

Body, Space, and Technology: Interrogating Unconventionality in Postmodern African Dance Theatre

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Abstract

The interface of bodies and technology in theatrical space is redefining the colour and contours of contemporary dance theatre. The application of new technologies in theatre leads to the creation of Virtual Reality (VR) in performance. It transforms the physical stage into a virtual space; the dancer's body transmutes and oscillates, as Susan Kozel postulates, from a 'fleshly body' to a 'cyber-body'. The use of telepresence, projections and multimedia effects creates phenomenal theatrical illusions through image manipulation interwoven with the physical movements of the dancers. With the advancements in science and technology, and the complexities that characterize the (post)modern society, dance vocabulary and movement iconography have fused into nonlinear, non-realistic deconstructions that shape significations in amorphous forms in response to popular culture. The use of multimedia technologies in contemporary African dance theatre is reshaping choreographic tenets and pointing towards a new direction. This paper examines these trends using three dance compositions from Mozambique, Nigeria and South Africa for illustration. The study interrogates the issues of form, content and audience and points a way forward.

Introduction

The observance of conventions over time has become a dynamic feature of performance. Theatre history is replete with documented records of conventions observed in diverse cultures and performance traditions. In each epoch, performance idioms and production styles have usually been guided by conventions and such conventions constitute significant

elements of a theatrical tradition. The dynamic character of conventions contributes considerably to the changing concepts of theatre since antiquity. This affects the different forms of theatre and elements of production; from playwriting to performance, theatre technology to space and architecture. While recognizing space and architecture as the foundation of theatrical conventions, Drain (1995: xvi) observes that 'theatre has been pursued outside the institutional frame and allocated edifices that stand ready to contain it, and in the process the concept of theatre has widened'. Hence, with the continued quest by theatre to reflect a dynamic society, 'our culture's conception of what theatre is continually alters' (Counsell, 1996: 210).

In the conceptualization of dance as a spatial art, it has been argued that the body is no longer the sole means of defining space in performance. Due to 'the advancement of technology and the evolution of the technical sensibility', elements like 'sound, light, motion, even smell can all be used just as validly to define space' (Soyinka, 1995: 325). Dance, the interaction of body and space, is guided by changing conventions catalysed by technology. The virtual explosion of different dance forms and nomenclature is a reflection of the frequency with which the hitherto unconventional becomes conventional in contemporary theatre.

The term dance theatre was originally associated with the work of the German choreographer, Pina Bausch. This 'relatively new mode of performance' which Bausch termed *Tanztheater* or 'dance-theatre' refers to 'dance with a greater narrative component'; in practice, it entails a combination of 'dance and theatrical mimesis' which suggests 'interpretative uncertainty; for it brings into play the distinct reading conventions of both forms' thereby offering the audience a complex and richer interpretative experience (Counsell, 1996: 225-6). Dance theatre is a product of experimentations aimed at breaking down the distinction between dance and theatre as separate forms. The performance allows dance to give up many of its unique properties and conventions and to accommodate others for optimal effects and communication. The twenty-first century dance theatre is therefore becoming increasingly eclectic, malleable in form, and content.

As a popular art, dance is gaining wider currency in Nigeria, influenced by the media and the appeal of popular music stars. These trends are indicative of emerging social conditions and changing tastes of the people. As Iyeh (2011: 131) affirms, 'a work of art such as dance cannot be separated from the general consciousness of the society'. With the rapidly changing social values in Africa, their reflection in dance theatre becomes normative since 'it is what Africans value that they incorporate into their art, especially music and dance' (Iyeh, 2011: 130). Thus, a functional

discourse on dance theatre should logically incorporate technological dimensions since technology, with its advancement, is at the root of social values and consciousness of the modern African.

The increasing application of technology is heightening the communicative essence of dance theatre. Basically, 'dance is a multi-communication channel', operating through 'time and space' to 'kinetically, visually' and perceptively transmit information (Soyinka-Ajayi, 1996: 96). In fact, in Africa, a good number of plastic arts achieve their optimal essence through dance performance. In such performances, the body, space and technical elements (costume, make-up, lighting, props, sound and scenery) are fused into one inseparable whole; each cannot be read in isolation from the other as they interweave and flow simultaneously in organic unity.

In this sense, dance is closely aligned to kinesics, the study of human body as a means of communication, commonly used by theatre semioticians to analyze meaning. Thus, reading the body is central to the theatrical sign-system and the production of meaning. In theatre, especially in dance, the performer's body and face are in a constant state of flux and action, and this becomes a significant site of meaning for the audience who must 'capture' and understand the slightest gesture and the dynamic compositional 'frames' created by the dancer's transient movement and action (Aston and Savona, 1991: 116).

Similarly, proxemics, 'the organization of space, and the ways in which spatial codes are used to generate meaning' has come to occupy a key position in understanding the dance arts and allied theatrical events. In fact, 'not only do spatial codes set out to define, shape and construct the meaning of the spectating and playing spaces, they also govern relations between performers on the stage, and performer-spectator interaction' (Aston and Savona, 1991: 115). In essence, any attempt to conceptualize the character of contemporary dance theatre must recognize the dynamics of body and space in their kinesic and proxemic relationships.

In the convention of postmodern dance theatre characterized by new media, the moving body interfaces with multimedia technology to create 'abstract visual and rhythmic patterning' (Buckland, 1998: 236). Furthermore, Buckland argues that contemporary music video dance productions adopt the performance modes of postmodern dance theatre. Apart from 'the incorporation of high avant-garde art techniques and images', the 'recycling of representations and style from the once opposing world of high and popular cultures contributes to the consideration of music video as quintessentially postmodernist in its content (and) form' (Buckland, 1998: 285). As the music video gains popularity in Nigeria and

many parts of Africa, it is vital to explore the impact of the postmodern idiom on contemporary dance theatre in Africa.

The Problem in Context

The progressive decline of live theatre patronage remains a challenge to the survival of the African theatre industry. Although efforts are ongoing to mitigate the trend, the results remain poor and the problem persists. However, this appears to be a global problem rather than a peculiar African challenge. For, as Graham observes:

Theatre in the West may well be dying in terms of 'plays': the average age of audiences on Broadway is 45 and only about seven percent of the population of Britain regularly see theatre at all, whilst films and television thrive and interactive entertainments grow fast. Even in the East, traditional theatres like *ř* are losing audiences to film (2003: 136).

Hence, the problem is not so much about the decline of theatre, but the failure of Africa to adopt functional measures, as countries in other continents are doing, to sustain her theatre traditions.

Carter (1998: 121) explains that 'dance can be seen as a stylization of the physical culture of society'. The culture 'produces shared customs and beliefs, word and artefacts' as well as 'movement styles and activities' which are all ingredients and tools for dance expression. This implies that dance is not a raw exhibition of culture, as the average African audience perceives; it is a *stylization* of culture through movements. In Nigeria, the association of dance with indigenous cultures has reduced the art to mere pastime particularly as many people are unable to distinguish theatrical dance from social and ethnic dances. The elements of a society's culture are only *ingredients* and *tools* from which the choreographer may select materials for artistic work. The concept of choreometrics deals with dance as a measure of culture, but the culture often associated with dance is not necessarily traditional or ethnic; it may be contemporary, foreign or popular culture of high art or even a *mélange* of these and other forms. But since social or ethnic dances are commonly performed in Nigeria and all over the continent, the average audience and most administrators underrate the dance art and often fail to understand the unique form and demands of dance theatre. This mind-set affects the development of the dance art in Nigeria.

From a global perspective of mass culture, audience tastes and expectations in art and performative communication are being redefined. Producers of cultural production began to devise new idioms and media

to meet the changing tastes and expectations of their audience. Hence, 'as part of the consequence of new communications technology, social subjects are bombarded with signification in a way never before possible' (Counsell, 1996: 203). But, Africa remains at the periphery of these global cultural flows and any aesthetic standard that is perceived to differ from their 'norm' is kept at bay and sometimes adopted when it has become outmoded.

The rising popularity of postmodernism is radically altering the global perception of theatre and popular art. In response to this trend, theatre experience is becoming more visual than ever, particularly through the application of technology. In fact, postmodernism is characteristically aligned to the visual phenomenon. Having been conceived as 'the crisis of modernism', that is, 'the crisis caused by modernism and modern culture confronting the failure of its own strategy of visualizing' (Mirzoeff, 1999: 3), it is understandable that the postmodern will espouse a visual culture. In the performing arts, its manifestation can be seen in 'the application of various technologies' which is becoming 'an accepted tradition' as 'evident in the design of performance costumes, props, make-up, venues, sound, light, scenery and special effects' (Nwadiigwe, 2010: 406). Nevertheless, whether the African dance theatre is adapting to this global trend remains to be seen.

Dance and Technology

Dance performances are conventionally regarded as spectacular. The sheer movement of dancers in varying patterns, motifs and vocabularies is sufficient to create a thrilling experience for the audience. However, it is not always emphasized that the visual spectacle associated with dance, whether in the modern or indigenous traditions, is considerably created and intensified by technical elements of production. Indeed, 'the uniqueness of theatre as an art of communication' is anchored on its 'ability to explore and employ such supportive audio-visual elements' that provide a 'diversification of appeal which no other art form can afford' (Asomba, 2000: x).

The concept of dance theatre entails more than mere movement in space. The creation of some scenery within and around a dance space is a priceless resource, which enables dancers to suggest a variety of meanings through movements, improvisation and composition. Choreographic action becomes more intense and engaging for the audience where dancers have materials – props, scenic units, accessories and even parts of their costumes to 'play' with. These materials literally dance with the dancer. The impact becomes more thrilling when sound effects, lighting,

projected images and visual effects are blended with the onstage activity. Emerging trends and developments in the performing arts show that 'modern theatre benefits immensely from increasing advances in science and technology'. This reality represents a 'response to the global digital march'. Consequently, the '21st century performance art' becomes 'a designer's theatre characterised by electronic gadgetry' (Nwadiuwe, 2008: 40).

Dance, in all its ramifications, is strongly visual. This explains its close affinity to light, which unifies all the visual aspects of performance into one dramatic picture. The objective of dramatic lighting is achieved when the dance compositional patterns and movements stimulate light to 'radiate, carrying form into space, filling it with living color and the limitless variations of an ever-changing atmosphere' (Beacham, 1993: 93). The dancer is always in motion. In designing for a dance performance, 'the primary concern is movement, which good dance lighting will reveal and emphasize'. In this regard, 'the axis of the principal light should parallel the axis of the movement' (Parker *et al.*, 1985: 540).

The technical demands of dance are actually considerable when compared to other forms of performance. The number and choice of equipment, angles and rigging positions, special effects and precision of technical operation, colour scheme, the fast-changing rhythm and tempo, and the plethora of sound cues required by dance are quite complex and challenging. Parker *et al.* (1985: 540) affirm that 'it would be quite impractical to attempt to cover every single movement of a dance'. This, they explain, would require an unusual number of spotlights with 'an extremely complicated list of cues and light changes'. Hence, it is advised that special lighting attention be given to only 'the most significant moments' and the 'major movements of the work' while covering the rest with a 'more general lighting' (Parker *et al.*, 1985: 540).

As digital technology becomes more accessible and applicable to the theatre, designers and choreographers are breaking all known conventions according to the elastic stretch of their imagination. With projections, as Wilson (2004: 351) observes, scenes and visual patterns 'can change with the rapidity of cinema' with a possibility to 'present vast scenes onstage in a way which would hardly be possible otherwise'. Furthermore, images can be projected not only on screens or on backdrops but on the dance floor, on stage props and even on the bodies of dancers and these heighten theatricality to a phenomenal level.

Another bold step into the realm of dance and unconventionality is the use of telepresence, which creates a virtual space for dancer – audience interaction. This technology involves the use of video projectors, CCTV, video cameras, and monitors to link various performances in

separate spaces. These images are interplayed with the physical performance of the dancers on stage thereby allowing multiple images, improvisation and interaction. The various dancers' movements occur in real time and this differentiates telepresence from conventional video or slide projection. Such technologies of the new media applied in dance offers a dancer 'two bodies' in space and action; the 'fleshly' body and the 'cyberbody' that is, the 'physical and the virtual' (Kozel, 1998: 81), thereby enriching the visual appeal of the performance.

The development of kinetic lighting remains a boost to dance. Gillette (2000) argues that since dances and allied musical theatre are anchored on movement, it is only logical that lights also move to capture the action effectively. Therefore, the production concept and atmosphere of rock concerts, clubs and dance performances are 'almost always visceral, bold, and extroverted' and generally, 'the atmosphere is high energy'. The lighting is equally 'overt and spectacular' (Gillette, 2000: 352). Kinetic lights with digital control mechanisms provide the theatre technologist with the tools and capability to match the unique concept and needs of dance production.

Case studies: Postmodernism and Dance Theatre

The dance performances selected for illustration in this study were all produced in the recent edition of *Dance Meets Danse* (DMD) Festival held in Lagos, Nigeria. Since 2000, Lagos has been hosting an annual festival of contemporary dance called *Dance Meets Danse* (DMD) organized by the French Cultural Centre, Abuja, Alliance Française, Lagos, in partnership with Goethe-Institut Nigeria and supported by the French Embassy and Culturesfrance. Being a creative platform for contemporary dance theatre, the festival involves the participation of selected Dance companies and notable choreographers from different continents of the world.

Imprint of the Flesh

Vera's Danse Hauz, a company currently based in South Africa, presented this production. The dance was choreographed and performed by Vera Ephraim while Adesoji Adetona handled the technical direction. The dance used movement patterns, improvisation and body language to portray the obscenities of repetitive violation against women as they struggle to achieve their individuality. Using props and make-up, the dance enacts the resultant violence, trauma and crude physical pain precipitated by the loss of identity. As freedom becomes an illusion, the

traumatic expenses and scars of the past, buried deep in the soul resurface on the flesh.

The dancer is swathed in bandage as costume. In the course of the various dance movements, these coverings are removed methodically until the dancer stands half-naked, wearing only her brassiere and underpants. This is followed by the smearing of the body with oil, jelly and sand that mixed into a kind of paste that partially congeals as the dancer contorts her body in agonizing pain accompanied by vocal howls, growls and electronic sound effects. However, the lighting was flat and only dimmed a bit during the stripping scene. The dance was unconventional but the avant-gardist approach lacked the desired technical support for optimum impact. Through its bold, bizarre and rare application of costume, make-up, props and body composition, the production caused a stir among the audience

Absence

The production was by a Nigerian Dance Company, Frankly Speaking. The dance, choreographed by Frank Chinedu Konwea and Edet Offiong Anthony, seeks to raise questions about social conditions and their impact on human relations. Through a variety of movements, the composition depicts images and situations that are representative of an ideal society devoid of racism, wars, pain, suffering, harm, conflict and death. In its enactment, the sequence reveals the utopian character of this ideal. The characters are engaged in continual struggles with the hope of making change. Therefore, struggle and pain is depicted as requisite efforts at pursuing and achieving the ideal social condition. Symbolically, the plot sequence suggests that life without dreams, imagination, aspiration and positive struggle is not worth living. In essence, living in such world is to die – an absence of life.

The performance was quite energetic and the dancers produced considerable spectacle through movements, acrobatic stunts and improvised actions woven into dance vocabularies adapted from Nigerian indigenous cultures and dance steps. However, the technical production was de-emphasized. The costumes were ordinary; make-up was virtually absent while lighting was flat, providing basic illumination and dimmed occasionally to provide some visual variety. Sound was limited to the music and the sound produced by the performers on stage. Generally, the technical aspects of production were not actually exploited to enhance visual spectacle and theatrical communication.

3rd Entity

The dance was choreographed by Edna Jaime and performed by Jorge Ndlozy and Macario Tome. It was produced by Nyakatandewa, a Dance Company from Mozambique. Quito Tembe designed the lighting and video effects while Amosse Mahoche served as the lighting technician. The thematic preoccupation of *3rd Entity* is focused on recreating the duality of human existence characterized by human energy and spiritual connection.

The dance choreography used a complex composition and juxtaposition of visual imagery, body postures, improvisation with properties and dance iconography to represent the contemporary African world intertwined with postmodern technology and the surreality of ancestral existence. The sequences explore the communicative power of the human body, seeking to reveal a voice, to link the physical and the transcendental spaces of contemporary African existence.

The composition is highly visual and eclectic, utilizing installations, idioms and materials from physical and subconscious existence. The visual motifs, movement iconography and improvisational anecdotes are structured in episodic patterns. Each sequence aesthetically links the next through technical devices such as sound effects and projected images. Hence, through movements, heavy breathing and panting, ululations and allied vocalization, the dancers transform into balls of energies; releasing energetic bodies into space.

The production of *3rd Entity* used technical devices involving a creative interplay of sound, lighting, mirror reflection, and scenic projections to heighten visual impact. The costumes were contemporary, sometimes bare skin was used to emphasize natural strength, energy and the dominance of human body in space. The lighting was subdued and conceptually presented an interplay of light and dark atmosphere to create dramatic effects. It also provided the ambiance and controlled visibility required for the visual projections, which were done on translucent screens, veils, dance floor, mirror, and even on the bodies of dancers.

Discussion

The foregoing sample productions are contemporary African dance theatres reflecting diverse social and cultural concerns. Their movement vocabularies draw from the cultural and social repertoire of their societies, yet, they are not circumscribed by any performance conventions. Although the dancer is often denied the conventional means of attracting attention, the human voice, nevertheless, dance communicates as the

dancer's body and technical elements express what cannot be articulated verbally. Indeed, as the case studies indicate, and affirmed by Foster (1998: 186), bodies in varied movements may 'create a kind of writing, but that writing has no facile verbal equivalence'; they are unique 'forms of articulation and representation'. The sequences and patterns of movements in the sample dances present a kind of 'kinescape' – an overall repertoire of movement each involving balance, dynamic unity and rigorous body awareness and control (Counsell, 1996: 155). Therefore, the 'kinescape' is a medium, a kind of canvas for the choreographer's display of 'bodily writing' expressed through 'habits and stances, gestures and demonstrations, every action of its various regions, areas and parts', which combine to 'construct corporeal meaning' (Foster, 1998: 180).

In *Imprint of the Flesh*, the use of performance technology was largely insignificant despite the unconventional approach of the dance composition. The visual support was only noticeable in the use of unconventional props and costume, particularly in the stripping scene, symbolic of the shedding of the skin of freedom and identity. In the second case study, *Absence*, there was literally an absence of visual support. The costumes were not spectacular and props were barely used. The lighting, though artistically different from that of *Imprint of the Flesh*, was not dramatic. Apart from the intermittent dimming and spotting, it was devoid of visual effects, in fact, the lighting was largely used for mere illumination. The sound effects in both productions were amateurish and failed to capture the high points in the movement patterns. Some missed cues, especially in *Imprint of the Flesh*, evidenced inadequate rehearsals. The visual strength of *Absence* lies in the sheer physical energy, agility and acrobatic stunts of the dancers.

On the other hand, *3rd Entity* made considerable use of technology to support the visual presentation. The lighting, sound and video projection were planned, plotted and applied in a controlled format. The technical elements enriched the visual experience, communicating varied meanings and heightening suspense. The creation of multiple images through projections and the interplay of physical and digital images raised the performance above the conventional norms and everyday experience of the audience. With the technical support and audio-visual variations, the dancers were literally released into space to explore their environment using their bodies. During the performance, the frequent applause from the audience reflected the artistic success of *3rd Entity*, particularly because of its technical ingenuity.

The example of *3rd Entity* is only a primary demonstration of the potentials of technology in dance theatre. It is primary because the company had limited resources, yet they made significant impact on an African

stage. The experiments of Richard Foreman's 'Unbalancing Acts' and Robert Wilson's 'Theatre of Visions' show the potentials of technology in contemporary performance. There is the possibility of attaching microphones on dancers, relaying their voices and other sounds (footsteps, clapping of the hands, heavy breathing, panting) through speakers to different corners of the auditorium in varying intensities. Sometimes, the sounds are so controlled that they seem to emerge from various corners in the performance venue.

Therefore, the need to intensify theatrical action by introducing technical elements in space to interact with the body remains paramount. Hence, 'all the materials we find available in the theatre should be thrown together in full polymorphous play. Curtains, scenery, moving platforms, lights, noises (sounds), bodies – all add complexity to the stage space' (Foreman, 1995: 69). With the global ascendancy of postmodern culture, the need to exploit performance technology becomes more glaring because the modern human's fascination with the visual and its effects which marked modernism has led to a postmodern culture in which the visual takes pre-eminence (Mirzoeff, 1999: 3).

In practice, postmodernism thrives on unconventionality, and embraces what Whitmore (1994: 3) describes as 'performances that are primarily nonlinear, non-literary, non-realistic, non-discursive, and non-closure oriented'. Whitmore further explains that postmodernism is basically conceived to 'bring simplicity and consistency to admittedly bewildering (experience or) discussion'. In practice therefore, postmodern productions combine elements of modernism and the avant-garde and is typified by deconstruction, fragmentation, ambiguity, abstractness, experimentation of collage, highlighting of self-referentiality, stream-of-consciousness and popular culture (Whitmore 1994: 4). The dance theatre productions examined in this study are therefore postmodernist in their approach but only *3rd Entity* explored the technical dimensions of the art.

Technology and visual presentation is emphasized in this style because 'postmodern art and theory tends to be concerned not with depths but surfaces; representing representation, framing the frame – concerned less with truth and meaning than with the means by which the *effect* of truth and meaning are created' (Counsell, 1996: 204-5). In this sense, Yi-Fu Tuan argues that performance space has become 'less a physically demarcated domain than the perceived product of interpretative conventions, formed in a complex relationship between viewer and viewed and the cultural expectations they share' (Counsell and Wolf, 2001: 157). In all the sample productions, space was quite flexible and the dancers freely adapted, transformed and reconfigured them without the audience feeling alienated.

The production of *3rd Entity* was able to generate additional space through digital projections thus creating a kind of virtual space. Iwu (2008: 4) affirms that 'the advent of computer and the development of hi-tech lighting technology' added a new space, a virtual space, into the performance world. It has equally been argued that the creation of virtual space through 'the advancement of virtual technology will help to render the claim that theatre is an artificial reproduction of reality even more nonsensical' (Kozel, 1998: 84). The creative use of image projection raised the visual experience offered by *3rd Entity* above the other dance theatre productions. Beyond the two performers on stage, technology provided another entity, a 'third entity', through visual projection and image reflections which the dancers exploited and 'interacted' with.

Theatrical projection traces its roots to the technical experiments and postulations of Appia and Craig, which were 'fully realized later by the inventiveness of Josef Svoboda' whose theatrical design is regarded as a precursor to postmodern multimedia performance art (Parker *et al.*, 1985: 57; Brockett, 1992: 269; Walne, 1995: 11). Scenic projection has become a functional way of creating multiple dramatic environments, providing visual interludes, adding special effects, conveying information and introducing texture to the stage setting through the filmic technique. These potentials are most suited to contemporary dance theatre, especially in consonance with the functional unconventionality that characterise the postmodern performance. The example of *3rd Entity* also shows that these technologies can be acquired and used effectively by small Dance companies operating on low budgets. As the twenty-first century existence becomes submerged in technologies, we cannot hope to reach and influence the present generation through the theatre if the African stage is still bogged down by obsolete equipment, outdated technology and lack of resources.

Conclusion

The dynamic character of theatre presupposes that its forms and approaches change with social trends and realities. By implication, theatrical conventions are not static and the flux is quite evident in the technology of production. Indeed, 'as the realities of life grow more complex, so does our need for, and method of, expressing them' (Graham, 2003: 136). Postmodernism is one of the complex methods of artistically expressing the realities of contemporary society. Hence, 'postmodernists rebel against traditional readings of text'; they 'mix abstraction and realism' by 'deconstructing' a performance, mingling 'popular concerns and techniques with those of high art' (Wilson,

2004: 263). It is a rejection of conventions and the conventionalization of unconventionality.

Contemporary dance theatre employs technical devices not merely as appendage. Choreographers frequently include design considerations while creating the dance structure, stressing 'synchronization and fluency in movement and design' and taking cognizance of allied audio-visual arts such as 'costume, make-up, light, set and sound' (Ufford, 2011: 110-1). In the current global visual culture, 'information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology' (Mirzoeff, 1999: 3). However, many African dance practitioners appear disinclined to tap from the visual metamorphosis that has enveloped the 21st century performance.

With the increasing dominance of the image, a distinctive feature of the postmodern age, 'the rise of virtual reality and the Internet' as well as the 'global popularity of television, videotape and film' appears set to continue (Mirzoeff, 1999: 9). It has been argued that the cinema (film and video) will continue to take audiences away from the theatre until the stage is re-equipped and updated with 'technical refinements' incorporating 'modern techniques' of creating 'theatrical spectacle' (Drain, 1995: 184).

Furthermore, since the 'electronic media have affected the theatre by creating the desire to make the representation of place in the theatre as transformable as it is in film and television, it becomes obvious that 'living as we do in "the electronic age" it seems inevitable that the theatre would exploit electronic devices' (Brockett, 1992: 267). Piscator observed that since humanity was living 'in an age whose technical refinements tower its achievements in every other field, it was only logical that 'the stage should become highly technical' for relevance and optimal impact (Drain, 1995: 103). The reality has become even more glaring in the twenty-first century theatre of multimedia technology. Among the three dance productions sampled in this study, it was observed that 3rd *Entity* made the greatest impact on the audience mainly because of its creative application of audio-visual technologies.

New social conditions are creating new aesthetic standards. The twenty-first century performance art is quite different from the cold Realism of the nineteenth century and the nondescript Avant-garde of the twentieth century. Globalization has entrenched a visual culture across the world. Consequently, African theatre must face this technological reality. This is the era of the screen, be it video, digital satellite television, mobile phone, computer, iPad, film, Internet, Play Station and computer games – people, both young and old, are increasingly watching the screen every day. To reflect the world of today and create meaning that will be

relevant to the audience, the African dance theatre needs to employ multimedia technologies.

The transformation of the twenty-first century African theatre cannot be conceived without cognisance of new technologies for the performing arts. The use of projections and kinetic lighting equipment radically transforms the dance space. These instruments literally 'dance' with the dancers because 'the common feature of kinetic fixtures is movement. Light beams *pan* the stage, zoom in and out, change shape, change color, diffuse, and sharpen; gobos materialize, spin around, change pattern, then disappear' (Gillette, 2000: 353). The stage becomes a kaleidoscope of images, light, shadow and movements while the dancer remains the centre of attraction exploiting these resources.

The frequent observation by practitioners that the African theatre audience is fast dwindling is quite serious. The situation may likely degenerate in the near future because apart from adults whose entertainment interests and tastes are changing, there is a significant generation of African children and youth who have never been to the theatre. These are the *screen generation* who grew up watching the screens as their only source of entertainment and communication. The future of the African theatre lies in bringing and indoctrinating the young people into the theatre. But it will be difficult to reach these categories of young people through theatre without updating the technology of production. It will be inconceivable to create any sustainable change in the function of contemporary theatre without bringing the stage technology up to date.

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