

13<sup>th</sup> ICLLCE 2019 Singapore 073-064 Pannatat Po-dhivejakul

## **The Use of Physical Theatre to Represent Great Danger in Society**

Pannatat Po-dhivejakul  
Division of Performance Studies, Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University,  
6 Rajamankha Nai Rd., Nakhon Pathom 73000, Thailand  
pann.podhi@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This creative work has been created from the radio drama of Gunter Eich, called the Fifth Dream, and aim to substitute the script by using physical theatre to perform on stage, to show the horrors of various disasters, and to let one sees and realizes those threats. The radio drama script analysis shows that living in today's society is full of hustle and bustle. It may cause a man pays no attention to observe the surrounding. Then, he is unaware of the danger which comes closer little by little, especially those that cannot be seen with the naked eyes; such as a dark influence, dominance, neglect, and selfishness. There are several kinds of physical theatre, finding the right one for the performance should be done carefully. Eventually, there are two kinds of physical theatre has been selected to work on this creative work. They are butoh dance and creative movement. During the experimental period, few butoh dance artists work in collaboration with a group of stage actors who have prior experience in physical theatre. A group of stage actors is mix ethnicity such as Thai, Chinese, and Canadian. That is because each of them acts as representatives of the population from any country on this planet. In parts of butoh artists, Thai and American, they act as representatives of all the wickedness in society. The plot of this creative work has been changed. However, the subject matter remains the same as the original. Ultimately, feedback from the audience ensures that the options of physical theatre used in the performance are worthy.

*Keywords:* Gunter Eich, physical theatre, Butoh Dance, creative movement

### **Introduction**

#### **Objectives**

The aim of this performing arts is to give a new interpretation and create a new work from the radio drama of Günter Eich, by using the form of physical theatre to perform on stage instead of spoken drama, and reconstructing a new plot that remains the same matter as the original.

#### **Research Questions**

All of this is to find out whether physical theatre can be another choice to represent great danger in society.

#### **Theory**

“Physical theatre” is a type of performance that physical movement is the primary method of storytelling. It may also incorporate other techniques such as mime, gesture, and dance to create performance pieces.

### **Methodology**

Firstly, study the author’s preference on the context and background of this radio drama and analyze the storyline. Then find out the possibilities of each character from the original story

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that he or she can become any other character in the new story that is about to be rebuilt. Secondly, focus on the main objective of both human beings and termites in the radio script. Carefully analyze and consider to determine which form of physical theatre will suit the character's objectives. After that, visualize whether the whole actions of the newly created characters can completely replace the old ones or not and create a new storyline at the same time. Then, search for a group of actors to take the roles of people in the society and a few



butoh artist to take role as termites. Lastly, it is the time of rehearsal and adjustment, followed by performing in front of the audience and get feedback afterwards.

*Figure 1.* The Experimental Process

### Literature Review

#### The radio play script: *The Fifth Dream*

HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn translated Günter Eich's the original German radio play script into Thai language. The story

of this radio play is about Mrs. Lucy Harrison's dream. Mrs. Harrison falls asleep while she is sewing her skirt. In her dream, her mother comes to visit her in New York City, walks around the house, and talks about Bill – Mrs. Harrison's husband, furniture, decoration, etc. Then, her mother begins to hear some strange noises from somewhere even though she turns on the music from a radio. They are listening to both music and disquisition. Especially in the disquisition, the speaker talks about termites and their noise, so Mrs. Harrison's mother absolutely believes that the noise she heard comes from those termites. She tries to distract her mother to other things. Her mother feels exhausted and falls asleep. Suddenly, Mrs. Harrison's husband, Bill, comes back home and inhibits her to touch or kiss him. Her husband has found out Mrs. Harrison's mother passed away. Although, Mrs. Harrison turns off a radio, that strange sounds from termites are still heard. Mr. Harrison tells her that inside his body is hollow and ready to tumble down. Mrs. Harrison is scared to death and gives the loudest scream the same time as the thunder sound.

Although this story was being composed after the World War II, the content has been applied in today's world incredibly. According to the belief that the dream is a bad sign, therefore, the dream is comparable to alarm people to think and consider the truth in their lives. Even though the story seems to be unreal, it clearly turns out to be various disasters that were hidden in our society. Günter Eich assigned Mr. and Mrs. Harrison to represent the general people in society. He used termites as a symbol of the threat that threatening human beings. The feeling of exhausted and drowsy is a sign of death that is threatening life, the same situation that has no way out. Moreover, he used the content of the lecture and the thundering sound to create the atmosphere of the city that is falling. The sound of termite nibble in the wall is a symbol that can be interpreted differently, from the dangers of the dictatorial government to the war, and the threat of all dark influences. However, the content of the story shows a comparison of the hollowness and superficiality of the people in the society, as if the people were being bitten by termites inside their bodies, until their lives and everything eroded. Once people hear the termites' bite, but do not take any action or pay no attention, comparable to the ignorance to what is happening around them. They are

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unconcerned to the unusual things and let everything happen by thinking that it is not their own business. Therefore, various disasters destroy the society or the world occur everywhere at any time.

### Physical Theatre

It is a form of theatre that focuses on using body movements to express and communicate with the audiences. There may be the use of script or without script, but emphasized on the use of movement to tell the story. Also, physical theatre is a visual performance beyond traditional theatre, including mime, clowning, masked, dance, etc.

"Physical theatre shows that you don't have to use words to express ideas. It uses techniques such as movement, mime, gesture and dance and can be used to explore complex social and cultural issues." (BBC)

Besides, it is known that dance is a universal language that can communicate emotions directly to the audience and sometimes more powerful than words.



*Figure 2.* Using body movements to express and communicate with the audiences

### Butoh Dance

Butoh originated in Japan with a performance called Kinjiki by Tatsumi Hijikata in 1959. It was originally named "Ankoku Butoh," or "dance of utter darkness." Butoh is not just a form of expression, but an ideology and a collection of trends that interpret and imagine in countless ways. Butoh ends with two different styles, one that is hard and distorted and one that uses graceful flowing motion instead. Butoh dancers learn choreography but they are not required to perform it exactly as another member of the ensemble. They use imagery to help them guide their movements. In a performance, when an actor paints his body in white color and move with a slow movement through a distorted body, the audiences easily know that this is butoh.

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*Figure 3.* Butoh artists

### Mask

The tradition of actor training with masks in the modern western theatre can be used in performance because theatre masks present a wider range of emotions when combine with the gestures of actors. The use of character's masks is to help the actors increase their presence, power, and physical

clarity in performance.





Figure 4. Masks in performance

### Creative Movement

The concept of “creative movement” is about creative action in the field of expressive means. Creativity becomes action linked, firstly, to the body and the movement. Also, the creative movement is the development of creative acts which leads to the relationship between human being and movement.

Since movement is important to performance, the

appropriate selection of body movements for a specific performance is necessary so that it can effectively convey the feelings of the story that affect the mind of the audiences.

### Findings



Figure 5. Creative Movement

After completing all three methodologies, the possibility is to think about the first word in each step of the procedures. The new storyline is about people in the society and their daily lives - different in gender, profession, and age. They live their lives normally and differently. Until one day, without noticing, they gradually begin to have the same life pattern. All of them pay no attention and unaware of great dangers around

them. The termites, as a dark influence, are slowly creeping into people's lives, even in their dreams. They are gnawing and biting inside of humans' bodies bit by bit. The defeat of mankind can be compared to being possessed by evil. Good people become bad. They ignore the fellow human beings.

Stage actors from different ethnicities, such as Chinese, Canadian, and Thai who have physical movement background are being invited to collaborate in creative movement to tell the new



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story via their bodies. All of them represent people in every country on earth.

There are not many butoh artists live in Thailand, so two of them - American and Thai, are being invited to perform in this creative work. Both of them represent all the great dangers in every society in this world.

Although the new story is conveyed in front of the audiences, message, mood, the meaning of the original script remains the same. The interviews and questionnaires that were received from the audiences show that most of them understand the story, feel the horrors, and aware of the alarm as same as reading and listening to the radio drama script. They are appreciated to witness this performance. Feedback from the audiences ensures that the choice of butoh dance and creative movement is worthy and well accomplished.

### Discussion

Surprisingly, there is no limitation in this creative work. The recommendation for future creative research is that the creator should try other forms of performing arts and find out which fit in to this story.



Figure 8. Working on creative movement

### Conclusion

The creation of a performing arts that was created from an original script to a new storyline with different form and style in performance is neither easy nor difficult. It can be either successful or fail. If the action speaks louder than the words, physical theatre is the action that speaks very loud, because acting is a universal language. If a story has any universal problem in its theme, it may not be difficult to present that theme in different kind of theatre. Nevertheless, all of that interpretation and substitute should be done with utmost care.

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