The Use of Technology in Theatrical Performances as a Tool of Audience'S Engagement

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Abstract : Throughout the history of theatre, technology has played an important role both in influencing the relationship between performance and audience and offering different kinds of experiences. The use of technology dates back in ancient times, when the introduction of artifacts, such as "Deus ex machine" in ancient Greek theatre, started. Taking into account the key techniques and experiences used throughout history, this paper investigates how technology, through new media, influences contemporary theatre. In the context of this research, technology is defined as projections, audio environments, video-projections, sensors, tele-connections, all alongside with the performance, challenging audience's participation. The theoretical framework of the research covers, except for the history of theatre, the theory of "experience economy" that took over the service and goods economy. The research is based on the qualitative and comparative analysis of two case studies, Contact Theatre in Manchester (United Kingdom) and Bios in Athens (Greece). The data selection includes desk research and is complemented with semi structured interviews. Building on the results of the research one could claim that the intended experience of modern/contemporary theatre is that of engagement. In this context, technology -as defined above- plays a leading role in creating it. This experience passes through and exists in the middle of the realms of entertainment, education, estheticism and escapism. Furthermore, it is observed that nowadays, theatre is not only about acting but also about performing; it is that one where the performances are unfinished without the participation of the audience. Both case studies try to achieve the experience of engagement through practices that promote the attraction of attention, the increase of imagination, the interaction, the intimacy and the true activity. These practices are achieved through the script, the scenery, the language and the environment of a performance. Contact and Bios consider technology as an intimate tool in order to accomplish the above, and they make an extended use of it. The research completes a notable record of technological techniques that modern theatres use. The use of technology, inside or outside the limits of film technique's, helps to rivet the attention of the audience, to make performances enjoyable, to give the sense of the "unfinished" or to be used for things that take place around the spectators and force them to take action, being spect-actors. The advantage of technology is that it can be used as a hook for interaction in all stages of a performance. Further research on the field could involve exploring alternative ways of binding technology and theatre or analyzing how the performance is perceived through the use of technological artifacts.
Keywords : experience of engagement, interactive theatre, modern theatre, performance, technology