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Chapter Eight

The World of Creation: Press Accounts of Ethnographic Shows in Circus Performances in Upper Silesia

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At the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century the towns of Upper Silesia were regularly visited by numerous traveling circuses. Artists appeared primarily in the larger towns—for example, Bytom (Ger. Beuthen), Gliwice (Ger. Gleiwitz), Katowice (Ger. Kattowitz), Opole (Ger. Oppeln), Racibórz (Ger. Ratibor), and Zabrze (Ger. Hindenburg). Somewhat less frequently they visited developing towns such as Chorzów (Ger. Königshütte) and Siemianowice Śląskie (Ger. Laurahütte). During their tours circus troupes traveled through consecutive towns, never staying longer than a few days in a single location. At the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century the rapidly developing industrial centers of Upper Silesia (see Heines 1976) provided a perfect space for such performances, and the number of shows presented—at least one big circus a year performed in larger towns—suggests that traveling circuses counted as popular sources of entertainment in that territory.

Despite numerous political upheavals, between the beginning of the twentieth century and the outbreak of World War II popular entertainment remained connected with circus. And even though over time the cinema grew ever more popular, until the mid-1930s Silesian towns eagerly welcomed traveling artists. From accounts in the press we can deduce that tickets for their performances usually sold out. Significantly, Upper Silesia was visited by circus companies founded not only in the territory of Germany but also in France and the Netherlands. Numerous circuses also kept returning to the territories discussed here with a new program every few to every dozen or so years, and circus directors gradually built an extensive advertising campaign around it. This chapter does not focus on all circus shows presented in Upper Silesia before World War II but intends to examine the circus shows that
In the twentieth century, the circus became a place for presenting “exotic cultures.” And although the ethnographic shows underwent deep transformation at arenas, they nevertheless replicated the essential quality of such performances: amusing audiences with radical otherness. The aim of this chapter is thus to analyze how such shows established their presence in the pre-war circus and simultaneously to examine the press descriptions and advertisements of circuses as sources of information concerning ethnographic shows.

Ethnographic shows developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, primarily in Europe, but also in the United States of America (Corbey 1993), though researchers have documented ethnographic shows as early as the sixteenth century, when Europeans brought residents of the New World to the Old World to present them at royal courts (see Denzin 2013; Fusco 1994). Therefore the notion of “ethnographic shows” encompasses a vast array of different types of show, ranging from quasi-scientific presentations in the style of an anthropological examination—the “human zoo,” exhibiting craftwork, dancing, and skills—to performances at circus arenas (Blanchard et al. 2008; Blanchard, Boëtsch, and Nanette 2011; Sánchez-Gómez 2013). Originally, organizers of ethnographic shows explained their activity as scientifically motivated (see Bogdan 1988). Moreover, the shows reinforced colonial policies as they demonstrated remote cultures and their representatives as uncivilized, and requiring civilizing by Europeans (see Arnaut 2011; Blanchard, Boëtsch, and Nanette 2011; Denzin 2013; Toulmin 2011).

As time went by, however, and towns gradually developed, their inhabitants grew more affluent and mass culture and technology evolved, thus enabling certain social groups to be afforded more—or some—leisure time. In consequence, the cultural significance of mass entertainment kept increasing (see Bogdan 1988; Otte 2006). As a result of these processes, ethnographic shows became more entertainment-related in character. Moreover, the shows continued to professionalize in order to satisfy the growing expectations of the audience, who—especially in larger towns—became familiar with such displays of the exotic. At the beginning of the twentieth century,

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spectators were no longer satisfied with the mere act of displaying representatives of foreign cultures on stage. Therefore, the shows had to be enriched, complemented with artistic stunts and elaborate costumes and scenography (cf. Demski in this volume). Analogous to European performers, artists from remote parts of the world were supposed to demonstrate exquisite skills and originality (cf. Czarnecka in this volume). The circus was one of the art forms enabling such transformation. It is thus essential to mention that in the twentieth-century European circus, shows included performances by representatives of distant cultures in their main repertoire. They became established as one of the main attractions of the circus programs, unlike the case of American circuses, at which such performances often constituted an element of the so-called sideshows—separate, smaller performances (Bogdan 1988, 46).

The circus show’s primary goal was to present to audiences, above all, the “savage” and “barbarian” nature of the performers; it exemplified the human oddities displayed to audiences in the above-mentioned sideshows (Bogdan 1988, 177). In the enterprises discussed in the present chapter, the representatives of “exotic cultures” constituted professional artists, members of a troupe who delivered a complex dance performance, acrobatic stunts, or magic tricks—and not a mere demonstration of “uncivilized wild nature.” This is, however, not to say that as a place of professionalization and artistic development of ethnographic shows the circus did not contribute to establishing and reinforcing existing stereotypes of the “civilized West” and “less developed exotic cultures” (see Bogdan 1988). There was, however, a different manner of achieving such reinforcement of stereotypes—namely, through emphasizing the distance and differences of the performing peoples from the representatives of Western cultures, simultaneously pointing to the orientalism and unusual character of the art they presented.

Importantly, information regarding ethnographic shows in circuses traveling through Upper Silesia can be found mainly in advertisements and press notes. In other German regions, more types of circus advertisements can be identified, and it is known that an important role in visualizing the image of “exotic cultures” was played by posters promoting ethnographic shows taking place in circuses (Ciardo 2011). In the territory of Upper Silesia, posters, leaflets, and circus programs were not preserved, so it is difficult to determine whether the same advertising techniques were used there as in other
German cities. Only traces of visual representations of the shows are present on the letterheads of documents preserved in some local archives (figs. 8.1 and 8.2). Importantly, however, press advertisements printed in Upper Silesian newspapers were similar to those published in magazines in other parts of Germany. Moreover, advertisements with the same or very similar content were published in both German- and Polish-language newspapers. Press titles with a strongly anti-German profile, such as Polak (The Pole) founded by Wojciech Korfanty, advertised the German Jewish circuses Blumenfeld and Strassburger and also, for example, the Dutch company Carré. Advertisements for circus shows mostly appeared in newspapers with large print runs, which seems consistent with the desire of circus directors to reach the maximum numbers of potential visitors.

Aside from press materials, very limited information about ethnographic shows was preserved in Upper Silesia, which is also true of other regions of Central and Eastern Europe. This situation significantly impedes the study of ethnographic shows. Therefore, the aim of the present chapter is, above all, to examine the possibilities of using press advertisements as a source of information concerning this phenomenon. The majority of research on ethnographic shows has concerned Western Europe and the United States (e.g. Bank 2002; Blanchard et al. 2008; Blanchard, Boëtsch and Nanette 2011; Denzin 2013; Sánchez-Gómez 2013). Analyses resulting from such research leave out or give only very general accounts of the territory of today’s Central and Eastern Europe, across which the shows were also performed. Furthermore, literature cited in this article concerning the theme of ethnographic shows in Germany (Thode-Arora 1989; Dreesbach 2005) refers primarily to the territory of the contemporary German state and pays less attention to those areas currently within the Polish borders that were once part of the German territories but later became part of Poland—some areas, after World War I, and some, after World War II. The fact that contemporary state borders influence research concerning a phenomenon that occurred at the end of nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth century is symptomatic. On the one hand, there are obstacles to accessing archival materials and, on the other, language presents a challenge—for example, Upper Silesia, formerly a part of the German state, was inhabited by Poles and thus some of the documents are written in Polish (while most are in German). Moreover, in the focus area, Polish-language newspapers,

which today constitute one of the main sources of information on performances of that era, were issued along with German titles.

More importantly, studying sources originating from territories located within present state borders reveals a conviction that certain concepts and ideas—including those related to entertainment—were born in the political center. Studying ethnographic shows within this context sheds light on their role in the social and political conditions from which they originated. However, at the periphery such phenomena could acquire a different character, serve different purposes, and gain local specificity (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020; cf. Mesarić in this volume). Research on the ethnographic shows presented inside the present-day Polish territories that used to belong to Germany (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019; Czarnecka 2018; Demski 2018, 2020) has proven that local particularities—not necessarily resulting from political issues but rather from the development of infrastructure or during a peculiar economic boom—define other contexts for interpreting these shows. A consideration of distance from the political center reveals that interpretations of ethnographic shows originating from the center are sometimes insufficient for describing the complexity of a phenomenon that traveled through lands, across local political boundaries, and between social contexts; what was happening on the periphery has to be taken into account.

Upper Silesia was distant from the political and ideological center of Germany. In this context it constituted a borderland, where at the turn of the century national identities were distinct (Kamusella 2005). Apart from Germans, Czechs, Poles, and Jews, a group identifying itself as Silesians resided there (Kamusella 2002). An analysis of press advertisements demonstrates that circus directors wanted to find audiences for their shows within each of these groups. However, my research on ethnographic shows in circuses traveling through Upper Silesia does not include an analysis of the social conditions of the region. I focus primarily on the described area as a place characterized by excellent infrastructure for traveling troupes. As I will demonstrate, the concentration of shows in a rather limited region, or even attempts by some companies to “conquer” others, and a visible, intense competition for economic success in Upper Silesia, in my opinion, enables us to understand the difficulties concerning contemporary research on ethnographic shows in circuses during the first decades of the twentieth century,
The majority of circuses presenting ethnographic shows in Upper Silesia were registered in Germany. Some of them were not only traveling enterprises, but had their headquarters there—permanent circus buildings. In the cases of the Sarrasani circus (Dresden), the Busch circus (Berlin, Wrocław [Ger. Breslau]), the Hagenbeck circus (Hamburg), the Charles circus (hereafter referred to as the Krone circus; Munich), and the Barum circus, founded in Königsberg, all the owners were German. The region was also visited by companies owned by Jewish families, which had no permanent arenas but were in possession of headquarters for winter, namely Blumenfeld in Góra (Ger. Guhrau) and Strassburger in Strzelin (Ger. Strehlen). A Dutch circus, Carré, and a French circus, Angelo, also performed in Upper Silesia.

**Egalitarian Entertainment**

Nowadays the circuses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are perceived as an egalitarian form of entertainment. Marline Otte (2006) claims that performances at circus arenas facilitated a particular combination of popular and highbrow culture. The scenarios of the shows combined acrobatics, ballet, horse-riding, military drills, and clown performances, often occurring in a frivolous, erotic, and wild atmosphere (Otte 2006; Siedlecka 2017). Such performances could be viewed by all social groups: audiences included both royalty and laborers (Otte 2006). The circus became a place of mass entertainment consumed by mass audiences; thus, in a broad sense, it constituted egalitarian entertainment. The development of towns and cities, including industrial ones, such as in Upper Silesia, translated into a gradual increase of wealth of their inhabitants who, consequently, could afford to pay for entertainment.

Moreover, at the turn of the century the circus became a truly modern phenomenon. It used all the technical developments offered by its era. Thus in Germany this entertainment genre became a specific branch of business, not only for German but also for Jewish families (Otte 2006). The fact that different social groups were able to spend money on leisure time guaranteed that the circus could not only get by but could also be an investment. In turn, this provided the opportunity of using increasingly innovative technologies to arrange the performances, which attracted audiences interested in
viewing them. The electrification of the circus and illumination of the arena enabled a few shows per day to be performed. Other technical solutions made possible, for instance, filling the arena with water and offering performances on water, as at the Busch circus. At the same time, the development of communications infrastructure significantly contributed to extending the scope of circus troupe tours. Even the companies that had permanent venues embarked on tours. The development of a railway network and supply trains enabled circuses to spread their wings. Usually, circus companies possessed their own trains to transport people, animals, and equipment. For the duration of the tour these trains, moreover, became the place of residence for artists and circus employees. The correlation of the development of circus companies and the railway is clearly demonstrated in the case of Upper Silesia, where the network of connections between towns was extremely dense, due to the industrial character of the region and the necessity of connecting particular mines and ironworks.

Owing to this development, during tours through Upper Silesia, circuses performed their shows in consecutive towns within a rather limited area. The majority of towns mentioned in the present chapter are concentrated in a relatively small space. Today—except for Racibórz and Opole, which are about 70 and 100 kilometers away from these towns, respectively—the towns have grown together to form a single metropolitan area. At the turn of the century, however, they were a dozen kilometers apart at most. Interestingly, despite the towns’ close proximity, circuses were still able to find audiences. At the same time, though, it was exactly the concentration of towns and, consequently, of performances that made Upper Silesia a difficult area for circus owners, who were kept in permanent mobilization and had to monitor the competition to attract spectators for their shows.

At the same time, circuses continued to refer to established aesthetic models and used effective methods of attracting audiences (Barcz 2014). In this sense, they were still rooted in the nineteenth century and transferred elements of the nineteenth-century atmosphere into the twentieth century (Barcz 2014, 188). One way of doing this was through ethnographic shows, incorporated into the programs of the twentieth-century circuses from nineteenth-century stages, which, combined with other components, constituted the amazing circus world (Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019). This type of entertainment was mainly intended to surprise the audience and prove that on
stage impossible things could happen (Siedlecka 2017; Cihlář 2017). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the circus was intended for the general public who, regardless of origin or wealth, expected entertainment to bewilder them, allowing them respite from their mundane lives and everyday problems.

The Land of the Eerie: Ethnographic Shows’ Place in the Circus

Circuses promised to meet the expectations of audiences and introduce them to a world of amusements that transgressed the laws of nature. The Upper Silesian press at the beginning of the twentieth century, both Polish-language newspapers and the dominant German-language newspapers, was full of circus announcements and advertisements. The region is peculiar not only due to its concentration of towns but also due to the large number of newspapers and magazines published there. A few Polish-language and several German-language titles were issued in almost every town. Apart from local titles, a regional Upper Silesian press was also published. Consequently, a large number of press advertisements and an immense amount of information related to circuses in this region were generated, providing an abundant source of material for interpretation.

Interestingly, all published advertisements of the shows, regardless of the place or decade, appeared to respond to specific aesthetic expectations and to promote a rather conventional package of attractions. They promised unforgettable experiences; exceptional, exotic performances; and an exquisite, unique level of artistic and technological solutions. The language and pathos of these advertisements seems funny nowadays, however; they also suggest that circuses did not want to be associated with cheap entertainment. The circus had the ambition to establish itself as a form of highbrow art, despite the fact that its foundations were democratic and open to all social groups, which was proven by ticket prices and information on the general availability of performances to everyone. The lowest social groups were to feel at home there and the highest ones were to be provided with the sophisticated experiences they were used to.

For that reason each circus company designed its press advertisements in a way that would appeal to the imagination of its potential audiences. They unveiled some secret that would be demonstrated in the arena, without giving
a full description of what would be shown. This could only be learned through participation in the show, but already the press descriptions constituted the first stage of creating the magical world of the arena. What appears significant in the context of the present analysis is that advertisements of circus performances were similar to each other and recommended shows in a similar vein during the entire period from the beginning of the twentieth century until the outbreak of World War II. For this reason the references to advertisements of the circus performances mentioned below have not been presented in chronological order. They are supposed to demonstrate the attempts of the circus directors to respond to specific expectations of their audiences, at the same time providing an introduction to a discussion on the role of press advertisements in studying ethnographic shows, which I will conduct later, using the example of advertisements from 1912 (a year with a particular abundance of circus performances in Upper Silesia). It was a period when Upper Silesia was visited by a number of famous circuses, which used the local press to compete for spectators and gain the highest rank among entertainment companies. At the same time, 1912 was a part of the so-called golden age of the circus—which came to an end by the outbreak of World War I—with performances presented at that time demonstrating the peak of artistic and technological solutions (see Otte 2006). The combination of these circumstances made the advertisements and announcements published in the Upper Silesian press in 1912 a perfect ground for analyzing press advertisements as a source of information about circuses and ethnographic shows of the era.

My starting point will be the advertisement of a relatively late show, the performance of the Strassburger circus in 1932, to demonstrate that, despite technological advancements and strong competition from the cinema, the aesthetic of the circus was based on methods of creating a world of wonders that had been elaborated through the decades. These wonders invariably involved transgressing the laws of nature through acrobatics and magic and creating an atmosphere of exoticism through presenting distant cultures whose representatives intrigued audiences with their mysterious appearance and behavior or untamed wild spirit, sometimes reinforced by the presence of wild animals on stage.

The advertisement from *Der Oberschlesische Wanderer (Upper Silesia Wanderer)*, June 14, 1932, concerning shows in Zabrze and Bytom introduces the main attraction in the following way:
The exotic ethnographic show (*Exotische Völkerschau*). 500 people. 500 animals from all continents. The most prominent artists from five continents. 40 stunts in each show. 150 most exquisite pure bred horses.

The exoticism of presented cultures and art performed by their representatives accompanied by trained animals was for many years considered the main attraction of the circus and a way of amusing the audiences. Ethnographic shows, combined with other elements of geographically distant exoticism, constituted one component of this eerie stage reality. Not surprisingly, the very same qualities of the performances were emphasized in the advertisements of other circuses. For example, before its arrival in Bytom in 1913 the Blumenfeld circus declared:

There has never existed a company as huge as to parallel the abilities of the Blumenfeld circus. The newest and greatest attractions will be presented, which have never been presented by any similar company. An amazing program of 15 stunts. One in the whole world. (*Katolik Codzienny* [*Daily Catholic*], April 1, 1913)

Further, the advertisement reads:

There is a performance of a lion mastering the art of horse-riding. There is a quadrille of Bedouins on 8 camels. There is Mr. A. Blumenfeld as a violin virtuoso on an elephant head! Apart from this sensational performance Mr. Blumenfeld will also introduce a group of trained elephants. There is the original training of director A. Blumenfeld Sr. with his small and smallest horses accompanied by a pack of dogs. There is Mr. La Roche with his astounding stunt entitled Secret Ball. There is catching of a cannon ball by gladiators called the Planetary Three.

Following the above list of attractions is a reassuring statement that the audience will, moreover, have the chance to watch “The show of most exquisite female artists of horse-riding and acrobats as well as supreme jockeys and horse-racing riders accompanied by clowns and augustes, etc.”

2 An auguste is a type of clown who entertains the audience with exaggerated expressions and clumsy movements.
It appears that the director of this undertaking designed the program using all possible types of circus stunts, including ethnographic shows, to put the audience under a strong impression that the world on stage is completely different from the mundane one. Describing the shows of the Blumenfeld circus, Głos Śląski (Silesian Voice) announced that “each audience member left the circus satisfied as the program was splendid and sensational, one unlikely to be watched in a provincial town” (April 5, 1913). One could assume that such an accumulation of tricks contributing to the magic of the arena matched the preferences of the spectators. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by other advertisements as they demonstrate that directors of other circuses adopted similar strategies.

Advertisements of the Barum circus visiting Upper Silesia in 1925 reveal that its owner stuck to the same principle. In advertisements of this company, ethnographic shows were positioned as one of the main attractions. The advertisement published in Ostdeutsche Morgenpost (East German Morning News) on October 6, 1925 announced a “traveling show of people and animals from all parts of the world,” promising a performance that, according to the fashion established during the golden age of the circus, used the most innovative technical solutions and unusual skills of humans and animals. The advertisement read:

Barum brings entire groups of exotic peoples. Hard and firm silhouettes of northern Africans, Indians, the Chinese, magicians gifted by nature, traveling artists and fakirs, Arabs—avengers with fiery eyes. A complete ethnic show, an engrossing and educational experience.

Readings of the Upper Silesian press demonstrate that similar attractions were also offered by the French circus, Angelo, which visited Racibórz in 1909. The advertisement published in Nowiny Raciborskie (Racibórz News) on September 14, 1909 (see also Neues Gleiwitzer Intelligenz Blatt [New Gleiwitz Intelligentsia Newspaper], June 29, 1909) promised an unforgettable performance featuring representatives of different ethnic groups:

Arabs as astounding jumpers. Bedouins building splendid pyramids. South Americans as masters of horseback riding. Russians as brazen steppe riders. Female horse-riding masters of all nationalities. Danes as
bold acrobats on bars. Norwegians as graceful funambulists. Indians as spectacular elephant tamers. Turks as wrestlers and gladiators. Frenchmen as classy jockeys. Italians as exceptionally hilarious clowns. Spaniards as acrobats. Englishmen as amusing jesters. Austrians as horse riders. Hungarians as rapid riders... Each program of this spectacular company includes 25 best productions, which is twice as many as in every other circus.

The year 1909 was important in the history of circus shows in Upper Silesia as the region was visited by the famous Sarrasani and Angelo enterprises, alongside the Olympia, Westfalia, and Maine circuses, which did not have ethnographic shows in their programs (Der Oberschlesische Wanderer, July 2, 1909). During this period more aggressive and more elaborate advertising campaigns were conducted; however, the really fierce competition in the circus world occurred in 1912. In this year press advertisements clearly demonstrated the limitations in using the press as the source of information about circuses and ethnographic shows presented during their performances. I believe that the press materials from 1912 provide a particularly interesting set of data for analysis. A number of renowned circuses visited Upper Silesia that year and, one after another, traveled to the same towns, published advertisements in the same newspapers, and competed for the same audiences. As a result, a geographically limited area became the arena of intense competition of particular circuses, whose owners were determined to sell all of their tickets. Some of their actions were visible in the press of the era.

In 1912, advertisements with content almost identical to the fragments of the one by the Angelo circus, quoted above, announced August performances of the Dutch Carré circus in Zabrze. They advertisements were almost identical in visual design and announced exactly the same attractions as the advertisements of the Angelo circus from three years earlier (Kurjer Śląski [Silesian Daily], August 16, 1912; Zabrzer Anzeiger [Zabrze Gazette], August 16 and 18, 1912). The advertisements contained only text, but their typographical arrangement and content unequivocally prove that the Carré and Angelo circuses were promoted by the same advertisement template. From this one can conclude that there functioned a certain fixed canon of attractions offered in circuses, and advertisements referred to this list in order to maximize its efficiency in attracting visitors, while a detailed, realistic program of a particular...
show was not that significant in an advertising campaign. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the circus was associated with a specific, defined aesthetic. Audiences were attracted to the circus by the promise of viewing everything they expected—namely, eeriness and exoticism.

Advertisements for the Carré circus drew a lot of attention, but not for copying the advertisements of the Angelo circus. Interestingly, the latter was not involved in the conflict described below. Accusations of unfair conduct toward the Dutch company were expressed by the Blumenfeld circus and regarded the copying of the advertisements of the Henry circus and the appropriation of a horse-training stunt called *Schulpferd und Ballerina* (Learning Horse and Ballerina), which had been presented in the program of the Blumenfeld circus. The Carré circus advertised the stunt in the following way:

Learning Horse and Ballerina. The newest, exquisite show of training during which the solo dancer performs the most difficult dances and the horse copies them precisely after her, followed by them dancing together. Not seen in any circus ever before! People are talking about it everywhere! (*Górnosiążak [Upper Silesian]*, August 29, 1912)

In response to announcements of the shows of the Dutch company, the Blumenfeld circus invested in a peculiar “black PR” campaign, comprising announcements entitled *Die Totengräber des Circus* (*Gravediggers of the Circus*). It spoke of a foul and treacherous promotion of the Carré circus by juxtaposing the press advertisement of this circus with the one by the Henry circus; it also pointed out appropriation of the Blumenfeld circus stunt by the Dutch artists (*Der Oberschlesische Wanderer*, August 19, 1912; *Zabrzer Anzeiger*, August 22, 1912). The Carré circus, in turn, published a huge announcement rejecting these charges and accusing the Blumenfeld circus of unfair competition and a disgraceful attempt at slandering Carré. To prove his point, the director of the Dutch circus quoted fragments of press articles praising the performances of his company, including the *Schulpferd und Ballerina* stunt (*Zabrzer Anzeiger*, August 23, 1912). This conflict seems to have taken place only in the press to make sure that its subject reached the greatest number of people, as it was intended to create noise in the media around the circus performances and attract audience attention rather than to prove that one of the parties was right.
In 1912 the competition among circus shows in the region was intense. The similar artistic and technological possibilities among circus companies of the era led them to look for different ways of emphasizing their uniqueness, while at the same time sticking to the well-established aesthetics of the circus. One of these tactics of suggesting the uniqueness of performances consisted in directing readers’ attention toward a stunt that would distinguish a particular performance from others and making this stunt the showcase of a given circus. Ethnographic shows were sometimes used in this way (see also Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019). In 1912 Gliwice was visited also by the Hagenbeck circus. The following advertisement placed in *Der Oberschlesische Wanderer* (October 15, 1912) promised the following:

The Indian ethnographic show of the Hagenbeck circus: 150 Indians: men, women and children, elephants, bears, monkeys, snakes. Unmatched and most outstanding undertaking of this sort. Feast at the court of Maharaja from Maisur [contemporary Mysore]: the exhibition of the Indian prince, Guarani Indians—Acrobats, Magician, plate juggling, Temple dancers, elephants as working animals, acrobatic stunts on moving bamboo, flamethrower, bear fight, jugglers and dagger throwers, monkey training, the tent—a parade to celebrate the Indian prince. Madras marketplace.

Upper Silesian audiences had a vast array of entertainment to choose from at the time. In the same year, the Strassburger circus (Katowice), with no ethnographic shows in its program at this time, and the Charles circus (Gliwice and Racibórz) presented their shows in the region:

An original worldwide circus whose troupe consists of the best genuine Arabs, the Chinese, Moroccans, Indians, only original exotic groups of animals and an original New European artistic quality. (*Nowiny Raciborskie*, May 7, 1912)

Such a concentration of similar performances in a small area explains the essence of elaborate advertising campaigns and anti-campaigns conducted by other circuses intended to guarantee the companies a permanent position in the entertainment industry of the given era. The Blumenfeld circus presented its shows in Upper Silesia in both 1911 and 1913; hence, the strug-
gle to achieve a favorable position among other circuses appears understandable. The actions of the director of the circus preserved in the press materials, however, gain specific meaning in the context of analyzing the role of press materials in studies on ethnographic shows.

The Circus in the Upper Silesian Press

The example of copying exactly advertisements of circus shows (it is difficult to determine whether it was done by circus directors or, rather carelessly, by editorial boards) provides us with yet another argument suggesting that press advertisements should be used with caution as sources of information on circus performances in the first decades of the twentieth century. Obviously, advertisements presented an imagined, exaggerated world of the arena, and the creation of this magical reality began at the stage of preparing advertisements or posters. In fact, the press itself constitutes a demanding historical source (Allen and Sieczkiewicz 2010; Baumgartner 1981); therefore, particular attentiveness is recommended when working with press material, especially when advertisements are used as material for interpretation. However, the entire field of ethnographic shows is immersed in a profound awareness that in their case, maybe even more intensely than with research of other phenomena relying on press sources, the image of the shows presented in newspapers is an act of creation itself. It constitutes an introduction to the performance, a sample of the eerie world established on stage during circus shows. In my opinion, performing remote, exotic stage reality started already at the level of advertisements of circus shows.

My research, however, was for a long time based on the conviction that even the most incredible and unbelievable image of the shows presented in press advertisements pertained to specific performances and resulted from the intentional activity of particular circus owners. It was thus supposed to provide the best promotion of their shows and was in a sense consistent with the other elements of a circus enterprise run by a particular director. As it turns out, press advertisements could also present the reality of somebody else’s arena or some model stage, describing not so much the particular circuses and their programs or advertising strategies but rather general expectations toward circus companies.
The last insight reveals a lot about the world of circuses and ethnographic shows from the first decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, with most performances it is possible to confirm that a given advertising campaign constituted an element promoting a particular company and resulted from a policy adopted by its owner; consequently, the same advertisements could be found in all locations along the route of a particular circus tour. Some examples illustrating this are incredibly heated advertising campaigns of the Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2020; Hlebowicz 2019) and the Sarrasani circus (see Baraniecka-Olszewska 2019). It is also intriguing to encounter such press advertisements, which are difficult to connect unequivocally with a specific circus company as it is not entirely clear who appropriated them or their rhetoric. The existence of such advertisements, although hardly credible as historical sources, at the same time reveals the precision of people’s expectations toward the circus and elements that had to be included in the announced program in order to attract audiences. As we can observe in the case of analyzed press advertisements, ethnographic shows were also considered core circus attractions.

The majority of directors put a lot of effort into making their advertisements original and proving to their audiences that the program presented in a given year was a brand new show. However, reading through a few hundred advertisements and announcements of circus performances in Upper Silesia from the turn of the century to World War II made clear that all circus announcements referred to the same types of stunts, involved a common aesthetic, and, due to regional characteristics, competed for literally the same audiences. These audiences, though—also due to the concentration of circus shows in a very limited territory—were already used to a particular type of entertainment. Therefore, press sources concerning circuses and ethnographic shows revealed information primarily about the expectations of the people of that era regarding entertainment and their preferred ways of spending leisure time. Simultaneously, however, the press sources inform us about the emergence of a specific aesthetic of the circus, which was expected to be announced in advertisements and offered on stage. The circus became an independent entertainment form—recognized, liked, and, importantly, presenting its own artistic canon. Audiences were expected to realize this, which is why the content of press advertisements was strongly conventionalized.
The End of the Era of Traveling Circuses

The world created in the circus arena remained within the realm of a magical reality transgressing the laws of nature. Circuses performed on stage their own spatiality and temporality, transferring spectators to the world of wonders. The egalitarian nature of the circus assured its immense popularity. It might seem that a truly democratic, mass entertainment form was born in the circus, involving all social groups and superseding national and class divisions. Yet the moment of the circus’s development and of its decline coincided with a period of extremely intense geopolitical transformations, which impeded its functioning beyond social divisions. The world created on stage enabled the spectators’ detachment from the mundane. In no way, however, did this protect the circuses themselves from a confrontation with harsh reality. Consequently, regardless of the intentions of its directors, the circus was inscribed into the intricacies of political and social transformations. The European circus did not manage to establish itself as an apolitical phenomenon (see Otte 1999).

The twentieth-century history of Europe, including that of Germany, played a key role in this process. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the circus experienced an intense period of development. The golden age of the circus lasted until World War I. The major economic crisis that followed the war also impacted the condition of the circus. During the period of post-war reconstruction, the perception of the circus in Upper Silesia started to become governed and perceived through, among others, notions of intensifying national movements and nationalisms (see Kamusella 2002). After changes to the border following World War I, the Silesian Uprisings, and the plebiscite on Silesian self-determination in 1921, German circuses no longer performed in towns that belonged to Poland; they only traveled around the German territory. In other regions of contemporary Poland, appeals had appeared even earlier to boycott performances of German companies—for instance, the Hagenbeck circus in 1917. One could, therefore, assume that Polish national activists perceived the circus as a tool of Germanization.

The stage reality presented in circuses—“exotic cultures,” oriental outfits, tricks, and wild animal training—did not constitute a commentary on political transformations of the era. The circus arena created its own world,
which transgressed the laws of nature and political and social phenomena. Circus companies, however, operated as a part of a specific reality, which led to the collapse of this field of entertainment in the form known in the pre-war period. The circus of the beginning of the twentieth century came to an end after World War II because of its links with politics and the economic crisis and due to the depreciation of circus art and the physical annihilation of Jewish circus families.

Since the beginning of the 1920s one could observe an even stronger politicizing of the German circus (Otte 1999, 541). Some circus companies, including the Busch circus, looked for support from the new political formation in Germany and openly supported the program of Adolf Hitler. Shows of the Busch circus took place also during the war on territories occupied by the Third Reich. However, in the context of the history of circuses performing in Upper Silesia one should emphasize particularly the stories of the Jewish Blumenfeld and Strassburger circuses. Most of the family members managing these circuses were murdered during World War II.

Even though the very idea of ethnographic shows, including those performed in circuses, has been criticized by most researchers due to unquestionable, significant ethical reservations (see Arnaut 2011; Denzin 2013; Fusco 1994), as suggested by Luis Sánchez-Gómez (2013), not all of the shows should be examined using a single set of standards. Shows representing distant cultures, also part of the circus, were underpinned by inequalities resulting from the colonial policy of European superpowers or attitudes toward non-European cultures, which were commonly positioned as inferior in relation to Western ones. The circus provided, however, a path for professionalization of these performances and enabled artists to earn money. The early twentieth-century circus ethnographic stage shows offered a new life. At the same time, the decline of circuses brought an end to this life. After World War II ethnographic shows basically vanished, similarly to the great traveling circuses established in the aesthetic traditions of the nineteenth century.

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