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UKRAINIAN MODEL OF POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE: CONTEXT AND PRAXIS

The article characterizes the Ukrainian model of the postdramatic theater in the framework of global culture of modern times. As new historical realities prescribe changes in artistic pathways of modern art development, the issue related to processing of the specific features of postdramatic stage business becomes relevant. The author defined the particular characteristics of the Ukrainian postdramatic theater as illustrated by artistic experiments of such Ukrainian directors as O. Apchel, O. Seredin, A. Mai, R. Sarkisian, S. Brama, A. Vusyk. The result of the research conducted is the disclosure of the specific features that the Ukrainian postdramatic performance acquires: total hybridization with the dominated visual component; understanding of the text as a multivariable use of signs; deconstruction, deformation, multi-code nature and pluralism as a communicative space; the audience as a co-author of the performance etc. It is established that the postdramatic theater as a cultural phenomenon of the postmodern era is the newest form of stage representation and an intermediate between the permanent institution of the classic Ukrainian theater and theatrical practices of the twentieth century. According to the art history analysis the author proved that in the postdramatic theater there was a permanent hybridization: from types and genres to template formations, causing transformation of the morphological theatrical system into autonomous theatrical practices. Generation of the textual basis of the postdramatic theater during the very performance ensures an availability of the interactive system, a frame in which the personality of the performer, being a “performative” representative, is actualized. The relevance of the article has emerged due to a need in advanced study of the very Ukrainian model of the postdramatic theater.

Keywords: modern theatrical culture, postmodernism, postdramatic theater, modern theatrical practices, performative art.

Articulation of issue. Gradually integrating into the European artistic space, Ukraine is on the way of creation of a new model of cultural development. This stimulates changes in artistic pathways of theatrical culture development and at the same time causes cultural reflections with regard to its place and role in the Ukrainian society. Inclusion in the global theatrical innovations actualizes the search of new types of connection with the audience, creation of such a proportionality of a stage player and audience, which would meet the new historical realities, form cultural guidelines and moral values. Rather than having taboo topics, the postdramatic theater submits the narratives, provoking oppositional opinions, for discussion with the audience. A great number and variation of manifestations of postmodern theatrical practices in the modern artistic paradigm determine the relevance of theoretical elaboration of such a social and cultural phenomenon as a postdramatic theater.

According to the national culture and art history surveillance the postdramatic theater is usually regarded as a system component of cultural space. Publications of O. Apchel, A. Bakanurskyi, H. Veselovska, H. Lypkivska, V. Romaniuk are about the description of particular stage businesses, performances, happening and any other latest theatrical practices. Analysis of art history research leads to the conclusion about the uncertainty of a scientific idea concerning the peculiarities of the postdramatic theater as a significant component of modern Ukrainian culture.

Thus, the **purpose of the article** is to characterize the Ukrainian model of the postdramatic theater in the framework of modern Ukrainian theatrical practice.

Presentation of basic material of the research. Once Ukraine became independent, a new formation of directors began to emerge, easily experimenting with the form and content, causing introduction of theatrical practices of various artistic languages: performance, documentary theater, environment, happening,

fluxus etc. A great number and variation of theatrical experiments as well as active integration into the Western European art space caused development of such a phenomenon as a postdramatic theater. The current situation of active development of the postdramatic performance is also caused by the significant step-ups in the Ukrainian postmodern social and cultural reality towards theatricalization of social communication, given that the audience is not satisfied with unilateral connection with the art, it requires its own self-expression on equal terms with the director. A dynamic “ingrowth” of theatrical methods of self-representation of theatre-goers and corresponding frames in the social and cultural structure allow us to identify the genesis of the Ukrainian model of the postdramatic theater. Another incentive for generation of the researched phenomenon is a deep gap between the theater and literature, caused by new understanding of the performance text: the dramatist is no longer defined as one of the authors, another theatrical phenomenon is formed on the basis of the synthesis of plastics, music, advanced technologies, making the visual component various and dominant.

Throughout the centuries in the traditional European theater, which is based on the very dramatic text, there has been a paradigm significantly different from the non-European model of theatrical entertainment. Whereas the visual component of certain ceremonial entertainments: the synthesis of dance, chorus and music, is incidental to the Eastern theatrical tradition, in the European theater everything was subject to the literary text. According to the European theatrical tradition, a performance is an illustration of the play, in accordance with the text of which an illusion, imitation of reality, is created. Consequently, in opposition to traditional construction of the performance, the postdramatic theater is characterized by the departure from the literary original source in favour of the visual reality¹.

In particular, the Ukrainian scientist A. Bakanurskyi stated that the sources of the postdramatic theater should be searched in the processes related to the penetration of the cinema in the urban culture since the early twentieth century². Promoting competition with the theater, the cinema defined certain intentions of changes in the emphasis from the traditional dramatic text to the visual component of the performance. As a result of the scientific and technological process there are absolutely new opportunities for the implementation of the artistic and figurative idea of the performance: projection systems, modular stage structures, holographic projections, VR-technologies etc. In this framework, the release of the book, authored by the German theater specialist Kh.-T. Leman “Postdramatic Theater”, was logical. The theory of the postdramatic theater, proposed by the artist, being a system of “new polymorphically discursive theatrical forms”³, is one of the first attempts to systematize a new theatrical theory based on the research of the practice of outstanding masters of the stage art of the late twentieth century: E. Barba, P. Brooke, R. Wilson, Ye. Hrotovskyi, T. Kantor, R. Schechner and others.

The term “postdramatic theater”, introduced by Kh.-T. Leman, has steadily come into use of the general public of the theatrical world and nowadays means: broadly construed as – a certain complex of theatrical practices of postmodern origin and their latest modifications, and specifically construed as – the very one of such theatrical practices, which is the latest form of stage, first of all, directorial representation. According to Kh.-T. Leman the postdramatic performance, as opposed to the classic performance, is endowed with a new type of the theatrical text, this is a multi-variant use of signs; it has become “presence rather than representation, shared experience rather than communication experience, a process rather than a work, manifestation rather than designation, an energy impulse rather than information”⁴. The idea of unreasonableness of reality copying becomes dominant that stimulates the search of any other methods for its reference.

The Ukrainian director and researcher O. Apchel stressed that the postdramatic theater appealed to experimental space and, first of all, to young people, allowing them to “select” only what is “necessary” for a particular person within a particular space-time system. Such critical characteristics of the postdramatic theater as deconstruction, deformation, multi-code nature, media pluralism, new media and communications that constitute the communicative space of such a theater, new understanding of a gesture and movement are defined by postmodern aesthetics⁵.

¹ Исаева, Н. (2013). Теория постдраматического театра: пристрелка по движущейся мишени. *Издательская программа Фонда развития искусства драматического театра режиссера и педагога А. Васильева*, 16-25.

² Баканурский, А. (2009). Украинская режиссура в контексте постдраматического театра. *Центр Леся Курбаса* <http://www.kurbas.org.ua/projects/kurb_chyt_5/38-52.pdf> (2021, December, 15).

³ Lehman H.-Th. (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. London; New York: Routledge; Frankfurt am Main, 460.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Апчел, О. (2014). Документальний театр у контексті сучасної культури: *автореферат дисертації кандидата мистецтвознавства*. Харків: Харківська державна академія культури, 22.

Thus, according to the documentary materials recorded during expeditions to the mines of the Lviv-Volyn and Donetsk coal basins, O. Apchel created the performance “Horizon 200”¹. Directing practices of O. Apchel constitute logical continuation of researches of the artist, who in 2014 defended her PhD thesis dedicated to one of modifications of the postdramatic theater – a documentary theater². Reviewing “Horizon 200”, the director of the First Stage of Modern Drama Drama.UA Viktoriia Shvydko stated: “...due to the use of combined methods, this performance tends toward the post-documentary, post-dramatic performance – i.e. the performance that otherwise understands the conflict (even not one) and the dramatic situation as it is”³.

The director uses a variety of advanced technologies during the performance, stating that the time, when we cannot work on the topics that we are concerned about with the use of traditional or classic methods of theatricalization, has come. The second act of the performance “Horizon 200” powerfully reflects with regard to the modern theatrical art with the use of a variety of means of artistic expression. The audience begins to have allusions concerning the modern Ukrainian postdramatic performances “Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful Time” and “DPU”. O. Apchel introduces discussion of two Ukrainian directors about the movement of theatrical trends from West to East into the stage business. The theater historian L. Ilnytska states that such an autoreflexion is an effective method for the artist to exist in times of post-truth, characterized by the stage illusion destruction⁴.

With regard to the analysis of postdramatic aesthetics of the performance “Horizon 200” the following elements should be marked out: existence of the interactive system (sometimes unfolding of the plot belongs to the audience in its entirety), reflection and self-reflection (stage players do not identify themselves with the characters, openly deny illustration, reflex with regard to the performance and separate stage topics) multi-code nature (provoking creative activity of the audience that allows to actualize and give birth to certain meanings, partially available in the stage embodiment), the principle of repetition of episodes, allowing to draw the audience’s attention to certain directorial accents, double/triple a certain opinion, a lack of traditional composition system (the plot of the performance unfolds nonlinearly, the classic structure becomes deconstructed).

The free postdramatic performance structure allows stimulation of directorial imagination and gives a significant impulse to various creative experiments. An outstanding example of the postdramatic theater is a range of performances by Oleksandr Seredin, released at Kharkiv Academic Drama Theater named after O.S. Pushkin. Various postdramatic methods have been applied by the director in the performances “Three Sisters”, “Pushkin. Tribe”, “A Hero of Our Times”, “Nihilists”, “The vaulting buck”. Violating absolutely all standards of theatrical academism, O. Seredin synthesizes a lot of multimedia means, destroys the classic structure of the text, waives the duplication of the literary structure and invents his/her own one. In fact, the literary basis is deconstructed and recorded into another structure. The function of the very word is also changed: it concedes to the body language, the visual component becomes dominant, when neither plots, nor formalized dramatic characters, nor dramatic and dialectical clashes of values, nor even recognizable figures are required anymore in order to create a “theater”. In such a case, there is too little sense left in the drama idea – no matter how versatile and comprehensive it may be – that it loses its cognitive value. The performances of the Kharkiv director are perceived as a collage of theatrical elements rather than as a coherent narrative of an eligible story. O. Seredin invites the audience to complete its own work related to construction and cognition of the main content.

It means that the theater ceases to be self-sufficient, as the audience becomes the co-author of the performance. Due to such a transformation the tissue of the work of art is generated, which is both the product of the artist’s imagination and the matrix of reception of the stage business. It is these functions that are implemented by the subject-artist and the “consumer” of works of art. The activity of the “consumer” produces figurative constructions which are not “imprints of reality”, but its original formations, projections of the subject’s free imagination. Involvement of the audience in the completion of the stage business in the postdramatic theater becomes principal: the conflict is not played out on the stage, but is transmitted to the consciousness of the audience. If the integrity of the statement is no required anymore, communication is conducted not due to understanding of the entire text of the performance, but due to stimulation of the

¹ Апчел, О. (2020). Без «плюсів» і драми. *Zbruc* <<https://zbruc.eu/node/96654>> (2022, February, 06).

² Апчел, О. (2014). Документальний театр у контексті сучасної культури: *автореферат дисертації кандидата мистецтвознавства*. Харків: Харківська державна академія культури, 22.

³ Швидко, В. (2020). Горизонти постдрами. *Zbruc* <<https://zbruc.eu/node/95950>> (2022, January 16).

⁴ Ільницька, Л. (2018). Що ти знаєш про вугілля? *Zbruc* <<https://zbruc.eu/node/84612>> (2022, February, 11).

audience's imagination. Meanwhile the personality of the audience is assigned a special status, the director may decide whether to manipulate or not to manipulate the audience's perception, to provide or not to provide ready answers to the questions proposed, i.e., to determine the place and role of the author's text content in the stage interpretation. "It's about leaving the space and freedom to the audience to understand things as it can. Thus, everyone comes to the theater with his/her own baggage and his/her own experience. For one person the star will be a symbol of communism, and someone else will perceive it as a symbol of show business. The multiple meanings of subtexts can be programmed and predictable. Free interpretation and free understanding of the subtext with regard to the audience's own experience are so permitted"¹.

Thus, generation of a mutual correspondence between the artistic form of the performance and the way of its perception by the audience makes it possible to reveal the inner meaning that unfolds during the stage business and is transmitted with the use of the couple of concepts "expression-reception". Consequently, an environment is formed for generation and transmission of a certain meaning by means of theatrical representation, where a "meaning" plays the role of the central concept around which the experience of cultural communication unfolds. Therefore, during the performance expression acquires reception which is necessary and structured according to it as well as generates an intermediate, interpreting a certain cultural content.

This demonstrates a radical change in the role of the main morphological units of theatrics: the play-writer, director, stage player. Thus, the play-writer waives the need in refutation of previous interpretations, his/her text is written as such when the performance is created. The stage player ceases to be a performer and becomes a co-author. At the center there is his/her personality, transmission of his/her own reflections to the audience: "the stage player no longer associates himself/herself with the character, but instead emphasizes the distance between himself/herself and the character by all possible means. The plot is no longer illustrated by figures. The boundaries of genres are blurred: dance and pantomime merge, as do dramatic and music theaters. Such a theater takes the shape of a project, the work within which is of experimental nature"². The director plays the role of a medium: "the theater gradually turns into some kind of a certain instrument, with the use of which the "author" ("director") directly addresses his "discourse" to the audience"³.

The postdramatic theater in Ukraine actually becomes the newest form of stage representation, in which the literary basis is deconstructed and recorded into another structure. The function of the very word is changed, it concedes to the body language, referring not to the European theatrical tradition, but rather to the Eastern theatrical practices. Thus, plastics, being the main component of the performance, is incidental to Kharkiv Theater "Beautiful Flowers" (Kharkiv City). The creative ensemble of the theater denies the dramatic text as a basis: "we held ourselves out as a theater without words, synthesizing the physical theater, pantomime and various practices of the modern European theater. All the scenes were worked out intuitively, there was no director as it is: the stage players offered their ideas and assembled them together – as a whole organism – into a single story"⁴. Experimenting at the confluence of art and "not art", creating their own artistic language and synthesizing the basic postdrama methods in their performances, the theater staff proves one of the main theses of the postdramatic theater – the text is only one type of the stage material, and the dominant place is given to visuality, reflecting the dominant position and characterized by the freedom of the audience perception. The model of the postdramatic theater "Beautiful Flowers" is characterized by total hybridization: the combination of the verbal theater with the advanced digital technologies, quotation of samples of the classic literature with burlesque techniques etc. The structure of the performance becomes free from the unity of time, place and action, it may be fragmentary, torn, may not contain the division of the text into replicas and remarks, but constitute a pseudo-monological text.

Lviv director Sashko Brama spent considerable time observing and communicating with the patients of the geriatric home that became a basis for the director's idea with regard to the performance "Autumn on Pluto" – five documentary stories from the old people's home, which are told with the use of puppets. The performance was made possible due to a combination of documentary and puppet theater, modern dance and advanced technologies. Postdramatics of the described performance is expressed in the experiment of the form, attention paid to profound transformations of the psychological and emotional state of the audience/participant, hot-button social orientation, a lack of equation of the stage player with the character

¹ Льницька, Л. (2018). Що ти знаєш про вугілля? *Zbruc* <<https://zbruc.eu/node/84612>> (2022, February, 11).

² Лиотар, Ж.-Ф. (1998). *Состояние постмодерна*. Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя, 160.

³ Lehman, H.-Th. (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. London; New York: Routledge; Frankfurt am Main, 460.

⁴ Черкашина, О. (2020). Гра в постдраму. *Zbruc* <<https://zbruc.eu/node/96334>> (2022, February, 10).

(puppets are directed by stage players who permanently stay in the public eye, creating an effect of estrangement), as aesthetics of the postdramatic performance demands not to “play” but to “be”.

Such Ukrainian directors as Maksym Holenko (Kyiv independent “Wild Theatre”), Pavlo Hatilov, Stas Zhyrkov, Andrii Mai, Illia Moshchytskyi (Kyiv theater “Misanthrope”), Roza Sarkisian, Tamara Trunova are outstanding examples of embodiment of creative experiments, radical work with the text, visionary play with the space. Due to their creative developments the mentioned artists build a clear path of motion towards the postdramatic theater, interacting and actively intervening in the realities of the Ukrainian daily life, serving as a kind of the shock therapy, which helps to put together a puzzle within itself in contrast to what is happening on the stage.

The research conducted leads to revelation of the specific features of the postdramatic theater in the modern Ukrainian theatrical practice. It is stated that the paradigm of the modern theatrical process has been significantly changed due to the integration of the Ukrainian art into the world theatrical space. Grant programs and active festival movement allowed development of playwriting of mixed theatrical forms as well as caused active interaction of the theater with anthropology, psychology, sociology and philosophy, being related disciplines. The Ukrainian model of the postdramatic theater is characterized by total hybridization with the dominant visual component; understanding of the text as a multi-variant use of signs; deconstruction, deformation, multi-code nature and pluralism. It is worth noting that there are not all postmodern theatrical practices in the postdramatic paradigm. However, the postdramatic theater is constantly being modified, new modes of its existence emerge, and the artistic speech is enriched, proving the thesis that the mentioned artistic phenomenon has not exhausted itself and is still relevant. Multi-variant environment of the postdramatic performance allows the artist not only to express his/her attitude to different issues, but also to conduct a dialogue with the society. The growing interest of the audience to such practices makes it possible to predict the further growth of the role of the postdramatic theater as a method for an active dialogue in the Ukrainian society.

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