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THE GENESIS OF THE TERMS “PHYSICAL THEATRE” AND “PLASTICHESKIY THEATRE”

Abstract. Each era of theatre history has its own characteristics and is distinguished by its main trends, work of prominent stage figures, key terms and concepts. Modern theatre art has radically changed as a result of global changes in the economy, politics and culture. Some topical distinctive properties date back to the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, when the attitude towards drama text, artistic solution and form of the performance, space of the stage changed. Currently, with each year, more new forms are added to Kazakhstani theatre space. New performing arts centers and groups, positioning themselves as, for example, a physical theatre, a *plasticheskiy* theatre or a dance theatre, are created. Therefore, it has become relevant to study the phenomenon of productions, wherein movement is the main means of expression. The terms “physical theatre” and “*plasticheskiy* theatre” have become wide spread in the performing arts of Kazakhstan. They have firmly entered modern theatrical vocabulary causing some disputes and discussions at the same time. The purpose of this article is to define the terms “physical theatre” and “*plasticheskiy* theatre” and establish their connection. The article systematizes information related to the appearance of the terms under consideration. Materials by contemporary foreign theatre researchers, works of leading practitioners and theorists of the XX century stage are used. An attempt to identify the genesis and specifics of the development of “physical” and “*plasticheskiy*” theatres, as well as to determine the content of the concepts “physical theatre” and “*plasticheskiy* theatre”, which are becoming increasingly widespread in the modern theatre of Kazakhstan, is made. These results can be used by theatre practitioners in the creative process and by teachers and students of performing arts departments of creative universities in the educational cycle.

Keywords: theatre, theatre art, physical theatre, *plasticheskiy* theatre, contemporary theatre, actor, theatre director.

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Генезис терминов «физический театр» и «пластический театр»

Аннотация. Каждая эпоха истории театра имеет свои особенности, отличается основными тенденциями, творчеством выдающихся деятелей сцены, ключевыми терминами и понятиями. Современное театральное искусство кардинальным образом изменилось в результате глобальных перемен в экономике, политике, культуре. Некоторые актуальные отличительные свойства берут свое начало ещё с рубежа XIX-XX вв., когда изменилось отношение к драматическому тексту, к художественному решению и форме спектакля, к пространству сцены. В настоящее время казахстанское театральное пространство с каждым годом все больше пополняется новыми формами. Появляются новые центры сценических

искусств и коллективы, позиционирующие себя как, например, физический театр, пластический театр, танцтеатр. В связи с этим возникла актуальность изучения феномена постановок, в которых главным выразительным средством является движение. Термины «физический театр» и «пластический театр» получили широкое распространение в исполнительском искусстве Казахстана. Они прочно вошли в современный театральный лексикон, вызывая при этом дискуссии и разночтения. Целью статьи является определение понятий «физический театр» и «пластический театр» и их связи между собой. В статье систематизированы сведения, связанные с появлением рассматриваемых терминов. Используются материалы современных зарубежных театральных исследователей, труды ведущих практиков и теоретиков сценического искусства XX века. Предпринята попытка выявить генезис и специфику развития «физического» и «пластического» театров, а также определить содержания понятий «физический театр» и «пластический театр», приобретающих все большее распространение в современном театре Казахстана. Данные результаты могут быть использованы практиками театра в творческом процессе, преподавателями и обучающимися факультетов сценических искусств творческих вузов в образовательном цикле.

Ключевые слова: театральное искусство, физический театр, пластический театр, современный театр, актер, режиссер.

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«Физикалық театр» және «пластикалық театр» терминдерінің генезисі

Аңдатпа. Заманауи театр өнері – көптеген саяси, экономикалық дағдарыстардың, түрлі дәуірлер мен мәдениеттер ықпалының, көзқарастар қайшылығының нәтижесі. XIX-XX ғасырлар тоғысында театр өнерінде сөзге, драмалық мәтенге деген көзқарас өзгерді. Сонымен қатар сахна кеңістігінде, спектакльдердің сценографиясында, жалпы сахналық қойылымдардың формасы мен шешімдерінде де елеулі өзгерістер орын алды. Өр театр дәуірі жаңа есімдер мен жаңа концепциялармен толықты. Бүгінгі таңда қазақ театр сахнасында да пластикалық қойылымдар, эксперименттер қойылады. Жаңа сахналық алаңдар мен ұжымдар өздерін би театры, пластикалық театр, физикалық театр деп танытуда. Осыған орай, пластикалық қойылымдар феноменін зерттеу қажеттілігі туындайды. «Физикалық театр» және «пластикалық театр» ұғымдары театр өнерінде өзекті және дискуссия тудыратын арасындағы ұғымдары болып табылады. Бұл ұғымдар заманауи театр кеңістігінде кеңінен қолданылуда. Дегенмен, театр қайраткерлері бұл ұғымдарға нақты анықтама бере алмайды. Мақаланың мақсаты – физикалық театр және пластикалық театр ұғымдарына анықтама беру және арасындағы байланысты анықтау. Мақалада заманауи шетелдік және ресейлік театр зерттеушілерінің материалдары, сонымен қатар, XX ғасыр зерттеушілерінің де ғылыми еңбектері пайдаланылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері физикалық театр және пластикалық театр ұғымдарының шығу тарихын, даму жолдарын, мазмұнын анықтау болып табылады. Бұл нәтижелерді театр және хореография факультетінің ұстаздары мен студенттері қолдана алады.

Кілт сөздер: театр, театр өнері, пластикалық театр, физикалық театр, заманауи театр, театр ұғымдары

1 Introduction (Yembergenova A.P., Kabdiyeva S.D.)

Gaining of independence by Kazakhstan has stirred the search for national identity process in the art of the country. With regards to the theatre, this was primarily reflected by the strengthening of the line of historical themes in repertoire. It was an important and natural stage in terms of rethinking the history of Kazakhstan. Many plays appeared, in which the

main characters were heroes of the past and national epic. Words and text determined everything in productions of such dramaturgy.

Traditional performance with the predominance of the word is gradually losing its dominant position in theatres of Kazakhstan in XXI century. Young directors work with new forms mixing genres and artistic means of expression. The field of application of digital technologies and other innovations is expanding in the stage space. The body expressiveness and body language in the context of E. Fischer-Lichte's «performativity» and «performativity turn» (Fischer-Lichte, 2004) and concept of «post-dramatic theatre» by H.-T. Lehmann (Lehmann, 1999) are intensively developing in the art of acting.

Theatre directors and teachers are paying an increasing attention to new trends and directions in the development of stage vocabulary such as physical theatre, dance theatre, *plasticheskaya* drama, etc. There is an increased interest in the special performing technique of modern dance developed by Martha Graham and in the philosophy of dance by Pina Bausch, with the fundamental thesis proposing the importance of not only how people move, but rather what moves them (Keefe, Murray, 2016: 86).

The search for new forms in modern choreography of Kazakhstan was carried out by G. Adamova and sisters G. and G. Gabbasovas at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries. Some productions of the National German Drama Theatre in Almaty were created in line with this direction. Currently, performances are actively staged in the country, in which body language is decisive regardless of whether the text is used or not. New stage groups have been created positioning themselves as a dance theatre, *plasticheskij* theatre, and the concepts of «physical theatre» and «*plasticheskij* theatre» are widely used. Therefore, studying this phenomenon, determining the origins of its formation and evolution has become an important issue. Analysis of the theory and practice of É. Decroux, R. Laban and the International Theatre School (École internationale de théâtre) of J. Lecoq becomes especially significant for the educational process in this direction.

There is no single commonly accepted definition of the genres «physical theatre» and «*plasticheskij* theatre» in theatre art. This is due to different interpretations and understanding of the essence of these theatrical phenomena. There is no terminological clarity on this issue. Thus, the conceptual terminology of the problem under study has not been finally established.

Numerous discussions are held on this subject and studies and monographs are published. Firstly, it is necessary to consider the problem of terminology and definition. The authorship of these terms and time of their appearance should be determined. The article attempts to systematize information related to the appearance of the terms under consideration.

2 Materials and methods.

2.1 Research methods (Yembergenova A.P.)

Historical, theoretical, typological, comparative methods and source study analysis in the context of interdisciplinary aspect were used during the research process of the problem. The factual base is set up on the theoretical works of international researchers.

2.2 Material description (Yembergenova A.P.)

In order to study the issue of the genesis and evolution of the concepts of «physical theatre» and «*plasticheskij* theatre» and conduct a comparative analysis works of leading

experts were used: «Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction» and «Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader», «The Oxford encyclopedia of theatre & performance» by Murray S.D. and Keefe J., «Encyclopedia of Contemporary British Culture» “Circulation of the theatre: From traditionalism to futurism” by Sergeev V.A., dissertations “Plasticheskiy theatre in Russia of the XX century” by Yushkova E.V.

Works of researchers of French mime theatre and of the founder of the physical theatre Jacques Lecoq were analyzed to identify gradual development of physical theatre and its chronology, including the books “Lessons of Pantomime” and “Marcel Marceau” by Markova E. and materials of the International de Theatre School of J. Lecoq (École internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq) in Paris. Research works of modern Kazakh researchers were also studied. Among them is the article by Tsoy A. “Performativity of “plastic language”: historical and cultural context”, where the author studies the development of the language of physicality in Kazakhstani performing arts.

3 Discussion (*Yembergenova A.P., Kabdiyeva S.D.*)

Researchers Murray S.D. and Keefe J. define in their works the concept of physical theatre, its appearance and use in the theatrical environment. They note that the concept of “physical theatre” gained popularity in England and America in the 1970-1980s. «In Britain, the term ‘physical theatre’ first came to public attention through the emergence of DV8 Physical Theatre in... Slightly earlier, in 1984, the London-based Mime Action Group (MAG) was founded, and in its first newsletter (autumn 1984) Nigel Jamieson refers to ‘physical based theatre’ in response to the Arts Council’s recently published report ‘The Glory of the Garden’. By its third newsletter (Spring 1985) a MAG editorial refers to ‘mimes or physical theatre people’. However, notwithstanding sporadic sightings of the term in the 1970s, it is not until the mid-1980s that the phrase begins to gain some momentum and becomes a fashionable designation for a range of emerging practices» (Keefe, Murray, 2016:18). It is emphasized that creative teams called themselves physical theatre for several reasons. Firstly, the troupes sought to determine and formulate the direction of the development of their artistic activity in which physical movement came to the forefront. Secondly, they needed to position a new performing style and its place in the theatrical process and attract the attention of the audience.

DV8 Physical Theatre company, headed by L. Newson, was the first in the UK to officially declare itself a physical theatre (Keefe, Murray, 2016: 18). Lloyd Newson, who was part of the Theatre of Contemporary Dance until 1985, left it to create his own new team (DanceVisual 8). He deliberately invited choreographers to work on performances focusing attention on a special technique of performance and most importantly on the concept of new productions, which raise important political, social and psychological problems. L. Newson has repeatedly noted that he was inspired by the work of Pina Bausch. She contributed considerably to the changing role and significance of dance (not classical ballet) in the performing arts and its transformation from an applied component into an independent theatre - a dance theatre (Keefe, Murray, 2016:92).

The works on the French mime school headed by Jacques Copeau and his followers Étienne Decroux and Jacques Lecoq occupy a special place in the studies of physical theatre. J. Copeau is an outstanding French director and teacher, founder of the “Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier” and an acting school-studio in Paris. He dealt with the problems of

development of acting art, formation of a new repertoire and new forms of communication with the audience. J. Copeau, being the reformer, set himself the goal of returning the theatre to an artistic level that would encourage the viewer to understand and truly appreciate theatrical and, in particular, acting art. He used traditions of the ancient theatre, techniques of Molière's comedy, improvisational techniques of the Italian Renaissance theatre and K. S. Stanislavsky's method in his pedagogy. While solving the set challenges J. Copeau experimented boldly with the stage space and, as a result, returned to the form of the ancient amphitheatre. It was his understanding that the actor must be open to the viewer from any part of the auditorium (Markova, 1975).

«Copeau was in a sense, therefore, a pre-modern post-modernist. He did not believe in '-isms', or artistic movements and cultural revolutions, but in a renewable, rediscoverable entity, the medium of theatre. It was not that he had an antiquarian interest in the old, but that he considered the theatre had fallen into such disrepair that it could no longer offer a solid platform on which new works could be presented» (Rudlin, 2000: 55). J. Copeau revised the system of professional training of an actor who should be versatile. He strengthened the line of body expressiveness, aspired to free the actor from tenseness and predetermination, raising free and uninhibited on the stage mime actors.

Étienne Decroux received his education at the acting studio of the «Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier». His main thesis was the statement: «Theatre is the art of the actor». Other types of art like literature, visual arts, choreography, synthesis of which had been recognized as the foundation of stage art for centuries, are not required in the theatre system of É. Decroux. Actor is the central figure and body is his main instrument. É. Decroux continued development of the idea of a new mime actor and created the «mime pur» technique which implied that the mime actor exists on the stage through a truthful, accurate "poetic body" that can convey all the feelings and drama. «Mime pur» and "Corporeal mime" are results of É. Decroux's experiments and search for stage forms' union of ideas of corporality and physical expression with the laws of drama. This technique is yet to be comprehensively studied and be given modern artistic expression. Meanwhile, it should be noted that many of É. Decroux's contemporaries did not agree with him, thinking that actor should not be deprived of the text (Markova, 1999).

Researchers also link the origins of contemporary physical theatre with Jacques Lecoq. He continued development of the actor's concept of J. Copeau and É. Decroux's idea of a mime actor. He was also fascinated by the ideas of E.G. Krag, Italian theatrical masks and traditions of the Oriental theatre. The name of J. Lecoq is associated with a neutral mask, which he used in the educational process. He also used larval masks and character masks.

The idea of creating a neutral mask is described in the "Theatre" magazine's article "The School of Jacques Lecoq: a missed chapter" by Mamadnazarbekova, K. The idea came to J. Lecoq during the process of observing the work of J. Copeau with an actress, who failed to convey emotions in a dramatic climax moment. The author writes: "Copeau tried to help the actress, who froze, stuttered and could not move at the most dramatic moment. He covered her face with a handkerchief and noticed that hiding behind a mask the body was released". Subsequently J. Lecoq tries to work with his students with a neutral mask, which does not have any expressed emotions and character. This mask is used ex-

clusively in the educational process. The purpose of working with this mask is to free the body from the tenseness and understand body's freedom. The most interesting part about this mask is that it acquires those emotions and character that the body of the artist sets. (Mamadnazarbekova, 2013).

Canadian clown and mask artist and teacher Jan Henderson described in this way: "The neutral mask was originally developed by mask and clown teacher Jacques Lecoq as a diagnostic tool for actors. His goal was to help them develop emotional honesty, economy of movement, and an inner core that would allow them to remain centred while expressing powerful feelings onstage. Like all masks, the neutral acts as an intuitive, non-verbal 'script,' bypassing conscious thought and instantly integrating body and mind" (Henderson, Tilley, 2020). Unlike the neutral mask, the larval mask and character (expressive) masks, on the contrary, seem to dictate the artist what body should be like, which movements and gestures are applicable. Larval masks are large, white masks of various shapes. The artist's task is to find connection between the body and the mask. Larval masks react to any object and any given situation. Character masks, which are also called expressive masks, give the artist a specific type of behavior, characteristic gestures and voice. These masks are similar to those of the *commedia dell'arte*.

"...Lecoq saying to a student in a movement class, '*ne bouge pas commemoi, bougecommetoi!*' – '*Don't move as I move, move as you move*'" (Russell, 2020). Currently the author's training program of J. Lecoq is used in the International School "École internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq" founded by him in Paris and in other modern schools of physical theatre around the world.

Interest in the expressiveness of the body and creative solution through the physicality in performance in the theatrical art of Russia intensified at the beginning of the XX century and then continued during the Soviet period. The masterful body control of circus performers (acrobats, jugglers, gymnasts, clowns) attracted directors' attention. Physical action became as important component of performance as the word. It was then when the term "*circusation* (tsirkizatsiya) of theatre" appeared and experiments on the synthesis of circus and theatre art began. The Soviet theatre also turned out to be a platform for new forms search. First step towards the *circusation* of the theatre was the transformation of the traditional theatre stage into the space of a circus arena, an amphitheatre. Second step was the use of acrobatic stunts, elements of clowning in performances. Viewers could observe such techniques in the creative searches of V.E. Meyerhold, Yu.P. Annenkov, A.Ya. Tairov, S.M. Eisenstein and others. Acrobats and pop artists were often invited to perform tricks and circus elements. V.E. Meyerhold, fascinated by the new theatre aesthetics, actively developed a training program for actors who would be able to freely and masterfully control their bodies. He began to teach circus art to studio actors (Sergeev, 2008: 6).

It should be noted that in 1915 the term "*plasticheskaya drama*" appeared in Russia which was used by the critic Yulia Slonimskaya in her work in the "Apollo" publication (Slonimskaya, 2015). It became widespread much later in Soviet and post-Soviet stage art. In the 1970-1980s director Giedrius Mackevičius created the *Plasticheskaya Drama Ensemble* in Moscow, which was later transformed into a theatre. Drama did not refer to a literary but a theatre genre, where *plastika* was the main means of expression, through which the

main idea of the performance was expressed. Elements of pantomime, circus art and choreography were also used in the productions of the troupe (Yushkova, 2019).

The concept of "*plasticheskaya* comedy" was also used in the Soviet performing arts along with the "*plasticheskaya* drama". It was associated with the performances of V. Polunin's mime theatre "Litsedei". With his art he managed to erase boundaries between genres, countries and even between art and life.

Theatre has undergone many changes in the post-Soviet space. The ideas, forms and vocabulary of performing arts were transformed. The auditoriums were filled with a new audience having its own preferences. Interest in the *plasticheskii* theatre has increased again in recent decades. With the development of modern choreography elements of modern jazz, contemporary, contact improvisation and social dances can be seen in the performances of this direction. Elements of the physical and *plasticheskii* theatre, sometimes the whole scenes can be seen in the productions of drama theatres.

According to "The Oxford encyclopedia of theatre & performance" physical theatre refers to "A relatively new term open to provocative debate. Theatre based on physicality has always existed, ranging from the "circus (using skills like juggling, acrobatics, trapeze, and clowning) and commedia dell'arte to mime, pantomime and dance-theatre. 'Physical theatre', however, attempts to describe type of hybridized non-traditional theatre which places emphasis on physical virtuosity but is not exclusively dance, and which, although it often uses words, usually does not begin with written text. Its creators often use an image, an object, a movement, or a gesture as a point of departure" (Kennedy, 2003: 1031). Thus, within the physical theatre happens transformation of the functions and role of movement, that acquire new significance and semiotic meanings. Physical theatre represents synthesis of bodily arts and aesthetics.

In «Encyclopedia of Contemporary British Culture» physical theatre written by Dymphna Callery as «focuses on the visceral qualities of theatre, and it characterized by an emphasis on the actor's body as the primary sign; it is rooted in the belief that the actor is the "total resource" for "total theatre", also «includes hybridized forms previously labeled "visual theatre" (The People Show), "dance theatre" (DV8), "mask theatre" (Trickster), which demonstrate the mutation and cross-pollination which have impacted on theatre since 1960». It is emphasized that Jacques Lecoq is the main figure who gave a start to physical theatre, which «has strong relationship with mime and circus». (Childs, Storry, 1999: 396)

Two books by Murray S. D. and Keefe J. "Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction" and "Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader" are the first comprehensive research about physical theatre phenomenon in English. The first volume contains scientific articles and essays on how the psychophysical apparatus of the actor is developed based on the methods of such theatre figures and teachers as J. Lecoq, É. Decroux, V. E. Meyerhold, etc. In the "Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction" authors present results of the research on the roots, aesthetics and concept of physical theatre, consider the methods and techniques of practitioners, whose activities influenced the formation of the physical theatre of M. Chekhov, V. E. Meyerhold, P. Brook, P. Bausch and others.

The authors agree on the opinion that physical theatre is a combination of performing arts: stage, circus and modern choreography. This synthesis is based on the idea of corporality.

4 Results (*Yembergenova A.P.*)

The following results were obtained during the study: the first cases of usage of terms "physical theatre" and "*plasticheskiy* theatre" in Western countries and Soviet theatrical space were determined; the content of these concepts was defined; the process of transformation of stage means of expression from "word" to "corporality" was identified; activity methods of founders of the "physical theatre" were studied.

Interesting parallels arise when studying the history of formation and development of physical and *plasticheskiy* theatres. The French school of mime and Soviet directors turned to the space of the ancient amphitheatre approximately at the same period. Removing the word from the pedestal they bring physicality to the forefront. Theatre directors and teachers create studio schools, the purpose of which is to raise an independent actor-creator, who masterfully controls his body - the main and only instrument of an actor.

The growing interest in corporality in the West has led to intensified development of modern physical theatre and emergence of new forms, such as, for example, the dance theatre. The evolution of the Soviet *plasticheskiy* theatre, analogous to the foreign physical theatre, developed differently. Physical expressiveness was an actor's tool and not a theatre direction at the first stages. Over time interest in *plasticheskiy* theatre faded away for many years. By the end of the XX century a path from being one of the components of acting art to becoming an artistic direction, in which body expression determines the artistic idea, poetics, imagery, content, meanings, had been taken.

5 Conclusion (*Yembergenova A.P.*)

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the contemporary theatrical concepts discussed in this article have been the object of research by theatre theorists and practitioners for many years. This is evidenced by the examples and theoretical materials given in the article. In the Kazakh theatre area, the concept of "physical theatre" appeared relatively recently. In particular, this is how independent theatre groups define their productions. The Kazakh theatrical figures and researchers argued about the correctness of their use, since for a long time it was believed that these are different concepts. However, the works of foreign researchers argue that the content of these concepts is similar.

Currently both concepts "physical theatre" and "*plasticheskiy* theatre" are used in the post-Soviet space. Modern *plasticheskiy* theatres frequently call themselves physical theatres adopting the experience and aesthetics of Western physical theatres.

Thus, it can be argued that the definitions of "physical theatre" and "*plasticheskiy* theatre" are identical. These two concepts, in essence, represent the type of performing arts, where the body of the actor, his bodily expression and physical actions are at the center.

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