

THE IDENTITY OF STAGE DESIGN AS A COMPONENT OF UKRAINIAN CULTURE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract. The vocabulary of Ukrainian scenic art is extremely rich in artistic devices and metaphors. The formation of Ukrainian identity on the world art scene explains the growing interest of the scientific community in the phenomenon of Ukrainian culture, thus contributing to the relevance of the study of Ukrainian scenography as one of the aspects of Ukrainian culture of the 21st century. The purpose of the article is to identify the features of the identity of Ukrainian stage design in the context of cultural and social changes of the 21st century and in particular, in 2022. The following methods were used in the study: analytical, typological, terminological analysis and survey. As a result of the study, a list of the main ethnic elements used in theatrical performances to create a metaphorical image of the identity of Ukrainian culture in scenic art was defined. The study examined the issue of identity in scenography and Ukrainian culture in general, including the public's attitude toward the use of ethnic elements aimed at achieving a metaphorical image of identity for the cultural past of the Ukrainian people in stage design. Accordingly, the study conducted a survey of visitors to theatrical events in Kyiv at the Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theatre regarding the placement of ethnic elements as the main component of scenic identity in the production of plays on the stage of the contemporary Ukrainian drama theatre. Summarising the results of the survey, it is possible to trace the Ukrainian audience's preference for the use of traditional attributes in scenography during performances and art events dedicated to the appropriate coverage of Ukrainian culture. This research is of practical importance for stage designers and researchers of the identity of the Ukrainian stage space.

Keywords: *Visual identity, multi-art form, scenography, Ukrainian art, signature style.*

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1. Introduction

In 2022, the identity of scenic design in Ukraine is evolving into a multi-art form. The active use of techniques from other art forms, such as architecture, graphics, sculpture and fine arts, in Ukrainian stage design requires additional research, as it is important to identify and study new phenomena that organically emerge in the artistic space of Ukrainian culture as it revisits its own identity and history, especially as digital technologies are advancing. The focus of the study of contemporary Ukrainian stage design is on the identity of scenography as a component of Ukrainian art and the study of the true picture of stage culture in 2022 when active military hostilities are taking place on the territory of Ukraine.

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According to the Ukrainian musical theatre researcher Kanyuka (2022), theatre culture and its stage space manifests itself as a model of educating the audience, its morality, tolerance, creating high ideals and aesthetic taste. However, changes in the models and trends of Ukrainian theatre generate changes in Ukrainian cultural history, which is why it is important to take into account the ongoing changes in Ukrainian cultural identity during wartime. It is also necessary to study the manifestations of the national and cultural identity of Ukrainians in the 21st century in the field of stage design since art is the primary sphere of reflecting the image of the people and their inner state.

As noted by Popova (2022), Ukrainian stage design in 2010-2020 was significantly influenced by the experience of foreign specialists, which ultimately prompted a rethinking of its processes of artistic and aesthetic formation. Ukrainian scenic art, as seen by contemporary directors, is an architectural and spatial composition and at the same time an abstractedly neutral environment that allows scenic designers to create spatial models in the most common variants. However, the study of Ukrainian stage design must also be adaptive in nature, particularly in the context of the war, so it is necessary to address the issue of scenic identity in the 21st century during the war on the territory of Ukraine.

According to researcher Yankevych (2021), the creators of stage design, as masters of scenography, incorporate light and shadow nuances in their work and the smallest details of *mise-en-scene* to create the complete illusion of experiencing a particular scene. Set designers create two-plane elements, calculate the viewing angle of the audience and create a three-dimensional scenery to imitate walls, fences and other objects. At the same time, a significant number of stage design issues require much more exposure. For example, researchers Brako and Gilbert (2022) believe that contemporary scenic design is created through artistic means that can use interchangeable elements to build and set the background scenery in theatrical performances or other artistic events. However, among other things, it is important to explore not only the sphere of creating scenery in the theatre space but also the scenographic impact on the audience, foreseeing their reactions and preferences.

Veselovska (2022) argues that the influence of digital technologies on Ukrainian theatre and the creation of a worldview through widespread ideologies and social processes has manifested itself largely in the whole generation of stage designers. However, it is also necessary to address the opposite, as the influence of art is extensive in the 21st century, unlike in the 20th, which is why it is necessary to study the public's reaction to the current artistic product created by theatre.

Theatre, as a shared artistic endeavour, has a distinct function in shaping and preserving cultural identity (Kanyuka, 2022). Scenography serves as a platform for encoding and transmitting the meanings of national culture by creating a performance space that is rich in semiotics. The field of Ukrainian scenography possesses a significant historical background that is intricately linked to the development of national identity, albeit briefly. The events that transpired in 2022 served to underscore the imperative for Ukrainian society to assert its cultural identity and revert to the foundations of folk traditions. Examining how modern Ukrainian scenography incorporates aspects of national culture to construct a symbolic representation of identity appears to be a significant research endeavour in this particular context.

The study by Portnova (2018) is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of national and cultural identity, which posit that identity is a construct that is constructed

through communication and subject to historical transformations. According to Gaiduk and Tarapatov (2022), national identity is expressed through cultural practices, artefacts and traditions that possess symbolic significance. Scenography is a structured system of visual codes that is used to create performative communication.

This research contributes to the knowledge by examining the significance of scenography in shaping and visually portraying national and cultural identity through the application of interdisciplinary theories. This study provides an empirical analysis of audience responses and interpretations of cultural codes in scenography, using philosophical concepts such as authenticity, representation and hermeneutics as a framework. This article examines the dynamics of interaction between tradition and innovation in Ukrainian scenography, with a focus on how these dynamics reflect the evolving cultural needs of society. This study presents opportunities for additional investigation into the issues surrounding identity, the portrayal of cultural heritage within the theatrical realm and the function of scenography as a conduit for cultural recollection. Engages in the advancement of interprofessional communication among the fields of theatre studies, cultural studies, philosophy and semiotics to enhance comprehension of cultural phenomena.

This study aims to fill several gaps in existing research. Firstly, it seeks to collect empirical data on the perception and interpretation of elements of national identity and cultural codes in contemporary Ukrainian scenography by the audience. The survey provides insight into the audience's reactions to the use of ethnic markers in the design of stage space. Secondly, the study aims to address the lack of a systematic analysis of the role of scenography in the representation and construction of national/cultural identity in Ukrainian theatre art. It attempts to conceptualise this problem through the prism of theories of identity, theatre semiotics and cultural memory. Thirdly, the study also aims to fill a gap in data on trends in contemporary Ukrainian scenography, balancing between traditional ethnic codes and innovative digital technologies. The survey results reveal certain differences in the preferences of different age groups of viewers. Fourthly, it solves the problem of disparate theoretical approaches to the study of scenography as a space of representation of cultural identity by creating an interdisciplinary conceptual framework, integrating the ideas of cultural studies, semiotics and philosophy of art. Finally, the study addresses the problem of the lack of systematic research on the place and role of ethnic/national codes in Ukrainian scenography in the context of current socio-cultural transformations, in particular the events of 2022, which makes it relevant and significant for contemporary theatre practice and theory. Thus, this study attempts to fill the gaps in empirical data, theoretical conceptualisation and interdisciplinary understanding of the phenomenon of national identity representation in contemporary Ukrainian scenography.

Objectives of the research:

1. To examine the utilisation of national culture and ethnic codes in contemporary Ukrainian scenography, to construct a metaphorical representation of Ukrainian identity within the theatrical realm.
2. To investigate the potential of scenography as a tool for social commentary, critique and advocacy, particularly in addressing issues relevant to the Ukrainian context.
3. To investigate the role of scenography in preserving and promoting cultural memory, especially in times of conflict or social upheaval.

4. To analyse the main performance venues of Ukrainian theatre and their cultural significance.

5. To analyse the respondents' opinion on the importance of stage images in a performance.

2. Materials and Methods

The following methods were used in the study of Ukrainian stage design identity: typological method, terminological analysis, survey and analytical method. The use of the typological method helped to define the basic functions of identity in Ukrainian scenic design and to identify the distinctive features of their manifestation in the theatrical space of the 21st century. The method of terminological analysis in this study facilitated the examination and interpretation of the conceptual part of the article. Using the survey method, the study investigated the perception of ethnic elements of the theatrical identity of stage design and their role in the broader picture of the audience's perception of the ideas of scenic designers. Using the analytical method, this research paper investigates the concept of identity and its representation through the prism of Ukrainian culture of the 21st century. This research method was also used to analyse the results of a survey conducted.

The paper presents an empirical study of the identity of Ukrainian stage design and its understanding by Ukrainians through a survey of the audience. This survey was conducted in Kyiv, Ukraine, at the Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theatre on December 23, 2022. The respondents were 40 participants aged 18 to 60 (including 28 women and 12 men). The respondents answered questions about the metaphorical function of props in the theatre and their understanding of the design of the stage space during performances depicting Ukrainian culture and history.

The survey was conducted in 2 stages: first, visitors to theatrical performances answered questions about the relevance of using ethnic items of a traditional Ukrainian house, during the play's development inside a rural Ukrainian house and then in its yard. The first survey contained a list of ethnic elements placed in the middle of the house and their description. The respondents judged the extent to which a particular element of the set and props corresponded to their ideas about the Ukrainian culture depicted on the theatre stage. The second survey was conducted to determine the perception and presence of a stage design identity in the arrangement of the front yard when depicting historical Ukraine in a theatrical performance. At this stage of the survey, the respondents were also shown the main elements of scenery and props related to cultural Ukrainian identification in the theatre's performance space. After collecting the respondents' answers regarding the identity of the stage design of Ukrainian culture in the theatre space, the results of the survey were analysed and summarised.

Following the completion of data collection about the stage design identity of Ukrainian culture within the theatrical domain, a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the survey findings were conducted. By situating the methods within the specific context of studying Ukrainian scenographic identity through surveys of audience perception of ethnic elements used, this approach offers narrative contextualization. The analysis examines how ethnic elements such as the pokut', windows, oven, etc. metaphorically communicate and represent Ukrainian cultural identity on stage, incorporating symbolic representation and semiotics. The survey explores the

comprehension of scenography portraying historical Ukrainian culture and assesses audience attitudes in the present 2022 context of the war in Ukraine, incorporating historical and social commentary. The educational significance is underscored through the collection of data regarding audience perceptions, which can provide valuable insights for scenographers in designing educational strategies that effectively integrate ethnic elements that align with viewers' cultural comprehension.

3. Results

3.1. Development and characteristics of scenography in Ukraine

The contemporary stage design of Ukrainian theatres is searching for new forms of staging and creating an original presentation of the stage space (Popova, 2022). Meanwhile, using the ethnocultural heritage of Ukraine on the theatre stage triggers the integration processes of scenography. Over the years of its development, the art of stage design has absorbed the cultural and historical characteristics inherent in the cultures of different peoples. Given the events in Ukraine in 2022, the scenography of Ukrainian theatres is experiencing an increasing interest in the use of ethnic elements in props and scenery depicting Ukrainian culture as an appeal to the ethnic memory of the audience. By turning to the history of art and combining it with scenography, a high-quality and modern product is created, which, through its active participation in the theatrical performance, complements the non-verbal vocabulary of performances (Von Rosen, 2021). Traditional symbols, images and motifs used by masters of stage design in the 21st century are mostly an act of awakening the historical culture of the Ukrainian people.

The political landscape and persistent conflicts in Ukraine exert a substantial influence on the evolution of cultural domains, encompassing the realm of theatrical art. These factors contribute to the increasing inclination towards enhancing national identity through the practice of scenography, which actively employs national symbols, narratives and characters. Scenographers endeavour to produce artworks that embody the essence of the Ukrainian populace, their quest for autonomy and their aspiration for tranquillity, highlighting enduring principles and cultural legacy (Galatska, 2022).

In the context of cultural revitalization, a crucial undertaking entails showcasing the profound depth of Ukrainian history, folklore and traditions through theatrical performances. This field of study fosters a profound comprehension of Ukraine's cultural heterogeneity, encompassing its linguistic, musical, choreographic and traditional artistic expressions. The role of scenography is crucial in visually presenting these elements, resulting in a distinct and exclusive theatrical language (Yankevych, 2021).

The development of Ukrainian theatre art is significantly influenced by globalisation, the exchange of international experience and digital technology. The incorporation of Ukrainian theatre into the global cultural sphere is enhanced by a comprehensive understanding of world theatre practices and styles, thereby introducing novel forms and concepts. This process additionally fosters intercultural communication, emphasising the distinctiveness and variety of Ukrainian theatrical art.

Digital technology and new media are increasingly being incorporated into modern scenography, enabling the creation of more dynamic and interactive productions. These technological advancements present novel prospects for audience engagement, offering them distinctive visual and auditory encounters. Digital

technologies facilitate a more profound investigation of themes and ideas, enabling scenographers to engage in spatial and temporal experimentation on stage (Osadcha & Baluta, 2021).

The development of theatre art is significantly influenced by economic conditions and funding. The presence or absence of resources significantly influences the feasibility of implementing innovative concepts proposed by scenographers and theatre collectives. Given the constraints of limited budgets, it is crucial to explore alternative sources of funding such as grants, sponsorship and crowdfunding to sustain the production of high-quality and significant theatre projects (Pogrebniak, 2023).

Scenography serves as a mirror that mirrors and addresses present-day social challenges, social changes and concerns, thereby transforming theatre into a platform for deliberating on contemporary issues. Scenographers can utilise visual art and theatrical performance to explore topics such as social justice, ecology, equality and more, thereby promoting social conversation and consciousness. In this manner, scenography assumes the dual role of an artistic medium and a potent instrument for effecting societal transformation.

In summary, the development of modern stage design in Ukrainian theatres demonstrates a dynamic amalgamation of historical legacy, technological advancements and socio-political circumstances. Scenographers play a crucial role in preserving and reimagining the diverse Ukrainian identity as they navigate the forces of globalisation and cultural revitalization. The convergence of conventional symbols and digital technologies gives rise to a dynamic platform for intercultural communication and societal contemplation within the realm of theatre. Ukrainian theatre continues to thrive despite economic limitations, thanks to its unwavering dedication to artistic superiority and societal significance. In essence, scenography surpasses its function as a mere embellishment on the stage, encapsulating the ambitions, challenges and successes of a nation undergoing significant changes, while inviting viewers to actively interact with the intricacies of present-day Ukrainian society.

3.2. Analysing the impact of socio-cultural changes and war on the identity of Ukrainian scenography

The war had a distinct influence on the operations of Ukrainian theatres and the professional endeavours of scenographers. The military operations conducted in 2022 posed significant obstacles to the theatrical industry in Ukraine. Numerous theatres were compelled to halt their operations, withdraw from the war zone, or undergo significant restructuring of their operations. Stage designers were compelled to adjust to the altered circumstances - scarcity of resources, disrupted logistics and funding issues. Nevertheless, Ukrainian theatres persevered, even in impromptu venues such as bomb shelters, basements and tent cities. Scenographers sought unconventional solutions by employing minimalist and portable scenery. Digital technologies, such as video projections and 3D mapping, were actively implemented in several instances.

Amidst the war, stage designers resorted to a heightened utilisation of national symbols, patriotic motifs, historical themes and recollections of the fight for independence. Ukrainian theatre experienced an increased level of engagement with folklore and ethnic motifs, which have long been integral to its visual identity. Simultaneously, contemporary visual symbols that depicted the actual encounter - such as ruins, barricades and bomb shelters - emerged. Several scenographic solutions incorporated motifs symbolic of the Ukrainian military resistance, including flags and

armoured vehicles, among others. Consequently, the scenography acquired a distinct quality. So, the scenography evolved into a form of artistic documentation of military occurrences.

This study examines the influence of socio-cultural changes on the perception of the audience. The conflict had a profound impact on the prevailing values, perceptions, and national identity of the Ukrainian population. The prominence of consolidation centred on patriotic and national liberation ideologies became evident. There existed a need for artistic creations that accurately depicted present-day circumstances and embodied the unwavering resilience of the Ukrainian people. Consequently, the audience's perception of the scenography, which was derived from these motifs, was heightened in terms of acuity and emotional impact. The utilisation of identifiable national images, codes and attributes evoked a strong response and received endorsement. The audience exhibited a heightened sensitivity towards diverse forms of symbolic recollections about the military conflict.

Ukrainian theatres and scenography played a crucial role in consolidating the dramatic conditions. The transmission of the message of spiritual unbrokenness and the will to resist was facilitated through the utilisation of iconic images of national identity and history in various productions. The theatre evolved into a revered domain where individuals engaged with the realm of artistic significance, while simultaneously fostering a sense of cultural and national cohesion. Therefore, the identity of Ukrainian scenography experienced a significant transformation as a result of the catalysts of war and social upheaval. The phenomenon underwent a shift towards increased patriotism, drawing upon national and historical codes and occasionally mirroring military circumstances. Simultaneously, scenography served the crucial purpose of preserving the national identity and spiritual cohesion of the Ukrainian populace.

3.3. Survey

When studying scenic art, it is important to understand the difference between scenic design as the construction of scenery and scenography, which forms the worldview and the overall vision of the performance, as the difference is too great to be equated (Hann, 2018). Scenography is the art of designing stage sets and environments for theatrical productions and encompasses several key elements that work together to create a cohesive visual and spatial narrative. These elements include: Set Design, Costume Design, Lighting, Sound, Projection, Multimedia and more. When creating a project, a scenic designer follows several characteristics that reflect and combine all of their ideas and facilitate their realization: design goals; tasks, scope and resources needed to achieve them; subject area of the project (Kovalchuk, 2019).

By achieving the goals and objectives, a master of scenic art creates a quality product for the audience. Creating and implementing stage design ideas by scenic designers in Ukraine for 2022, in the realities of war, is conditioned by the relevance of using ethnic elements and ornaments of traditional Ukrainian culture in scenery and props as one of the possible ways to fulfil the request of visitors to art events. The general phenomenon of functioning of Ukrainian theatres in 2022 is due to the combination of different genre formations in the scenographic art, which differ in original methods of interpretation and production creation (Galatska, 2022). A thorough study of the issue of stage design identity as a component of Ukrainian culture in the 21st century involved a survey conducted at the Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theatre on December 23, 2022. The survey involved 40 participants aged 18 to 60

years. The majority of respondents were residents of Kyiv (30 people) and 10 internally displaced persons; 28 respondents were women and 12 of the visitors interviewed were men. Two main thematic planes of Ukrainian theatrical performance were used to create the identity of the stage space:

- traditional Ukrainian rural house;
- front yard of the house.

The ethnic elements presented in the Table 1 were used to recreate the Ukrainian identity in the scenography of the rural house and the front yard.

Table 1. Ethnic elements of the Ukrainian rural house and the front yard

No.	Elements of the house	Metaphorical function
1	Icon corner (ukr. Pokut)	Sacred objects and symbols of the Ukrainian people
2	Painted windows	The eyes of the house through which the family look at the world
3	Threshold and door	Symbol of the beginning and end of the house
4	Painted oven	It is sacred for the owners. It was used to prepare food and heat the house in winter
5	Bed (pil/polyk)	Used for sleeping at night and for everyday activities during the day
6	Table	Symbol of family prosperity
7	Chest	Belongs to a woman. A symbol of her wealth
8	Cupboard (ukr. Mysnyk)	A shelf (or cabinet) for dishes in a village house
9	Decorations and paintings	Such as Petrikovsky painting or embroidered rushniki, adding uniqueness and national flavour to the interior
10	Front yard of the house	Emphasises man's connection to nature and his working traditions
11	Porch and gate	They serve not only as an entrance to the house, but also as a symbol of hospitality
12	Fruit and vegetable gardens	Reflects closeness to the earth and the ability to live in harmony with nature
13	Outbuildings	Such as a barn or cellar, demonstrating the self-sufficiency of agriculture
14	Layout of the house	Sacred objects and symbols of the Ukrainian people
15	Fence/farmstead/wattle fence	Served as a symbol of protection from enemies
16	Well	A symbol of earthly, underground and heavenly being
17	Cart/Brichka	Symbol of a hardworking householder

Source: Completed by the authors

Analysis of the responses of theatregoers shows that, for the most part, respondents saw ethnic elements as an identity and part of Ukrainian culture, but some of the audience members were willing to dismiss certain elements as insignificant contributions to the recognition of Ukrainian culture on the stage space of the theatre. To summarise the survey, it is worth noting that for the most part, respondents were convinced of the importance of all these ethnic elements as part of the identity of Ukrainian culture on the theatre stage, but during the survey they changed their minds, believing that other elements can offset the absence of certain elements to create an identical atmosphere featuring them.

In spite of the prevailing circumstances of modest living and limited possessions among rural inhabitants during that era, the items housed within their residences possessed distinct and noteworthy characteristics. Each of these traditions has resulted in the preservation of various cultural practices, including the creation of rushniks or embroidery cloths, which have endured to this day. Figure 1 depicts the exterior and interior appearance of Ukrainian rural houses during that times.



Figure 1. The examples of Ukrainian rural house and the front yard
Source: Ukrainian rural house: Ritual and semantics (2024)

Both the house and its front yard are integral components in the development of the scenography, serving the dual purpose of establishing an authentic setting for the action and engrossing the audience in the distinctive realm of Ukrainian culture, history and traditions. Utilising these images in theatrical productions facilitates a more profound exploration of the work's themes, establishes the appropriate atmosphere and elicits an emotional reaction from the audience.

After compiling a description of the main ethnic elements of the Ukrainian rural house and the front yard, which were commonly used in Ukrainian theatre productions to recreate the atmosphere of past Ukraine, a survey of visitors to the Lesya Ukrainka National Academic Theatre was conducted. After the first survey, the following results were obtained (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of the theatre audience survey

No.	Element of the house	Carries the ethnocultural code of Ukrainians, %	Has a small contribution to the identity of stage design, %
1	Icon corner (ukr. Pokut)	100	0
2	Painted windows	70	30
3	Threshold and door	20	80
4	Painted oven	90	10
5	Bed (pil/polyk)	60	40
6	Table	30	70
7	Chest	80	20
8	Cupboard (ukr. Mysnyk)	65	35
10	Decorations and paintings	100	10
11	Front yard of the house	100	15

12	Porch and gate	55	10
13	Fruit and vegetable gardens	55	0
14	Outbuildings	40	0
15	Layout of the house	100	0
16	Fence/farmstead/wattle fence	85	15
17	Well	40	60
18	Cart/Brichka	75	25

Source: Completed by the authors based on own survey

The results of the two surveys on the identity of Ukrainian stage performances suggest that Ukrainian audiences are fond of ethnic elements, even in contemporary productions. Respondents aged 18 to 30 mostly believe that the elements of scenic art used in contemporary performances and interpretations of classical works most organically are used in combination with digital technologies and designs. Respondents aged 31 to 60 are convinced of the value of using Ukrainian cultural attributes in their traditional form to preserve authenticity. In the survey about the main metaphorical ethnographic elements of a Ukrainian house, the majority of respondents voted for the use of almost all of the above decorations and props, with votes ranging from 60 to 100% (40 people voted for icon corner as the most important attribute that should be present in the depiction of a Ukrainian house). In two cases, regarding the threshold, the door and the table, the surveyed visitors of theatre events voted with a 20 and 30% share, respectively. As for the mise-en-scene in front of the house, only the well brought uncertainty, with just 40% of the votes in favour of its design, while in other cases the support for ethnic elements in the stage space ranged from 75% to 100%. It should be stated, that the Ukrainian viewer is engaged in issues of cultural identity. All the interviewed respondents answered the questions with great enthusiasm and largely expressed their belief in the importance of all the attributes being present on the stage when depicting Ukrainian cultural heritage.

4. Discussion

A researcher of colour in theatrical space and in particular, scenography, Bell (2013) emphasises the influence of colour on the audience as a psychological, emotional and physical factor. According to the scientist, set designers are required to skilfully interact with colour, taking into account the historical, social, cultural and religious connections regarding colour and the audience. Given the 2022 study conducted as part of the study of stage design of Ukrainian culture, it can be concluded that the most vivid reaction of the public, in this case, is received by the colours inherent in the traditional embroidered shirt, that is, red, white and black, which have a mental connection with the Ukrainian people.

According to spatial design researchers Kuhn and Burk (2014), stage design is a multicomponent socio-material part of theatrical art and is an integral part of communication between the set designer and the audience. Non-verbal communicative contact is achieved through the use of specific design patterns, colours and images. In this context, it is important to note that Ukrainian stage design practices usually employ historical images and colour combinations (for example, the combination of black,

white and red in traditional Ukrainian embroidery) and follow the canons of capturing the atmosphere of historical Ukraine in the theatre space.

The organisation of spatial design of the Ukrainian cultural identity requires conceptualisation and structuring. In the research of scientists Bhatt et al. (2014), when setting up a scenic design, special attention is paid to the construction and application of spatial abstraction tools directly on the stage. Ukrainian theatre seeks to capture cultural identity through metaphorical and abstract ethnic elements. According to a study conducted in 2022, spatial abstraction allows viewers to identify the cultural origin of a design solution in the stage set.

First and foremost, scenic design strategies encourage the audience to recognise the context of the performance. In the study of stage design by Beckford (2021) attention is devoted to the way production artists and scenic designers create the complete universe of the story presented in a theatrical performance. However, the director's conceptual ideas require additional effort from the theatre audience to comprehend and interpret them as a part of the performance. Therefore, in Ukrainian theatre, a significant role is given to ethnic elements, which, through their integrative features in the cultural domain, contribute to interpreting the performance. Thus, with the introduction of the icon corner, the viewer immediately recognises the context and place of the action.

Notably, Hayford (2021) draws the attention of set designers to the education received by students in the field of performing arts, since it is important to acquire the basic principles of the future profession in the chosen educational institution to form the skills of young professionals. Therefore, the study of stage design, the role of props, options and possibilities for automating scenography and projection design are important components of the education of a worthy professional who will master all the necessary techniques required in stage design.

Given the technological progress of mankind in the 21st century, it is important to introduce the latest digital technologies into the field of stage design. In his research, scientist O'Dwyer (2021) considers it rational to use the achievements of the technology industry in scenography, as this symbiosis allows the scenic design to reach a new level and quality. The scientist's argument is valid, because modern scenography, combined with the latest digital technologies and historical and cultural identification, creates a product of a new quality and scale. The empirical findings of the study of the Ukrainian stage design identity suggest that the technological achievements of the digital domain play an important role in the modernisation of stage design. However, it is the combination of progressive technologies and traditional ethnic elements that creates the very scenographic identity of Ukrainian culture as perceived by the audience.

The stage spaces of the 21st century, together with the development of digital technologies, destroy the boundaries of space and time to integrate the viewer into interactive art. The study by Kovalova et al. (2022) emphasises the relevance of using digital art in the stage space as a communicative means between the creator and the spectator of the artistic product. A comparison of the responses of Ukrainian theatre audiences with the findings of the research suggests that contemporary Ukrainians believe that a full or partial symbiosis of art and digital technologies in theatre spaces is possible.

Thornett (2020) considers the involvement of digital technologies not only desirable but indispensable for stage design in the 21st century. The scholar argues that

the use of virtual reality in classical theatre performances encourages progressive and qualitative changes in theatre as an art form. The findings of this study suggest that Ukrainian theatre audiences are eager for new progressive solutions offered by set designers.

Realising their history helps Ukrainians to build the future and so do set designers, according to Halskov et al. (2021), previous experience shapes the recognition and identity of their work. In turn, based on their own mistakes and achievements, Ukrainian scenic designers create a high-quality product that recreates the historical culture of Ukraine. The experience of set designers and the use of advanced technologies allow Ukrainians to immerse themselves into the authentic atmosphere of the past and in some cases, the present, which is depicted on the theatre stage using scenic art.

Studying scenic composition from the perspective of interactive design, researcher Cid (2022) argues that in the 21st century, scenography has an expanded character, which takes the place of intertextual and interdisciplinary art. Considering the interactive forms of contemporary stage design, it is fair to say that this is true, but the place of scenography as an artistic direction that integrates the art of various kinds into a single creative product is also conditioned by the development of the digital industry, as technological progress has had perhaps the most significant impact on the art of scenography today.

Drago (2021) argues that from a dramaturgical point of view, stage design can be interpreted as a cultural and social phenomenon, which, according to the spatial and temporal concept, the relationship between illusion and reality, is an art of experimentation. However, stage designers first need to find a balance between metaphorical forms and realism in stage design. Such a balance can be achieved, for example, by keeping the structure of a Ukrainian house, but not painting it with traditional decorations, thus preserving the space for the audience's imagination.

The existence of a distinctive style in the stage culture of Ukrainian theatre reflects the values and preferences of visitors. When comparing the results of 2022 with previous studies of identity as an important component of performing arts that reflects the cultural heritage and beliefs of a sophisticated theatre audience, it is important to pay attention to the integrity of the image of Ukrainian culture in the minds of Ukrainians. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainian audiences of theatre performances understand the meaning of each ethnic element used by set designers in the metaphorical depiction of Ukrainian culture in the stage space. However, compared to previous studies, it is important to recognise that, apart from the audience, the stage designer must have a great knowledge of the scenic art and culture of their country to design and realise an identical and true picture on the stage that does not contradict the vision of the audience. Ukrainian culture of the 21st century, carrying important messages not only for the Ukrainian audience but also for the world's connoisseurs, cultivates not only the culture of its people's past but also the art of the future as a key to the development of mankind and spiritual upliftment.

To summarise, the role of cultural identity in scenography is crucial in establishing a profound and intricate interaction between the artwork and the viewers:

The concept of narrative contextualisation pertains to the capacity of scenography to establish or enhance the contextual framework of a performance by acquainting the audience with a specific temporal, spatial, or societal state. Design elements serve as a means to communicate specific living conditions, cultural attributes or historical

epochs, thereby facilitating the audience's engagement with the artwork's world and enhancing their comprehension of the characters' motivations and behaviours. The concept of cultural identity plays a crucial role in interpreting the narrative by utilising visual and material elements.

Scenography employs symbolic representation as a means of conveying intricate ideas and concepts in a non-verbal manner. Design elements can possess symbolic significance that mirrors cultural, religious or social connotations linked to the artwork or its underlying themes. The field of semiotics, which pertains to the study of signs, aids in the interpretation of these symbols, thereby facilitating a more profound comprehension of the cultural identity encapsulated within the scenography. This phenomenon engenders a complex and multifaceted exchange between the performance and the audience, wherein every design element assumes supplementary significance.

Scenography possesses the capacity to function as a potent instrument for historical and social critique, effectively mirroring or critiquing specific occurrences, patterns or societal attitudes. By strategically selecting the style, subject matter and visual language employed in a performance, the scenographer has the ability to address significant matters pertaining to identity, politics, economics or cultural transformation. Scenography serves as a mirror of social awareness, providing the audience with both a visual encounter and a catalyst for contemplation of their surroundings.

The educational value of scenography lies in its ability to provide the audience with both visual art appreciation and a deeper understanding of the culture, history and society depicted in the performance. Design elements serve as a means to exhibit traditional customs, historical intricacies, architectural trends and various cultural facets, thereby affording the audience the chance to enhance their comprehension and awareness of diverse cultures and time periods. Scenography assumes a role beyond being a mere backdrop for the action, instead actively engaging in the educational process.

5. Conclusions

The integration of advanced digital technologies in stage design, along with the establishment of a distinct scenographic identity, results in a contemporary and pertinent artistic creation that caters to the theatre audience of the 21st century. The examination of scenographic identity within the context of sociocultural phenomena in Ukraine presents novel opportunities and potential for the advancement of Ukrainian theatre. Hence, it is imperative for aspiring scenographers and experts in their field to thoroughly examine the Ukrainian stage design identity during times of war.

An important novel outcome of this study was the identification and delineation of a comprehensive inventory of the primary ethnic components employed in theatrical presentations to symbolically construct a representation of Ukrainian cultural identity in scenic art. By surveying the audience, we identified particular ethnic objects and scenery elements that hold significant symbolic significance and are considered to represent Ukrainian culture. Examples include the *pokut'*, which includes icons and embroidered towels, which are considered symbols of Ukrainian faith. Ukrainians perceive painted windows as the visual portals through which they perceive the world. The oven, with its revered importance in delivering warmth and sustenance. Through the process of cataloguing these ethnic elements and examining their semiotic

interpretation by viewers, fresh perspectives arise regarding the influential visual style of scenography in eliciting a feeling of national identity.

Furthermore, the results provide evidence that ethnic factors play a significant role in accurately representing the everyday experiences and cultural diversity of Ukrainian society. The survey findings revealed that viewers expressed significant approval and emotional connection towards the incorporation of culturally significant objects, designs and domestic landscapes that are deeply ingrained in their heritage. The inclusion of ethnic elements such as the elaborately adorned trunk, bread oven and thatched roof hut allows scenographers to create a captivating environment that viewers can readily identify as embodying the essence of Ukraine.

Although there may have been prior assumptions regarding ethnic motifs, this study offers a novel contribution by methodically identifying and analysing the distinct symbolic ethnic elements that effectively convey Ukrainian cultural identity in theatrical scenography, as perceived by the audience.

It is advisable for future scholars investigating the identity of Ukrainian theatrical scenography to broaden their research focus to encompass the incorporation of ethnic elements into contemporary, non-traditional stagings, extending beyond the realm of folkloric performances. Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of post-war scenography trends will provide insights into the potential transformation of scenographic representations of national identity within this significant sociocultural framework.

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