation on theatre study of the facts received with help of anthropological strategy, «oral history» and interview method. However, the certain problem currently may be related with introduction of the proposed scientific instruments in domestic theatre study which will be discussed further on.

This article purpose is the demonstration of the aforementioned strategies and methods relevance on the example of study of the creative activity of Odesa Musical Comedy Theatre named after M.Vodyanov. We consider this theatre presents itself an extremely interesting material not only for the research just in area of traditional theatre studies, but also for investigation of closely related with it phenomenon which visibly influences its existence, namely, of the Odesa city myth in the wide range of its creation, development, functioning and importance in communicative space of the city. Hence, the repertory, personalities of Musical Comedy Theatre, ways of public communication concerning performances and theatre's troupe inside itself, all this promote articulation of Odesa myth», particularly of the «behavior grammar», the so called cultural «patterns»² and universals which enable the identification of specifics of the «odeskost» as special social cultural feature of local community.

The «odeskost» is understood as certain elements of Odesa residents' dissimilarity with other cities residents, i.e. specific patterns which make Odesa residents exactly odesits: the language, the humour,

¹ Мирский, Э. (1980). *Междисциплинарные исследования и дисциплинарная организация науки*. М, 43.

² Фокс, К. *Наблюдая за англичанами. Скрытые правила поведения*.

<http://royallib.com/book/foks_keyt/nablyudaya_zanglichanami_skritie_pravila_povedeniya.html>

behavioral stereotypes, way of life, everyday life, holidays, material world filled with numerous senses and symbolization, etc). The «odeskost» origins or, expressing by metaphors, the root system, as we presume, lies in «Odesa myth» because it indicates the direction development, nourishes and fills with curative powers local culture and art. Our scientific experience shows that it is reasonable to consider adjacent phenomenon along with myth which are included in mythological discussion: «Odesa language», «Odesa humour», literary, song art, local legends, local celebrations and festivals (for instance, the Jumorina), local folklore, proverbs, anecdotes, etc. Within this meaning an interesting source of diachronic and synchronic research on «Odesa myth» existence in local culture are the performances on the «Odesa topic» and wider cultural practices of Odesa Musical Comedy Theatre named after M.Vodyanoy, which are the kind of crossing points for all afore mentioned phenomenon and its alive functioning and understanding by public.

Hence, «Odesa myth» and performances on «Odesa topic» of Musical Comedy Theatre are considered as interrelated cultural artifacts. We may agree with M.Coule: «Artifacts are the fundamental components of culture... at the same time they are tools and symbols»¹. According to our perception, artifact is an objective procedural mediated product of people's activity; as per its nature it is anthropogenic, variable and interpretable embodiment of cultural shape as concrete material physical product, behavioral act, social structure, informative message or estimating judgment, usually in syncretic combination of all mentioned aspects with features of conscious activity. Following this definition, the city myth and theatre performance as myth's tangible bearer may be considered as cultural artifacts. It is necessary to outline that content of the myth and performance as cultural artifacts defines much by the context, social features of cultural environment where they are created and existing (type of power relations, correspondence of social structure and others). They do not exist separately, one from another, even unfortunately, as a rule, they are still considered as isolated in traditional strategies of theatre studies and theatre criticism.

Methods of cultural (or social) and city's anthropology coincide a lot. They are mainly related with induction. The pattern of the research follows the idea: everything starts from the matter. We will direct our research exactly by this way. Due to the processing of various sources (articles, archive documents and other written evidences) and especially drawing of the so called «oral history» into the research and specially elaborated interviews, we determined numerous interesting explanations of certain theatre performances popularity («The Locust», «At first light», «Four persons from the Jane's street», «Near the native berth», «Wedding in Malinovka», and others) by the reason of constant overlapping of their content with «Odesa myth».

In our opinion, the highly important sources for reproduction of «Odesa myth» and related with it theatre phenomenon are the individually oriented materials or signs of everyday life (memoirs, reminiscences of actors, diaries, etc). These once obtain life connotations and realities of daily perception (general cultural senses), they are «sounded» by commentaries collected with application of «oral history» methods.

Let specify, that «oral history» is a lead method of the research, especially when any documentary fixed evidences about object or subject are absent or there are few or insufficient quantity for comprehensive research. Thereafter, we consider as exemplary the work of Canadian anthropologist T. Richardson – «Kaleidoscopic Odessa». For gathering of material and reconstruction of «local imaginary» the author often uses oral history, methods of conversation and interview during her walks through Odesa along with Odesa residents – «old-timers» (old generation of odesits)². In our research we apply specially designed personally by us original interviews with principal actors, creative management and administration of Vodyanoy Musical Comedy Theatre.

In general in West European scientific tradition (USA, Great Britain, Canada, Spain, Italy, Germany) rather than in domestic the method of «oral history» is greatly popular. It must be outlined that currently «oral history» is a purposeful collection and studying of historical information on certain persons, families, important events or everyday life with application of audio material, videocassettes or transcription of prepared interviews, which ought to be saved as records for next generations, strives to obtain information from the different opinions, most of which may not be found in already existing written

¹ Коул, М. (1997). *Культурно-историческая психология: наука будущего*. М.: Когито-Центр, Институт психологии РАН, 13.

² Richardson, T. (2008). *Kaleidoscopic Odessa: History and Place in Contemporary Ukraine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

sources¹. We based our research right on the exploratory works of leading English-American specialists in the area of «oral history» (works of P. Tompson², L. Shopes³, Jh. Moyer⁴ and I. Reti⁵).

If in anthropological and historical discussion the method of «oral history» is very popular and applied, than in theatrical discussion at present time it is almost unknown. However, in our opinion, oral history in this context is almost a unique efficient method for gathering and accumulation (reservation) of information on performances which left the playbill of the theatre, on past generations of actors and their signature roles, on the glorious pages of theatre's history which have been already left in the past. It is strange, but regardless obvious advantages of oral history domestic and even West European teatrologists neglect its methods. Possibly, it is related with the circumstance that authors still traditionally prioritize references on «written», professionally authoritative and average. Moreover, the most important is in centre stage itself. Domestic science traditionally rely on written, but not verbal word, meanwhile West European science, on contrary, due to the permanent necessity of studying modern mass movements (different protest actions, struggle of social minorities for their rights and so on and so far) is aimed at catching of people «voices». Besides social topics (social problems), the oral history is also occupied with the actual art challenges. The prominent events in this aspect will be the stable interest to the projects of fine art, movie (for instance, oral history of Hollywood stars), and, finally, to the theatre (establishing of archives on oral history of different theatres, as for example, Dublin archive of Abbey Theatre). But even in this case, the studying of real environment of theatre everyday life and of certain performances is not yet a meaningful priority of the researchers. In this regard our work is nearly the first step in the direction of «oral history» adaptation within the framework of the study of art at the search of successive and outstanding theatre existence in city cultural environment.

As we have already mentioned, for domestic theatre studies the application of various written sources and orientation on the typed word of specialist (actor, teatrologist) is traditional one. However, such approach only bring us to the understanding of tissue (structure) of theatre artifact, but anyway it does not consider social cultural context around it and do not provide answers on the reasons of popularity, success, high interest or opposite to certain performance or theatre in general. Supporting the tradition, we also draw on the whole massive of texts on Odesa Musical Comedy Theatre (articles, books, memoirs, reviews, spectators opinions on the web-sites, repertory lists, programs, scenarios and so on), but on the other hand, to find the answers on the addressed issues in our work, we have to enlarge boundaries of classical theatre studies and appeal to the «oral history» (which is quite appropriate within the framework of common paradigms of postmodern culture and on the ground of modern globalization processes and integration of Ukraine into West European space, including, scientific area).

The oral history is a systematic collection of lively evidence of people (historical evidences) where the most important condition is contextuality, preservation of information and authenticity, because the data shall be constantly verified (verification of names, surnames, titles, dates, etc.), the received material proceeded, and special archives established. In our scientific paper on the basis of concepts of leading specialist in «oral history» were produced around 6 types of special «questionnaires» for different groups of informants, among whom are the following: principal director of the theatre (V.Podgorodinsky), two directors of the theatre – actual (O.Redko) and previous (E.Rumashevsky), company manager (A.Poslavsky), three generations of actors – coryphees (Ye. Dembska, I.Ivanova), «coryphees' apprentices» or middle generation (V.Frolov, V.Frolova, N.Zavgorodny, N.Zavgorodnya, O.Oganezova, A.Akhmetova and others) and theatre's youth (R.Rudny, I.Kovalska, N.Tkachuk and others). At the processing of interview materials the preference was given to the objective comparative approach (according to Tompson⁶). Composed in advance list of questions («questionnaire») is needed not only for providing the research with scientific severity, but also because the material is much intended for comparative analysis (we address various generations of informants and the interviews are already a kind of dialogue between époques and different «pictures of the world»). Still, surely, due to the anthropologic strategy and methods of «oral history» not only it is possible to study Odesa city myth and certain social cultural periods (some question of our interview project were aimed at restoration of old Odesa image), but also to disclose more

¹ *Oral history*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_history>

² Томпсон, П. (2003). *Голос прошлого. Устная история*; пер. с нем. и англ. М., Издательство «Весь Мир».

³ Shopes, L. *What Is Oral History?* <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf>>

⁴ Moyer, J. *Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History*. <http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html>

⁵ Reti, I. *Oral History Primer. Working Definition of Oral History*. <<https://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oral-history-primer>>

precisely contextual correlation of city myth and theatre, to reproduce complete picture of the past, namely history of the development and foundation of Musical Comedy Theatre within general Soviet and modern Odesa history (micro- and macrohistory), to reveal new facts from the biography of Odesa actors, to revive performances took off from the playbill, which originally was the key task of the research. Nevertheless, at the same time prepared in advance questionnaire did not exclude encouragement of new interesting information from the storytellers, which was consequently determined and demonstrated at the research. Actors mostly with pleasure shared various memories about theatre life (stage images, characters, repertoires, tours, rehearsals, histories of performances creation, their disappearance from the playbills, etc.) and «around theatre» life (up to the so called theatre «fairy tales»). Hence, due to the method of «oral history» it is possible to find out information about relations inside the theatre team (especially interesting how the model «master (teacher) – apprentice» is expanded on the example of relations of several generation of actors at Musical Comedy Theatre from coryphées to modern youth) and relations out of scene identifying various external impacts (relations at the level theatre-city, theatre-authority, theatre-spectators, etc.). With help of «oral history» it became possible even to «catch» the feelings (both personal and collective), for instance, patriotism and pride to native city (subject of «devotedness to Odesa and own spectator», as a product of «Odesa myth», is constantly dramatized in actors' biographies, expressed in their communication with public, tours, representation of theatre image in cultural space of the city, its numerous performances, various art actions and other theatre artifacts).

Evidently, the efficiency of the proposed strategies and methods, actuality of the research itself on the background of modern interdisciplinary studies, as well as specifics of work problematics, is extremely perspective and far going. Certainly, actual historic, anthropologic and cultural instruments make possible the restoration of theatre life in city space to the maximum diversified and full-blooded version, as well as the creation of «alive flow of the reality» or «life world flow», as A. Shiutz wrote ¹.

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¹ Шюц, А. Мир, светящийся смыслом. <http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/Sociolog/shyuz/>