



Scenography of Kazakhstan in the Philosophy and Culture Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the theory and methods connected with the analysis of the special features of formation and development of scenography of Kazakh Theater. The wide range of the questions investigated caused the need to examine the ideological and sociocultural aspects, which influenced formation and development of this art. Special attention is given to classification and to analysis of the basic stages of scenography of Kazakh Theater.

Keywords: *theater, performance, art, culture, scenography, theater set design art, traditional semantic images*

1. INTRODUCTION

The creation of a piece of theatrical art – of a play – is a many-sided process, and the means of its embodiment on the scene lie in different planes. One of which undoubtedly belongs to the art of creation of the artistic image of a play by depictive means, i.e., the art of scenography. Being the organic part of the phenomenon, called theater, scenography, after absorbing into itself full weight of the manifestation of different forms of depictive skill, from one side, opens a wide field for the interpretation of images and forms created by it in the space of stage. From the other side, specific character and the special feature of the interpretation of a play as an independent work, could be clearly understood under close examination, analysis and consideration of interaction of the consciousness of artist with the environment during free-flow artistic mastery.

Such a consideration of artistic trends, institutes, and specifics of the innovative activity of artists of Kazakh Theater through the prism of various artistic strategies and viewers' perception can contribute to clarified understanding of scenography as an art of a special type of intentionality, addressed to the spiritual world of an individual. After all, creativity in the development of the artistic image of a play by means of scenography is a specifically human activity in which the real world is "refashioned". Set designer not merely copies a model, but he tries to identify the underlying meaning, and interprets a dramatic world in such a way as to give it a new sounding and to express new insights and meanings. As a result, artist adds his own, individual vision to the objective characteristics of the "reality" created by dramaturgy and by producer's intention on stage.

A critical approach to the contemporary forms of art studies comes forward as objective for the solution of the research problem – the analysis of the methods of the interpretation of dramaturgical work by the artistic means of set design. With that, the analysis of different sides of the art of scenography with the attraction of philosophical, culture logical and aesthetical concepts makes it possible to take a fresh look and to broaden understanding about this form of artistic creation. Equally relevant remain the approaches oriented to the empirical level and, even, immediate pragmatics. Furthermore, to immerse into the specific problems of Kazakh set design, a preliminary comprehension of the significance of this form of art in the context of entire domestic culture is

objectively required. Because, as it seems to us, this form of art most fully reflected the unique experience of mobilization by the Kazakh culture of its possibilities, and authentic penetration into depths of which is attained only through the prism of ideological-semantic, socio cultural and spiritual-moral priorities.

It goes without saying, that comprehension of the processes and phenomena proceeding in the culture assumes a sufficient time. In other words, they must reach a certain level of historical maturity so that both the deep ontological bases could be “unfolded” and the initial stages and early forms could be “opened” for the efforts of research thought. Such an *insight* suggests the *recreation* of the semantic structures of the field of culture as the field of values, which is formed between the consciousness and the objects, when comprehension directly undergoes not meaningful “what” of the objects of philosophical research, but their “how”. In this case, it is understandable that their contemporary status and role cannot be described by traditional methods or with the aid of the classical technologies: the new approaches, definitions, methods of study are required. The methodology which makes it possible to compare the objects of the past in the differentiated time and the space is necessary for the solution of this problem [1].

Thus, with the ontological approach to the analysis of the phenomena of artistic culture and art that synthesize various ethno-cultural traditions and cultural-civilizational worlds, the field of research becomes the sphere of contact and continuity of consciousness and the objective world of human existence, that is, the field of perception between “consciousness” and “the world” - insight into cultural meanings of “self-in-itself-self-showing” phenomena. According to Heidegger, the essence of human being is that it never is, but always has to be, that is constantly to be thought of as its own possibility. Culturalogically this postulate comes out as the requirement of historicity in the approach to the phenomena of culture and art through the existential Dasein analytics [2].

The sustainability and viability of culture are in many respects determined by the development of the structures, which constitute its unity and integrity. The integrity of culture assumes the production of the uniform rules of behavior, common memory and common worldview. The mechanism of tradition is specifically directed toward these (interpreting and stabilizing) aspects of culture functioning. Especially,

this relates to the theatrical art, because theater is most tightly connected with the environment where it is developed. For the complete insight into the sense of theatrical action, the knowledge of way of life, the sensation of the rhythm of the life of people is necessary. The roots of theatrical art grow into the very thickness of people environment; a theater concentrates the entire life of people to the smallest traits and details. Along with the fact that the structure and foundations of the development of traditional Kazakh culture were determined not only by its own internal sources and historically formed features of the economic, and socio-political way of life of the inhabitants of the Great Steppe, they also underwent drastic changes caused by broad involvement in the traditional system of nomadic culture, urbanized culture of the West, and settled-agricultural civilizations of the East. This circumstance allows considering our problem (originality of cultural identity) with the view of the types and ways of its integration into the value and meaning contexts of socio cultural objectification of philosophical universals.

At the same time, in studies dealing with the problems and issues of integration of European civilization with the spiritual and ontological foundations of Kazakh traditional culture, it should also be taken into account that the interaction in the territory of Eurasia of the artistic culture of the East and West has undergone a fairly long evolution and differed in its features in each region and on each historical stage. In that way in the preceding centuries, the influence of the cultural worlds of the West and the East on the Kazakh culture was episodic and partial: at the level of perception and assimilation of individual elements of cultural traditions, art and artistic and aesthetic values, from the middle of the nineteenth century, a global nature. Whilst the European culture, which has developed as a type in the Modern Age, in the process of forming classical genres of professional creativity is perceived and mastered already in the sense of structural and systemic integrity, including not only art, but also other components of culture (with all its modes of expression, mechanisms and forms of public functioning). The mastery of the “new” for the traditional Kazakh culture types of art became a result of that process. The peculiarity of the historical development that brought Kazakhstan to the ranks of developed countries within only a few decades of the 20th century was due to the avid and rapid assimilation of all the achievements of world science,

technology, and culture; creative perception and application of the “new” experience of political, social, economic and artistic development to the special historical conditions of their own state and sociocultural construction, to which Kazakh art has used to make its development in accordance with world standards in historically shortest time. It is this ability to use art experience of neighboring countries creatively and in timely manner has helped the Kazakh culture make a giant leap and reach great heights in a much shorter timeframe than it would have been possible to do, remaining within the boundaries of its own cultural traditions. After being adapted to the new social and economic, ideological and political conditions, national tradition inspired its creative and artistic potential, special features of life comprehension and aesthetical values into the sphere of scenography as well.

From the time of the formation of Kazakh Theater, in the years of social and cultural transformations, transition periods, time of the bloom of the ideology of social realism and time of the wreck of this system, materials about scenography of plays have accumulated, which, as time showed, play an important role in the culture of Kazakhstan. Thus, exploring the initial stage of Kazakh scenography, the years of its formation, it is possible to note that this tendency appeared, it would seem, in the specific leveling of “domestic” cultural field due to the introduction of “foreign” experience. On the other hand, the main thing in this process, after all, consisted in the fact that in all stages of the mastery of “foreign” the traditional Kazakh culture generated the unique capability for the perception of new and different as “friendly” by way of development of its inner intellectual, creative and spiritual potentials. The development of new values and priorities by the Kazakh culture confirmed the most important truth that the true identity of the nation, its spiritual decolonization is not connected with the denial of other cultures or the borrowing of their achievements, but with the revelation in its own national culture of ontologically rooted in it universal values. The extraordinary plasticity of Kazakh traditional culture, inherent in it high degree of adaptability to new art forms and artistic practice, naturally led to a new kind of art as an integral part of the holistic artistic process.

A wide range of issues related to the genesis of Kazakh theatre scenography naturally leads to the need for reflection on it in the context of the famous B. Berezkin’s concept of evolutionary change of

system of art-graphic design of world theatre performances. Taking into account that the practice is in relation to cognition is not an *external factor*, but its *immanent constituent part*, it should be noted that it is the practice of Kazakh folk theatre that became the starting point of knowledge and way of existence and dynamic development of modern Kazakh theatre scenography. Therefore, consideration of the Kazakh folk art through the prism of known concepts as the unique matrix can clarify the matter of our issue. Going forward, it should be noted that the evolution of Kazakh theatre scenography, as it turned out, reflected the complexity and diversity of the entire global theatrical process. With the difference that the main stages of its development were completed in a shorter time. On the Kazakh land, the centuries-old history of theatrical and decorative art has been compressed in several decades, and it is quite natural that, at the same time, the course of its evolution did not always coincide with the mainstream and the evolutionary features of the art of the scenography of the world theater.

It is well known that the art of *acting* was a special subject of the scenography of folk theater, the first in the history of the world theater set design system. The dominant function of the scenography was to directly participate in the *acting*. After all, the acting principle in the theatrical action as a kind of art is ontologically rooted; it is unremovable, since the *acting* and the *art* are fundamentally inseparable. Moreover, in the history of world culture it also happened that in certain sociocultural areas *acting* existed only in the field of the artistic and only as an *art*.

Turning, in this connection, to the history of domestic artistic creativity, it should be emphasized that Kazakh folk theater art reveals a number of scenic techniques that can be attributed to the primary elements of the *acting* scenography. For example, the theatrical performances of the bearers of musical and oral-poetic tradition of *sal* and *seri* abounded in these techniques; they were inherent to the people's comedians *quaqy* as well. (By the way, Alkei Margulan, in his studies devoted to the creative activity of the bearers of the musical and oral-poetic tradition of *sal* and *seri*, dwelt on the description of their costumes. He wrote that even in everyday life the costumes of folk actors were distinguished by their unusual color, splendor and even pretentiousness. If such clothing began to be worn by the villagers, *sal* abandoned it, and were sewing clothes for himself from an even more expensive and bright fabric, or

from coarse felt or untreated leather, but necessarily with a lining of a costly, beautiful, inaccessible for the majority of people material). Undoubtedly, the spectacular side of performances performed by steppe actors was usually provided with a high degree of their creative potential, invention and fantasy. However, one cannot deny the fact that bright, unusual styles, fancy dresses, aimed at impressing the spectators, stand out from their environment, were designed for the effect of *theatrical spectacle*. (The theoretical development of these questions depends to a large extent on the concept shared by theorists - the problem of the existence of man and society. A deeper understanding of the typological characteristics of the cultural worlds of the West and the East could reveal and reinterpret the diversity of historical experience, the difference and similarity of the mental structures of settled-agricultural, urban and nomadic culture).

Elements of *acting* scenography were also present in the first productions of a professional Kazakh Theater in 1920s. Probably, this circumstance genetically predetermined the regularity and speed of mastering the “new” system of decoration for the theater by the Kazakh Theater - the decorative art, and explains the fact that in the real history of the domestic theater, the designated characteristics of the scenography are very conditional, especially since the element of *acting* decoration never completely disappeared from the stage of the Kazakh Theater, being preserved and already being recognized as the most important element in the work of artists and directors.

A special subject of artistic cognition following the design of theatrical action is the surrounding sphere of the material world covered by a broad concept - the *environment*. Representation of the place of action became a dominant function of the new system, which could not be carried out by an actor, since; using the terminology of M.Kagan, it was “singled out” from actor’s performing art. This contributed to the further differentiation of theatrical professions, and the decorative art was completely freed from the *acting* element and reached its typological purity: the theatricality of the *acting* scenography, laid down by the very nature of this kind of creativity, was replaced by pictorialism. The reproduction of a specific, recognizable place of action had become the main task of a theatrical artist (as a rule, it was only necessary to follow the playwright's exact steps). However, by the middle of the last century, in the design of the play, fundamentally new qualities of the place of action began to appear, somehow

interpreted by the artist. Scenography again become an indivisible component of the whole unfolding action on stage and was inseparable from the actor's performance, but now on the level of stage synthesis, which is qualitatively different from the syncretism of the people's theater.

In the practice of modern Kazakh Theater, the tasks of interpreting a dramatic work with artistic means of scenography occupy one of the important places. However, for the sake of objectivity, we should notice, that there are not so many performances in which the visuals would be their most important component. In this regard, the productions of Nurkanat Zhakypbai, one of the few Kazakhstani directors who believe in and skillfully use the artistic and imaginative possibilities of scenography, stand apart. Brightness and unusualness of plastic solutions of N.Zhakypbaimake artists, who work with him, search for the optimal solution of his directorial intention. In addition, the scenography of the play “Sulu men Suretshi” (in the translation “Beauty and the Artist”) based on T. Akhmetzhan's play became a vivid confirmation of this. The visual series in this staging has a very special place: the image has not only become a part of the artistic structure of the play, it possesses a sense-making role. The director Zhakypbai invited Kabyl Khalykov to be the production director of the play. Moreover, his place in the play became one of the defining.

The pictorial interpretation of any performance is in numerous senses connected with the direction, drama, music, acting, etc. They do not work taken separately. In the play “Beauty and the Artist,” along with the analysis of the whole stage action, the decorating solution requires consideration of the staging in its integrity, and this is impossible without determining what the artist is doing.

It is worth emphasizing that today the situation in Kazakhstan's scenography is determined by the level of tasks that the theatrical artist sets for himself, and the ideological and conceptual level of his reflection. It is also clear that set design is intellectual work. This art can only be carried out by a very educated person, able to comprehend both complex social processes, and the subtle problems of art, to respond to latest discoveries in artistic creativity and technology achievements. But most of all, as it seems to us, a modern theater artist needs the ability to understand and deeply feel what is important for the world in the present, and in what direction it is developing.

The artistic and visual solution of the play “Beauty and the Artist” is distinguished by a special philosophical, intellectual maturity, freedom and readiness to penetrate to other lines of the spirit without fear of losing its form.

It is likely that the director conceived his play rather as a legend about the artist: it was not a specific human destiny that interested the director; he was inspired to show a creative person. Switching not to the events of the biography of the central character of the play - the artist, but concentrating on the refraction of the fact of life in the poetic consciousness of the main character, and therefore the play is not based on a cross-cutting action, but on a series of free episodes-pictures related to each other only associatively. The real environment of the play exists in it being reflected through the prism of the main character’s poetic vision of the world. Each subsequent act of the performance is perceived by the installation of free visual suites. Sometimes it seems that the image breaks away from the narrative of the play, becomes “uncontrollable,” but it is this “liberation” that makes the scenography unexpected, unpredictable, and unbelievably beautiful.

The whole scenography of the play is based on the conflict between the two main themes. The first theme develops in complex-nuanced gradations of silvery-turquoise tints. In an infinitely variable, alive, and coordinate with music and light space, there is another, equally important component - an endless cascade of fantastic, snow-white sails, once soaring high above, then forming an impenetrable wall. Only in the finale, they slowly sink down with a kind of counter-movement to the last rise of the heroine skyward, to the inescapable worlds of her dreams.

This desire to visualize the hidden ontological structures and motives of the characters' actions was realized in the clarity of the planimetry of the outer and inner space of the scene. The rejection of the image of routine details, the concentration of the whole spectrum of scenography possibilities on invisible semantic structures, revealed the propensity and adherence of the directors of this performance to certain objects (sails), turning them into a symbol-metaphor (dreams, hopes).

As a result, the scenery became allegorical not only in its formal, but also in its content nature. The ideas contained in it are attempts to see the invisible and hidden, the surreal and the secret, both in the

surrounding world and in one's own soul. The ontological priority is given to an abstract idea that is above, outside or inside visible objects, but which provides by the very fact of its existence, both the internal structure of the world of things, and its appearance and order. The objects located on the stage are trying to become a materialized symbol of their ideal essence. Supremacy of internal and metaphysical factor of the artist, instead of external and physical are brought to the fore.

The sails, torn from the real context, turning into a specific metaphor as an object-symbol - concentrated in themselves all the possible fullness of meanings through which the director and the artist of the play tried to convey the invariance of rules and laws operating in the universe from the initial point of its genesis to the anticipated results.

The space of the play “Beauty and the Artist,” designed by Kabyll Khalykov, with seemingly intentional destruction of all the postulates of Euclidean geometry and the requirements of the linear perspective, begins to be perceived as a natural environment, plastically justified both for actors and lifelike convincing for the audience.

The apparent aspiration of the director to the conventionality of the abstract displacement of the characteristics of the “real” and “subconscious,” rational and symbolic representation of the mythopoetic meanings of drama, inspired Halykov to experiment with stage lighting as well. The unlimited breadth of color gradations through stage lighting opened the artist almost unlimited possibilities. In general, the idea of light in human consciousness, directly or indirectly, is connected with the divine idea. In the hands of an experienced artist, lighting contributes to the “release” of the unreal from the invisible realm. In theater, the “enchanted” light carries in itself the riddle of “unreal,” because the meaning of light is always permeated with special magic. Any changes in the nature of light are always perceived by the viewer as an immaterial beginning, symbolizing the mystical change of being. Identified with the idea of the spirit and essence of the spiritual, the light gradations in the play “Beauty and the Artist” are equated with the life-giving principle and divine love. Through the constant plastic tension of the scenery, as if under a luminous stream, the artist allows the viewer to, almost, physically feel the amplitude of mental vibrations and the rhythms of the “psychological” heat of acts. The complex light plot,

the architectonics of the space-topological constructions of the stage design of the play, helped to reveal the time characteristics of the action scene modeled on the stage.

In this play, yesterday incompatible pictorial principles, techniques, and ideas were crossed, opening the way for new creative insights. The scenery of Khalykov Kabyl to the play “Beauty and the Artist” became full-fledged character of the play and ensured the completeness and sense of the aesthetic impact of this staging on the viewer as a whole. This attitude to the artistic image of the play – like to a living organism, developing, constantly in contact with the viewer, seems to be the most important and most promising for modern scenography in Kazakhstan.

The scenography of modern Kazakh Theater synthesized and made painting, sculpture, graphics, and architecture act on the stage. Introduced on the stage, they acquired an “acting” quality, as the essence of the scenography is contained and manifested in its fundamentally functional beginning, as it acts along with the actor and opens in the course of and during the performance of the play (in the mode of “here-and-now-being”). After all, the theater has always been and will remain an *acting*. In the words of B.Brecht: Everything that stands on the stage must act, and what does not act, does not belong here. [2, 531p.].

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