System of Training Actors in The Contemporary Theater "Image Theater as an Example"

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Abstract

This research touches upon the mechanisms of the preparation and training of actors in Iraqi Image Theater, with director R. Welson as an example. It studies the artistic importance of Image Theater and how it supports Iraqi theater at the level of direction. The first chapter explores this problem by identifying the mechanisms of actor preparation. The second chapter, the theoretical framework, highlights the means of training employed by director Robert Wilson in Image Theater and the most prominent indicators concluded by the researcher. The third chapter reviews the attempts of Director R. Welson in Image Theater during rehearsals. The fourth chapter presents the most important findings, conclusions, recommendations, proposals, sources, references, and abstracts in English.

Keywords: *System- training- Image theatre, rehearsals, Iraqi image theatre, Robert Wilson, Rehearsal Process.*

Introduction

Background and Research Problem

Global theatrical art has witnessed, at the level of directing from the twentieth century until the post-drama, a great interest in the preparation of actors, how to train and refine their tools (body, sound, imagination) being the most important and influential element of communication and association with the recipient. Various methods and curricula have been developed to express directors' perspectives. Hence, these methods and approaches have become numerous, and there are laboratories and workshops specialized in the preparation of actors at the global level despite the influences and developments in theatrical art, the discoveries, and innovations on social, political, and economic status, primarily the reflections of other literary fields in dramatic art.

In our Iraqi theater world, the horizons of theatrical activity have widened; its methods and trends have multiplied in recent years. However, they have been confined to the governmental art institutions represented by the faculties of Fine Arts and the other institutes influenced by international experiences where theater directors are classified according to different schools and artistic trends. Director (R. Welson) is a well-known Iraqi director with innovative mechanisms in training and preparing actors. The researcher determines his research problem by raising the following question: What mechanisms are employed by director R. Welson to prepare actors in Image Theater?

Objectives of the Research

The present research focuses on the system of training actors in contemporary theater: "Image Theater as an example," the artistic values that support theatrical performance (show).

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- Beneficial for students of the faculties of Fine Art, its institutes, and all theatre specialists. The present research touches upon the most important mechanisms of preparing actors employed by director Al-Qasab in his Image Theater and the knowledge platform they (i.e., the mechanisms) generate for those interested in a theatrical direction.
- Beneficial for all workers in theaters, especially theater directors.
- Identifying the System of training actors in contemporary theater as an image theater example.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Mechanisms can refer to a wide variety of things, but generally, they refer to a part of a machine or a set of parts that work together (1). In a more professional context, mechanisms can also refer to processes composed of a series of successive stages, such as attention, measurement, and memory systems (2). In kinesiology, mechanisms are the three stages through which movement is formed: full compatibility, accurate compatibility, and skill or performance stability (3).

On the other hand, training involves preparing for something that will happen in the future (4). This can involve making or getting something or someone ready, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (5). Baalbaki defined it as the process of preparation or processing, whereas Wahba defined it as recasting a work of art to agree with **another** art medium (6). Karoomy describes actors' preparation as training them to use their physical, vocal, and mental tools to embody the characters they act. Jubran Mas'ood defines it as the artist's expression of perfect beauty through its production (7). In terms of the procedural definition, training involves the development of actors' tools, such as their body, voice, and imagination, to acquire performance skills (8).

Good performance requires certain elements to contribute to the development of a positive result. To create an actor with high skills, there is a set of requirements that each director must follow; they are as in the following:

Firstly /Voice Training: An articulated voice is one of the most important means of expression used by actors because "voice and diction are no less important than the body as a tool used by actors. Through voice, many functions indispensable to actors can be performed. The voice is an audio tool that can support the theater picture and clarify it for the audience' (1).

Koklan argues that "articulation is the study that should be first focused on by actors; it is the first principle of art and its peak; it must be learned at the beginning, as children learn literature because articulation is the literature of actors" (2).

Training actors to perform diction results in several tasks

- Development of the human voice in terms of strength and delivery regarding the various sound layers expansion of useful range.
- Development of articulation and pronunciation in terms of clarity, pauses, vocal music, and speed of speech.
- Develop a sense of speech and words to create an emotional bridge between the sender and the receiver by understanding the meaning of speech and the associated feelings to be conveyed to the recipient.
- Developing the speakers' characters in terms of phonological performance and creating harmony between recitation, diction, and the place, time, and situation experienced by the speaker "(3).

The researcher believes that actors should know the meaning of each word, even if it is unclear in terms of the relationship between characters. However, a word may include undeclared complications between characters. Actors should search for what is hidden behind words to provide an accurate impression of their meanings. Often, actors try to give new meanings to the words they articulate; sometimes, they try to provide contradictory meanings to what is in the text. The method of recitation or diction affects listeners, audiences, and spectators; it transmits sensory images that depend heavily on words, their structure, and the way they are toned.

Actors' acoustic flexibility comes only if the respiratory and speech organs are fully relaxed because tension hinders the flow of emotions and feelings. Actors should practice specific exercises to achieve peace. Actors are flexible and are organically linked to organs that produce sound. Because sound changes, actors should take care of the anatomical and functional aspects of their bodies, such as stature, which is necessary for many reasons:

1 - "Flexible stature provides actors with flexibility and beauty and makes movements and performing dialogues similar to a harmonious interconnected organic unity.

2. It helps the respiratory systems to function well.

3. It helps the nervous system to control the body.

4 - It relieves the human body of muscle tension to the required extent (4).

Diction aesthetics are achieved when an actress/actor has a clear and sound pronunciation with flexibility of articulation, which is free from defects, in addition to her/his talent. This comes only through exercises that increase expertise and generate the ability to communicate the meaning of text vocabulary and dialogue.

Diction (elocution) significantly affects listeners because, if performed well, it transmits sensory images that depend heavily on the word, its structure, and how it is toned. An actor who cannot share the power of words and depicts them as signs of different life connotations (if there are defects in pronunciation or articulation) causes words to lose their sensory pictures. Hence, preparation is necessary to avoid faults of wrong breathing and formation tools in articulating letters, in addition to anatomical defects such as Lisping and muttering. A message must retain its value for listeners.

Body Training and Flexibility

The human body is of great importance for visual communication between recipients and spectators. It is a vital tool in communicating ideas and visions in motion in the form of diverse and precise signals and gestures, which is a language based on a diversity of kinetic or dynamic expression patterns as a function of the environmental behavior of individuals and communities in real life; body movements interpret expressive images for spectators.

 Head expressions accompanying theatrical words or phrases constitute gestures and references that express various situations. This represents a system of fundamental importance in deepening character traits in the performance of actors. The face is unique in its ability to communicate with various feelings; it requires great skill in mastering different emotional and sensory states such as joy, sadness, smile, laughter, satisfaction, and anxiety. Hence, "an actress/actor must control her/his facial muscles to impart a desired shape commensurate with his feelings when the role is rendered" (8), explaining the internal world of character, which makes "an actor adopt physical exercises to create for himself — flexibility and adaptability according to the role requirements." (9). The elasticity of an actor's face is insufficient for conveying different situations of expression. An actor needs conscious performance obtained through his understanding of feelings and impressions that lie in words, and his understanding of the

personal aspects to be used in drawing the varying emotional situations by changing dramatic attitudes.

An actress/actor's body is characterized by her/his ability to communicate through non-verbal channels that define the interrelations between human beings; it is transformed into a social language of symbolic connotations, as it offers purposes of actions and behaviors that determine the character's identity on stage. The body's expressions depend on what is stored in the sensory memory, such as memories and (mock) experiences received by the actress/actor through her/his senses to turn them into stimuli through her/his awareness as signs and social and cultural actions in line with social standards as clear symbols, in addition to the languages of other elements on stage. Hence, an actor's body must be refined by developing theoretical and practical expertise.

Expansion of Imagination and Improvisation

Psychologists argue that imagination is a mental process that makes it easier for people to face reality. It is also a way to satisfy wishes and desires, that is, it is a compensatory process that contributes to achieving things that cannot be accomplished. Freud believes that imagination is a way of thinking that stimulates sensory, visual, auditory, and emotional means. According to Freud, daydreams are imaginations of the mind that can actualize them. Yong says that imagination is not intended to uncover facts but tends towards universal truths. Behaviorists argue that imagination is crucial because it guides one's mind. The associative school believes that different sensations result in different mental images. It stresses the existence of visual, auditory, gastronomic, and kinetic images (1).

Psychologists divide imagination into "creative imagination, which forms images in innovative compositions, and interpretive imagination that translates what a person reads or hears from the description through the mental image' (12).

Methodology

The descriptive approach was adopted to be consistent with the nature of the research and its goals. Methods: the documentary method is adopted in formulating the study's theoretical framework, and the deductive method (extrapolation and conclusion) is adopted in the theoretical framework, identifying the research indicators, and determining the research results. The case study method was used to analyze the research samples.

Research Tools: the following tools are adopted

1. Documents (books, magazines, internet, CDs, pictures).

2. Personal interviews: some interviews are found necessary for the present research.

3. Personal experience: as a specialist, the researcher has drawn upon his experiments in theater general and directing.

Research Community: The research community includes the product (of Iraqi Image Theater) and rehearsals conducted by the Iraqi theater director (R. Welson) of the theatrical performances he has directed.

Search Limits

- Time limit: From 2009 to 2014, great experiments won many local and Arab awards.
- Spatial limit: Baghdad theaters (theaters of the College of Fine Arts, Theater Forum, and National Theater) are significant theaters, which have also witnessed some notable performances from some provinces.
- Objective Limit: Studying the references of directorial experiences in the Iraqi theater.

Research Sample Analysis

Images in the (R. Welson) works are considered the starting point for the formation of aesthetics in his works. He is interested in images as the most important element in his theatrical performances (Image Theater). He considers images like poetry; they emerge from meditation and imagination; they are subliminal explosions that occur in poetic life to establish shows on visual composition and highlight the priority of audiovisual. Al-Qasab considers theater a vision first, and then a word. He considers modern image demand as one of the requirements of modern plays. He says, 'An image has become the language of the age; any messages or information, regardless of content, remain inadequate, unless accompanied by visual power in connection... an image remains intact and its time extends beyond the end of the show'(1).

Since director Al-Qasab depends on form and aesthetics in direction, he gives great attention to actors and helps them deal with open spaces, which may contribute to disclosing flaws, problems, or delays. The important thing to the researcher here is the mechanism employed by Al-Qasab in the preparation of actors, their knowledge, and self-realization. Al-Qasab says "an actor has endless capabilities; I deal with actors as people who have great awareness and energy. It is not possible to leave actors without charging and exploiting their energies. In all my directorial experiences, I consider actors as the unextinguishable spirit of work; an actor is a magical energy that needs to be built and provoked; his experiences and knowledge are an essential part in building the general form of the show, which is a bright lighting in the image space and its manifestations." (2)

Al-Qasab's interest in form and image form, which are generally targeted in plays, is key to transformation and training: the show's psychological and spiritual requirements. The space in 'Macbeth' is the decisive factor in the performance of actors, in their shift and in the mechanism of training. The dramatic characters in Al-Qasab's works represent ideas and spirit because they carry the characteristics of dramatic construction, and through it, the general form, on which dramatic characters and shifts are built, is performed. R. Welson thinks that the self revolves in life orbit, which is the actual existence that deserves to be studied and inspected carefully. He says that self is "a relationship between ego and desires; the barrier between ego and desire is how to turn desires into an act carried out by ego".

Salah Al Qasab believes that there are three perceptions to understand the characteristics that actors train to act. These three levels are part of the actors' training mechanisms: spatial, temporal, and objective perception. These enhance actors' understanding and shifting, which helps build aesthetic images in the Al-Qasab theater. Actors deal with form and structure according to these three levels. As Al-Qasab says, "I intend to build a (time) temporal form when I address the human body and consciousness. When I make an actress/actor move according to her/his physical structure and according to her/his logical understanding of her/his reality and behavior, then I have contributed to achieving a logical level in dealing with her/him, which is the most important thing I target since form, place, and time in the theatrical show are useless without a clear and influential impact." (1)

He also refers in his exercise to the "role of organizational director and aesthetic observer," giving freedom to actors to perform and express ideas that are essential in acting. Actors train and exercise to create a new image of dialogue so that their dialogue will be a tool to create an image. According to Al-Qasab, a text in training is a perversion in which text dialogues turn into sounds and pictures, requiring interaction between the actor, director, and filmmaker to create a scene image.

The researcher believes that Salah Al-Qasab's preparation of actors gives integrity in performance to the elements of performance to build a targeted state of shift. The actors' change is obtained through certain restrictions or harmony with those restrictions, which contributes to and builds relationships in the show. A director looks at a performance and its general structure as a group of things and blocks. An

actor is an identity with a spirit and an independent dynamic structure. The actor's movement and performance behavior must be based on positive interactions away from the negatives to shift in terms of body, voice, and imagination.

The researcher concludes that the most important mechanisms adopted by R. Welson to prepare actors in Image Theater are as follows.

- R. Welson depends, in the training of actors, on actors' energy; actors may interfere with the formulation of the theatrical role by provoking them in the way required.
- There is no skill or physical behavioral lesson provided by director R. Welson to actors but there is a group of superficial observations.
- Actors are free to select the proper and convincing behavior; an actor is free to select a professional actor to deal with, and no involvement with amateurs.
- R. Welson selects movements and gestures used by actors; he modifies them and comes up with a new and improved performance.

Results and Discussion

Based on the adopted methods and research tools, the research community was able to analyze the works of the Iraqi Image Theater and the rehearsals conducted by Iraqi theater director R. Welson. Through personal experience and interviews, the researcher identified the importance of images in Welson's theatrical performances and how they contributed to the formation of aesthetics in his works. Welson views images as like poetry, emerging from meditation and imagination, and considers them subliminal explosions that establish shows on visual composition. He believes that theater is a vision first and then a word, and that images are a modern demand and requirement of modern plays. The research community concluded that an image is a powerful tool that extends beyond the end of a show and remains intact.

Accordingly, the researcher found that imagination was related to awareness and cognition. Creativity feeds images stored in memory, which are perceived through cognition. Imagination is also associated with thinking; imagined images concentrate directly on the process of thinking. It must be mentioned here that imagination is not imposed but a consequence of thinking; it is not set on the cognitive process but includes cognitive processes. Since the theater mission, from Greek until today, is the establishment of a mental format symbolizing the world of things attempting to explain natural phenomena, which plays an essential role in acting on technical and creative levels; it helps in turning the story of the play into a real art scene, so an actress/actor should make her/his imagination perform its activities appropriately according to specific operating mechanisms set by rules according to some way or method. Artistic imagination contributes more when sentences are interpreted and improvisation is enhanced, which depends in part on imagination. Improvisation is enhanced depending on sensory experiences such as visual, auditory, or dynamic stimuli, which are stored by emotional memory. Imagination plays a significant role in actors' preparation. It helps implement missions along with simple actions or events to portray diverse or evolving characters and emotions. It is used as a technique that forces actors to use imagination and their skills practically, as well to integrate relaxation, dynamics, concentration, sensory awareness, and emotional processes, and allows personalization, that is, to give something or some personal qualities in a flexible and individual style (13).

The researcher believes that improvisation should imply freedom to choose movements. Each actres/actor expresses her/his emotions in her/his way, which keeps her/him acting away from imitating others. It also

results in vital interaction with improvisation, which gives actors continuous renewal energy.

Actors are prepared to develop improvisation by following video methods to assess what has been achieved; this is the feedback that "refers to performance problems and errors during the review of the tape' (14). The researcher found that this is the process of identifying strengths, overcoming weaknesses, and acting in making characters.

Two- Actor's Role in International Image Theater.

Image Theater is an essential product of post-drama; it is influenced by postmodernism philosophy and is based on the process of presenting visions to perspectives and foundations which create a visual image through (15):

- Undermining: undermining Western ideology through dispersion, delay, and deconstruction by using the language of difference, contrast, and contradiction.
- Questioning: questioning certain knowledge; questioning has become a mechanism to challenge Western philosophy based on reason, presence, and signifier.
- Nihilistic Philosophy: Nihilistic and chaotic philosophies are based on the absence of meaning, undermining reason, logic, order, and harmony — they are illogical and absurd philosophies that spread despair, complaint, and chaos in society.
- Disintegration and disharmony: It is against order and harmony but opposed to the idea of universality; it calls, in return, for pluralism, difference, and irregularity, and the dismantling of what is organized and recognized.
- Dominance of image: Visual image has become a semiotic sign of the development of postmodernism; language is no longer the only organizer of human life; and image has become the main engine of cognitive achievement and the means of revealing the truth.
- Strangeness and ambiguity: postmodernism strangeness, abnormality, and ambiguity of opinions, ideas and attitudes are difficult to understand and absorb.
- The power of emancipation: liberation of man from the oppression of institutions that own discourse, knowledge, and power; liberation of man from illusions of ideology, white mythology, and the philosophy of the center.
- Floating connotations: Mystery, ambiguity, and confusion. In other words, the connotations are not precisely defined. There is no single connotation, but various, different, contradictory, and dispersed connotations exist.
- Getting rid of standards and rules: To get rid of theories and rules of methodology where there is no meaning originally as long as it is undermined, destroyed, and dispersed; there are only different meanings that contradict themselves.

This is reflected in the performance of Robert Wilson (2005). whose works are characterized by chaos and inconsistency. His works reflect the message of the correction and reevaluation of society affected by this devastation, attempting to reform through constructive criticism of life phenomena. It may seem meaningless when performed in this way; however, it becomes important at the cognitive level. It is intended that people perceive and understand these activities, not as keys to understanding their internal psychological states. (16)

Wilson examines repetition and slow motion in actors' techniques and performance to uncover complex emotions and meanings that cannot be observed in traditional performances. He has worked to make actors' experience an attempt of self-revelation through what he calls 'self-external and internal screen.' He uses cultural icons in his works (characters with a universal cultural symbol) like Einstein and Hitler

in the external screen themes and subjects, such as the concepts of space, time, and subject, thrusting them into a self-inner screen, which contradicts these icons and themes. Hence, individuals' cultural structures are floated, which results in questioning the reality of these external cultural formats (17).

Wilson made actors' roles on stage essential compared to the importance of the image and its composition. The actors' roles are the performance of an act carried out by a theatrical character; what actors do is broadcast signals that contribute to the formation of an image formally drawn on stage. Wilson's view is focused on "human actors on stage. They are not acting out of their own will and effectiveness... there are no psychologically elaborate characters, not even an individual character within a coherent scenic context, but characters who seem incomprehensible symbols" (18).

The researcher finds that Wilson considered an actor's body to be an important tool that contributes to the formation of the theatrical image embodied in the show space, as the body has a dynamic property in addition to employing visual and auditory aspects in the performance of dramatic images. Wilson, in his preparation of actors, keeps away from traditional ways, giving actors the freedom to express their social identity.

An actor should not become a star through the self-show of his rare talents but should behave as a responsible individual who represents his community; he must find sources of self-expression of individual and social within himself. Wilson believes that a director is the author of the show; the role of the original author is to fulfill one element, that is, to produce a text; actors must adapt their bodies to the plastic frame in the play as one element of the show.

Wilson selectively deals with handicapped actors. He picked up many of them from the streets.

Therefore, their work is free from previous rigid methods, traditional movement systems, and phrases that indicate their belonging to schools. In experimental theater workshops, Wilson encouraged actors to perform their performances without preconceived aesthetic concepts. Instead of performing dances similar to traditional dances, actors devise their own kinetic styles or develop new movements that highlight their mastery of the art of physical sports. Actors spend their time training to act on stage in a natural way, which does not give the impression that they are acting. (19)

The researcher finds that, through these means, Wilson gives actors an opportunity for free expression; he also gives spectators an opportunity to freely interpret what they see on stage. In general, the process is an educational and therapeutic practice that creates unusual beauty characterized by originality and innovation. Images that imply treatment and have more than one goal been those required by Image Theater. This is not an aimless method or strategy, but rather the output of mechanisms followed in the training and preparation of actors by creating exercises of slow motion or speech, which is a therapeutic and artistic means that includes an extraordinary aesthetic aspect.

Theoretical Framework Indicators

The theoretical study in the introduction highlights several important indicators of the theoretical framework. For example, Image Theater places a strong emphasis on cultivating other techniques, such as playing musical instruments, dance, and theatrical fitness, to enhance actors' performance. This was achieved through slow motion during the training process. External preparation mechanisms deal with body parts, sound, and diction, whereas internal mechanisms focus on imagination, talent, and improvisation.

It is worth noting that the internal (psychological) content and external framework (living mechanism) are intertwined and cannot be separated during the training of actors. The goal was to achieve real and

effective performance. Furthermore, Director Robert Wilson heavily influenced Iraqi Image Theater's scenography, engineering, and design of theatrical shows. An actor's internal energy and visual embodiment are critical components.

The original theatrical text is not as important as the collection of signs and improvisations created. The Iraqi Image Theater does not have fixed mechanisms for preparing actors, but observations are provided to them. The training process relies on actors' energy, and they may even intervene in the formulation of roles by provoking other actors according to the show's requirements. Finally, the international director Wilson utilized improvisation as a crucial method for preparing actors and developing their performance capabilities.

Conclusions

In Image Theater, the preparation of an actor depends largely on their skill set. This is something that Iraqi theater directors understand well, and while they may not have invented any new mechanisms, they are certainly influenced by a variety of curricula and methods that are used to train and prepare actors. It is worth noting that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to training actors; rather, a variety of mechanisms are employed by theatrical directors to ensure that their actors are as well prepared as possible. Whether through traditional methods or more modern techniques, the goal remains the same; to help actors become the best, they can be on stage.

Recommendations

With the ongoing growth of technology and the digital world, the need for actors proficient in digital platforms has become increasingly important. By conducting a study on the preparation of actors in Digital Theater, one can gain valuable insights into the skills and techniques required to excel in this field and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the spectrum of theater training. This could lead to exciting new opportunities for actors and bridging the gap between traditional and digital forms of performance.

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