Theatre and the Digital

Towards a Virtual Theatre

Introduction

- The evolution of new technologies and media in the „digital age" has had a profound impact on theatre as a specific area of art and culture. New technologies and media have enabled the creation of completely new forms of art, mainly within the digital culture. The rapid and widespread expansion of the Internet, the development of new personal communication devices and the emergence of social media have caused radical changes in the distribution channels of cultural products based on their digitization and dematerialization.

Abstract

- New media often show their best aesthetic potential through the works of performing arts. It often happens that they "occupy" the central stage and turn the performance into something more than a display of technical virtuosity. With the advent of new technologies, theatre has gained unprecedented opportunities. The duration of the play has been expanded, allowing it to be strengthened by the use of technical devices. The scene lost its specific address by entering a new field of involvement of the audience - the virtual. The purpose of my research is to examine the aspects of technological advances in the digital age and their impact on the performing arts, namely theatre. The use of virtual technology not only allows to change the space of the play in the theatre building, but also creates a new form of communication with the audience inside or outside the theatre. The first theatre to become a leading concept as a combination of a play and cinema, i.e. live actors and film, appeared in Prague, Czech Republic in 1958, and was presented for the first time at Expo '58 in Brussels. It essentially still exists and is called *Laterna Magika*. The aim of my work is also to present the degree of usage of new digital technologies in Macedonian theatre productions and to stimulate the scientific debate on this topic, as well as to contribute to greater application of digital opportunities in Macedonian theatres.

Background

- The problem of virtuality is not only a technological but also a profoundly philosophical and cultural question of the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. The dilemma of whether it promotes theatre or it contributes to the loss of its original artistic manifestation as a kind of "ritual theatre" has been the main topic among theatrologists. Western theatrologists boldly define theatre as the first virtual reality in history. For theatre artists in the East, however, theatre is firstly and foremost "life" and still a kind of "ritual theatre".

Research Questions

- To what extent digital technologies and media, directly or indirectly, will affect the concept of theatrical production and what is their impact on the audience watching a particular theatrical performance?
- To what extent will theatre remain preserved in its classical appearance?
- Will theatre become a „virtual game" in which its basic characteristic - the direct contact with the audience will be lost?
- Can new media open new horizons for theatre or do they reduce its scope?
- Are new media changing the relationship between performer and viewer by pushing the audience back to the position of a passive recipient?

Methods

- The evolution of new complex theatre arts will be scrutinized thoroughly starting from the first multimedia experiments in the late 1950s to the digital interactive virtual theatre platforms today. From a selection of various specialized books and journals I will be focusing on the essence of what is happening in the field of theatre and new media. The other part of the research will concentrate on examples of specific theatre productions worldwide and in Macedonia in order to explore and cover the world trends of digital media in theatre.

Conclusion

- The mediatization of the modern theatre imposes the impression of its complete transformation and of theatre as far away from its original appearance. But regardless of the digitalization of theatrical space and the changing role of the theatrical spectator with the help of the Internet, the direct contact with the audience still holds the key position in theatre. And despite the overcoming of the basic theatrical concept in which theatre becomes the main sociological and cultural phenomenon, still, the ritual of acting remains the essence of theatre as a "sacred ancient rite" between the actor and the supersensible world.

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M.A. Aleksandra Pavlova

Faculty of Dramatic Arts - Ss. Cyril and Methodius University
Skopje, Macedonia
aleksandra.pavlova87@gmail.com

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