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## THE CONCEPT “PLASTIC CULTURE” IN THE CONTEXT OF ACTING

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### *N. Ihnatieva. The concept “plastic culture” in the context of acting*

A person exists in a certain cultural environment and is always adapting to it. The human need for movement and self-expression contributes to the development of sports, theater, dance, and pantomime. Sport allows you to develop and demonstrate the physical capabilities of a person. Dance, pantomime, and acting create artistic images that reflect the character's nature, feelings, emotions, spiritual values, and attitude to certain personal events as well as social life.

The development of a person's thinking process and feelings has a certain effect on their body, how they move, how they gesture, what poses they choose, etc. The forming of a theatrical image in the drama theater requires an actor to have a certain plastic culture combined with the ability to reproduce the internal psycho-emotional states of the character.

Therefore, there is a need to clarify the content and wider application of the concept of “plastic culture” in the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena, particularly, the performing arts.

**The purpose** of the study is to reveal the meaning of the concept of “plastic culture” in the context of acting and to identify problematic aspects regarding its application in the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena.

**The methodology.** The research was conducted by analyzing existing cultural and art historical terms, identifying similarities and differences between certain socio-cultural phenomena related to the field of plastic culture.

**The results.** The concept of “plastic culture” covers a wide range of physical and movement abilities, including not only artistic and creative activities, in particular performing arts (dance, pantomime, clowning, various types of theater, circus), but also such cultural

achievements as physical culture, sports, leisure and play activities, etiquette, politics, etc. So, the concept of “plastic culture” can be defined as a sphere of physical, non-verbal, informationally significant human actions and manifestations in space and time, which are influenced by social, cultural, ethical, political, professional and psychological aspects of human life.

**The scientific novelty.** The article offers a substantially clarified definition of the concept of “plastic culture” in the context of acting, and outlines the characteristic features, forms of existence, and structure of plastic culture as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

**The practical significance.** The materials of the article can be used by culturologists and theater critics to further understand the essence, forms, and structure of plastic culture as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and to facilitate creative comprehension of the plasticity in stage performance by actors and directors.

**Keywords:** *culture, plasticity, plastic culture, theater, acting, stage movement, actor's plastic expression.*

### *Н. М. Ігнат'єва. Поняття «пластична культура» у контексті акторської діяльності*

У статті розглянуто поняття «пластична культура» у контексті театрального мистецтва та акторської майстерності. Проаналізовано зміст культурних і мистецьких термінів і понять, що пов'язані з пластичною виразністю виконавців ролей. Акцентовано на необхідності ефективного використання пластики в професійній діяльності актора власного тіла для створення виразної фізичної форми художнього образу. Зазначено про вплив соціальних, політичних, культурних, етнічних та інших соціокультурних факторів на фізичну поведінку людини і, відповідно, потребу актора у їх врахуванні під час створення сценічної ролі. Висвітлено необхідність

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гармонійного поєднання в грі актора внутрішнього стану персонажа з його зовнішнім виразом. Запропоновано авторське визначення терміна «пластична культура».

**Ключові слова:** *культура, пластика, пластична культура, театр, акторське мистецтво, сценічний рух, пластична виразність актора.*

### Introduction.

**The relevance of the research.** Theater art is quite unique and demands constant self-development from actors. Actors are expected to be well-rounded in order to portray characters in plays of various genres. They must play characters of opposite personalities, education, and spiritual development, who may exist in different historical eras, have different jobs and social statuses. It goes without saying that the characters should differ not only in costumes but also in the means of expression used by actors to create a certain image, including “plasticity”.

Young actors need to understand the distinction between the “plastic culture” («пластична культура») of one historical period and the other, in particular, how sociocultural values affect a human’s psychological life, how they physically behave in certain circumstances, and how their psycho-emotional state is reflected in their movements.

**Research problem.** The concept of “plastic culture”, despite its widespread use by many Ukrainian artists and scholars, has not yet been fully defined. Therefore, when studying the plastic expressiveness of actors as a professional skill and the plastic self-expression of a person in the socio-cultural space, the researcher must clarify the meaning of this term for further accurate use.

**Existing research.** Despite the more than two-thousand-year history of theater, the thorough study of physical movement and actors’ plastic expressiveness, its scientific substantiation dates back to the XIX century with the research of F. Delsarte and E. Dalcroze.

During the XX century, famous directors and actors who created their theatrical systems were involved in the study of actors’ plasticity and the search for methods of developing plastic expressiveness. All of them shared the idea that the

actor’s plasticity on stage should become a vivid expressive tool in creating a character.

Some contemporary Ukrainian researchers, such as R. Nykonenko (2023), O. Zhukovin (2011), O. Abramovych and A. Kudrenko (2020), N. Chumak (2021), and others, show interest in studying various aspects of plastic culture.

In particular, R. Nykonenko studies plastic direction in contemporary Ukrainian theater. In the context of the research, the author clarifies the concepts of “plastic direction”, “plastic expressiveness of the actor”, “plastic vocabulary of the actor”, “plastic solution of the performance”, “plastic lines”, and “plasticity in theatrical vocabulary” (Nykonenko 2023, p. 119–126). Plastic directing, according to the author, is a type of stage-theatrical activity that uses a visual-bodily approach in the conveyance of the director’s thought (ibid., p. 122) and, although the scientist does not use the term “plastic culture”, he considers the actor’s plastic expressiveness as “a set of special skills and abilities” (ibid., p. 123), which help creating an artistic image, and the “actor’s plastic vocabulary” serves as a sort of artistic system “that develops under the influence of two complementary processes – sense- and form- creation” (ibid., p. 123). Plastic lines build the relations of an object with space at different levels, and as a result, the plastic solution of the performance includes both the actors and their interaction with the stage environment (ibid., p. 123).

O. Zhukovin examines stunts as a component of spectacular art emphasizing the importance of the actor’s plastic culture. The author pays special attention to the professional qualities of the actor, which are of great importance in the movement culture during the acting, in particular stunts on stage and in the cinema (Zhukovin, 2011, p. 231–240).

O. Abramovych and A. Kudrenko define plastic culture “as a complex of special theoretical knowledge and practical skills of choreographic, plastic and movement nature necessary for the actor to creatively comprehend the plastic image of the character” (Abramovych, Kudrenko, p. 173).

In our opinion, interesting is the study by N. Chumak “Plastic Self-Expression of a Person as a Cultural-Anthropological Phenomenon” (2021), in which the object stands for the process of evolution

of plastic culture in the context of philosophical reflection (Chumak, 2021, p. 17).

However, in English-language scientific discourse, there is no direct equivalent to the concept of “plastic culture” («пластична культура»). About the body and movement of an actor, Western artists use words related to the human body and bodily functions. They include “bodily” and “physicality” (Woltmann, 2024) which form the concept of “bodily practices” (body-related or physical), and “physicality” (which means the quality of being full of energy and strength (Cambridge Dictionary, n. d.), “physical theater” (Tran, 2022). These terms refer to the physical or bodily development of an actor and the expressive use of his or her own body while performing.

**The purpose of the article** — is to reveal the meaning of the concept of “plastic culture” in the context of acting, and to identify problematic aspects regarding its application in the analysis of theatrical practice and socio-cultural phenomena.

#### **Presentation of main material.**

In the publications by N. Bolsha and N. Yefimchuk “Terminological Dictionary of Cultural Studies” (2004), Z. Hipters “Cultural Studies Dictionary-Guide” (2006), P. Hertchanivska “Cultural Studies: A Dictionary of Terms” (2015 p.) the term “plastic culture” is not mentioned at all.

In the “Dictionaries of Artistic Terms” (2016, compiled by H. Sotska, T. Shmelova (p. 13), and 2020, compiled by I. Shyriaievska, N. Bilokon (2020, p. 13)), contains the term “plastics” as an artistic expression of volume in works of fine art. Moreover, the term “plasticity” is often used as an identical (substitute) to another term “sculpture”, and applies to different types of art. Therefore, the term “plastic arts” refers to painting, architecture, sculpture, graphics, etc. However, the phenomenon of “plastic culture” and its components in theater art is virtually not covered by any dictionaries.

In theater, actors, performing onstage, in some way *reflect a person's life* (Zahnitko, Shchukina, 2008, p. 596). That is, through the acting, actors *reproduce* the phenomena and events of both social life and the individual (ibid., p. 84). They represent another person, creating artistic images (ibid., p. 324). *Images*, regardless of the genre of the performance and theatrical direction, have a special

way of conveying reality and a specific form. This form becomes a system of expressing the content of the play through artistic means, that is, the external form reveals the essence of the phenomenon itself (ibid., p. 639). In other words, the internal and external components in theater art are closely interconnected, interact and complement each other, and, therefore, these components are also present in the acting profession. And it is only in the combination of internal and external that an actor can play their character.

In the context of the actor's profession, the form of external display is the plasticity of the human body, i.e. the role performer. In fact, acting plasticity requires harmony, rhythmicity, and general coherence of body movements (Zahnitko, Shchukina, 2008, p. 388). However, the word “movement” has many meanings, two of which are important for an actor. One is related to the body and its parts, changing its positions and movement. And the second meaning refers to a change in the state of mind through experiences and inner feelings caused by the human thought process as a reaction to external circumstances (ibid., p. 527). It is the inner feelings and thinking of a person that affect the way he or she moves, gesticulates, and chooses postures, in other words, an actor's whole body. In a person's day-to-day life, external manifestations occur by themselves depending on the person's inner self-awareness, while on stage the plasticity of a new personality for the actor is recreated. Such a selection of movements requires hard work, as the actor needs to cover the specific features of the character's life — the historical era, the existing culture, social status, life and professional skills, health, emotional experiences, and even political events.

A person exists in a certain cultural space and is always adapting to the environment. From a very young age, they learn to walk, run, and jump — this is their natural physiological need for movement. But under certain circumstances, for example, in artistic activity, plastic movement and physical actions become a means of cognition and recreation of certain events and characters in art, as well as a form of creative self-expression.

In her research, N. Chumak (2021) claims that human plastic culture and self-expression

are influenced by the processes taking place in society: ideologies, cultural and social processes, worldviews, and everything that dominates society in a particular historical period (Chumak, 2021, p. 174–175). The author draws attention to the fact that the human worldview and self-awareness are manifested in various plastic forms, not only in architecture, sculpture or costume but also reflected in body language, i.e. plastic. As far back as ancient Greece, the perfection of the human body became a theme for fine artworks and emotional-imagery manifestations mainly in dance (ibid., p. 22–26), but in the process of evolution and change of eras, plastic culture also changes. The author points out that the plasticity of the human body becomes a reflection of socio-cultural, political events and new requirements in society, that is, a system of values that influences a person's attitude to themselves and their self-expression.

A person can express themselves physically in everyday life — it depends on their social status, their emotional state, and the situation they are in. In the process of historical development and culture creation, plastic features appear in various types of human activity — in the technique of various sports and dance, certain rules of physical behavior in politics, business, and the military, and almost every profession has its specific movement plasticity. So, in any field of activity, a person manifests themselves not only through words and speech but also through body plasticity, movement, gesture, etc.

The actor should find the movements that will accurately reflect the life of a particular character, and thus the set of spiritual and material values, i.e. his culture.

Culture is a rather multifaceted concept, the definition of which can be found in all the above dictionaries (some of them are more extensive) and which include all types and products of human activity. Material, spiritual, and artistic human activity, i.e. culture, is manifested in the person through external personal and related features. It is these features that the actor needs to rediscover when creating their character. Personal traits usually include general physical, anatomical, anthropological, and functional properties of the body. All of them are important in the process of developing an image. General physical (age, height,

physique, gender, weight) and anatomical (body composition) features essentially determine the type of actor or actress. Most often, they remain unchanged, although there are exceptions: for example, when a performer needs to lose weight or gain weight for a role (sometimes this is created by a special costume), or change their appearance or age with makeup and various overlays, etc. Anthropological features, such as ethnicity, nationality, and race, also hardly change. The most powerful thing that an actor can change is the functional properties of the body, which include voice, speech, articulation, facial expressions, posture, gestures, and gait. Among the most distinctive features of an actor's plastic culture, the functional characteristics of the body can be attributed primarily to posture, gestures, gait, and facial expressions. However, all other features affect their physical expression in the process of artistic transformation on the stage.

Of course, human communication happens primarily through words. Verbal communication is dominant in society, it is developed and reflects the process of bilateral (even multilateral) exchange of information through the use of a system of a set of words in one language environment. However, in real life, nonverbal communication accompanies a person all the time, reproducing a person's sensual and emotional state, desires and thoughts. Sometimes, people use gestures consciously, for example, trying to draw attention to themselves or give certain signs, but most often it happens on a subconscious level, accompanying human speech and revealing attitudes towards the content of the conversation.

On the stage of a drama theater, a specific situation arises: the actor must play a literary character in a conditional time and space, in conditional circumstances, as if they were a real person with inherent thoughts, feelings, and actions. The performer needs not only to memorize the text and “feel” the role but also to organically embody it with the help of plastic means of artistic expression — gestures, postures, movements, bodily rhythm, that is, to find a special way of non-verbal communication.

The actor's body is a kind of “plastic material” (“plasticine or clay”), with the help of which they create, so to speak, “sculpt” the corresponding

artistic image. In this context, the actor's art resembles the plastic arts. However, unlike works of plastic arts, which capture the results of the artist's artistic creativity in a static, "bronzed" form, acting is a *live, active, movement-based (plastic-cultural) activity*. When creating a new product in the culture sphere, the actor acts as a *creator*, a generator of ideas and a creator of images on stage. But at the same time, he is a *representative*, meaning a representative of tradition in culture, and, reflecting cultural and historical reality through the embodied artistic image, he becomes a subject of theatrical action.

**Conclusion.** So, the concept of "plastic culture" can be defined as the sphere of physical, non-verbal, informationally significant human actions and manifestations in space and time, which are influenced by social, cultural, ethical, political, professional and psychological aspects of human life. This concept, in our opinion, covers a wide range of

physical and spiritual abilities of a person, including not only artistic and creative activities, in particular the performing arts (dance, pantomime, clowning, plastic, dramatic and musical-dramatic theaters, operetta theaters, opera and ballet theaters), but also other cultural heritage of mankind — physical culture, sports, leisure and play activities, etiquette, politics, business, etc. In the context of acting, "plastic culture" requires role players to have plastic skills from various spheres of human life or the ability to quickly grasp them and adapt to perform on stage.

**Prospects for future research.** In the process of further research, it is advisable to consider the place and role of actor's plasticity in the systems of different theaters, innovative approaches in the attitude of directors to the plastic expressiveness of performers, and the functioning of plastic theaters in Ukraine and the world.

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